

# Know When to Hold'Em – Know When to Fold'Em

## How to Retain or Fire Employees

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If you take the time to pay attention to good and poor behavior of staff, you will have a more balanced perspective and can adjust policies, procedures, and staff in a more timely and effective manner. You will be happy, the staff will perform at a higher level, and patient satisfaction will soar!

Is it your style to drive your team forward? Do you push people to their limit? Ask too much from them or run too lean in your staffing? If so, the staff will burn out, quit and you will be in a constant state of hiring and training. This can be very costly for the practice; the cost of replacing an optometric technician can be as high as \$55,500.

To develop your skills retaining good people, instead of telling or mandating something from the staff, create a cooperative atmosphere by asking them for input or have them offer solutions for particular situations. Is your team strong enough to give you feedback? Remember they will not be accustomed to being asked so it may take a few attempts before they begin to become comfortable offering ideas, so be patient.

You can begin the process by giving clear and direct feedback to your staff. Do you tell them when they've done something well? Or only when you're dissatisfied? Let's start the process by having you make a considered effort to give positive feedback.

Here are the basics:

1. Look for positives. We can easily identify when there are mistakes, errors, or omissions. Can you re-train yourself to look for the good in each day?
2. Tell them! Right in the moment, don't wait for the end of the day or the next one-on-one meeting.
3. Make it public; compliment your employees in front of patients and other staff.
4. Be specific. Go beyond "Good job, Beth." Try something like "Beth, I really appreciate all your effort in filling the openings in today's schedule, thank you."
5. Make a big deal out of it. At our staff meetings, we often itemize every problem or negative, how about focusing on the positive too? Issues need to be addressed but positive input changes behavior far more effectively than negative feedback. Make the effort to highlight the good.
6. Do it daily. Make a point of complimenting someone every day. Spread around the positives.
7. Be sincere. Don't praise someone for opening the front door. But if people aren't excelling then the management, team is failing not the employee.
8. Recognize big and small accomplishments; just keep the recognition consistent with the accomplishment. Throw a party for a big accomplishment; write a short note for a smaller achievement.

Giving positive feedback creates a positive flow of emotions and information and everyone feels good.

Now that we've covered the positives, we do need to address how to give negative feedback. Giving negative feedback well is as critical possibly more than how to give positive input.

Here are the basics:

1. Don't react in the moment. Take a few moments or hours to allow for perspective.
2. Get your emotions under control. Don't act while you're frustrated, angry, or annoyed.
3. Do this in private, away from patients and co-workers. It only reflects poorly on you to reprimand someone publicly.
4. It's about the act not the person. Look at the action you want to correct and discuss that. Don't make it personal. Leave room for some personalities to act differently; is it the method or the result that is the problem?
5. Be specific. Rehearse what you're going to say, how you're going to say it, and what you want to achieve.
6. Be timely. Some situations need to be addressed immediately; others can wait until the end of the day. If behavior is left uncorrected, it will repeat or get worse.
7. Listen more than you talk. Once you have given the information, ask for the staff members input and really listen to what they have to say. Should there be compromise? Does the staff member not understand the big picture? Do they need to?
8. Reaffirm the employees' value and strengths. Always give enough positive information to keep the employee motivated and clear on their value to the practice. The suggested ratio is five positives for every negative. But this is something you build on over time it doesn't have to take place all within this one meeting. Have you built up enough reserves?
9. Define your future expectation. Confirm that the employee is clear on what you expect from them. This is best addressed with a question, "can you give me an example of how your actions will change after our meeting?" "How will you handle this situation in the future?"
10. Let it go. Keep an eye on the situation but once you're confident there has been a behavior change, compliment the staff member, affirm you're satisfaction with them and move on.

Negative information is not easy but if you do it properly, it will create clarity and benefit the situation, not cause anger or hurt feelings. Good employees will appreciate it and poor performing staff members will move on.

Remember, stay open to input from the staff, consensus building will increase cooperation and allow your team to work together to ultimately give your patients an amazing experience.