

Building a Successful Associate Practice

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"I just don't understand it. I hire these associate doctors, expecting them to take charge. All I get is excuses why things don't get done---why their practices aren't growing."

Doctor, if you've ever said this to yourself, you could be rewarding associates for avoiding risk taking. Your associates are more comfortable being safe and sure. So, they do only that which is expected. They avoid the new and untried.

Healthy, growing practices encourage their associate doctors to take smart risks. They give them the leeway to be wrong. Progressive senior doctors recognize the importance of intelligent risk taking. They realize that resourceful mistakes are a part of the price paid for personal and professional growth.

Personality tests given to low, average, and top-performing doctors reveal that top performers show the greatest willingness to take risks. Low-level performers are comfortable with security. They try to appear important without taking risks. Average performers are less security conscience. Like low performers, average performers are preoccupied with looking effective rather than being effective.

Peak performers receive enjoyment from work itself. Their strongest drives are for achievement. They focus on being the best they can be. They are risk takers -- the doctors that are responsible for the growth of any chiropractic practice. In the majority of chiropractic practices, peak performers are individually responsible for the success of "their" practice. The low and average performers ride along on the coattails of the peak-performing risk takers. Every growing and profitable chiropractic practice must establish a comfortable risk taking level. In addition, the associate doctors who work in the practice must be encouraged to take intelligent risks.

You can convert your risk avoiders into risk takers. Create a climate that promotes, rewards, and supports risk taking. If you don't reward risk taking, most people will avoid it. Give your associate doctors a positive environment in which they can learn from their mistakes without fearing punishment.

Strategy: Instill in your associate doctors that intelligent errors are part of the cost of progress. Whenever your doctors try to take an unexpected leap forward, encourage this progress.

Strategy: Be an example of a risk taker. Don't try to hide your mistakes from your associate doctors. You don't need to be right all the time.

If you aren't making some mistakes, chances are you're not taking enough risks. Talk openly and honestly about the mistakes you make and what you learn from them. Share your concerns about the risk you were afraid to take but decide to go ahead and try. Reaffirm the benefits that resulted from the apprehensive risks.

Strategy: Celebrate both success and setbacks. Accolades and other rewards traditionally are given to associate doctors who achieve great things. Few doctors celebrate mistakes. Don't ignore the

doctors who take chances, give it their all and fall flat out on their faces. They won't take another risk unless you give them appropriate support and encouragement for trying. When an associate doctor says to himself or some other person, "I tried, but no one around here really cares," he develops a negative attitude about future risks.

Strategy: Encourage intelligent risks. Isolating a few successful ideas requires starting out with many ideas. Create a comfortable and positive environment in which your associate doctors can explore new ideas. Then give them a way to evaluate the risk they are considering taking. Smart risks require several key ingredients:

1. Have a goal. A risk without a clear purpose is a waste of time, money, and energy. It's like shooting in the dark. You are running a very high risk of missing your target.
2. Consider the worst possible outcome. Be sure you can live with it. Write down the worst that can happen so you understand the risk you are taking.
3. Weigh the potential problems and losses against the potential gains. An intelligent risk that has little opportunity for success is a poor risk. There is a significant difference between risking and gambling.
4. Go for it! Once you decide to take a risk, give it your all. Approach it with an attitude of success. Don't look back. Keep moving forward.
5. Limit your losses. If you see things going bad, get out before you lose too much. Never continue simply to try to prove that your original judgment was correct. Realize and admit when things do not go as planned. Pause and regroup.
6. Relax, enjoy and learn from your risks. In chiropractic practice, if you don't take risks, you'll spend the rest of your professional life in the same spot. A successful chiropractic practice and a successful career require guts. And that means taking risks. The only real failure is never being willing to take risks.

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Please include your self-addressed, stamped envelope. Thank you.

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