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Ash: Hello, and welcome to another episode of Beyond Bitewings. In today's episode, we will be talking about conflict resolution. This has been a topic that has been on our listener's minds, as well as some of our client's minds for a while, because let's just say the industry just calls for a lot of conflict. You know, I paused there for a second because I didn't want to use a certain word, but yeah, I feel like this is gonna be an interesting topic, and within the studio, we have Robert,

Robert: Good afternoon.

- and Dr. Sharon Tiger. Now, she's a prominent dental practice management consultant nationally, and she's going to share some of her tips and viewpoints regarding the subject matter. So, Sharon, how are you today?

Dr. Tiger: Good, thanks for having me. So that's a great topic because what I find when I go in and work with practices, there's always some type of drama,

Ash: Mm-hmm

Dr. Tiger: some type of drama going on, and one of the things I, I do is I try to help the team on how they can work out their conflicts. I try to teach the doctor, in one of my previous episodes that I did with you all, I spoke about how the doctor needs to be a leader and be able to sit down with a team member and have a coaching session on what's working and what's not working, but it's very difficult with all the drama that goes on, that it's hard for some dentists to even wanna continue practicing, just because all they really wanted to do was do dentistry

Ash: Mm-hmm

Dr. Tiger: and not have to manage.

Robert: Right? Not have to run a business.

Dr. Tiger: Not have to run a business.

Robert: Right.

Dr. Tiger: So I'm gonna give you a few pointers. You might not be at the stage of your practice where you need a office manager,

Ash: Mm-hmm

Dr. Tiger: but an office manager can be helpful. Not probably in a very small practice, but I coach a lot of office managers on how to coach conflict. And so anytime, for example, I'm working with an office manager now where we have four hygienists in the practice, three doctors, and one of the hygienists is a hygienist outta school, and she only wants to do things the way they taught her in hygiene school. And so of course, this is frustrating the other three hygienists because they're doing sterilization, they're cleaning their rooms. they don't have anyone helping them. Of course the assistants will help them every now and then if they're free and they're not with one of the doctors, but they don't have a dedicated hygiene assistant.

Robert: So is this like her first practice she's worked in after hygiene school?

Dr. Tiger: This is her first practice. Yes.

Robert: Okay.

Dr. Tiger: And so she is always crying and always feeling like nobody's helping her and why aren't they helping her clean her room and why aren't they helping her? She definitely doesn't wanna participate in sterilization because she feels like, it doesn't, I feel like she really feels like she, know, has no time, but I also feel like she really thinks that she's a little bit above sterilization and just the assistant should take care of that. And we are having, I'm, I'm on the phone with the office manager continually on, Okay, have a meeting with her, talk to her about what our expectations are at the practice and how she needs to take care of her own things that we understand she's gonna be slower, but she needs to really pick up her pace. And at least when she brings her tray to sterilization to take the things off the tray, not to leave everything for the assistants or else we have another drama of the assistants feeling like the hygienists are disrespecting them. Because, really, regarding sterilization, hygienist and assistants should be working in sterilization and, and help take care of things.

Robert: Well, this is kind of what leads to that concept of hygienist as being prima donnas.

Dr. Tiger: Right. And this practice, they happen not to be prima donnas, but I have been in practices where they are that way or, or, and so this has been a huge, I'm on the phone with the office manager. This hygienist is crying all the time. And she'd say like, "Today's my last day," and I'm thinking like, let's let her go. Let's, but it's so difficult to find a hygienist that.

Ash: Especially these days.

Dr. Tiger: Right. And, and she's going to other people in the office and talking against the other hygienist, so that's causing drama. And of course the doctor is usually ambivalent to all of these things. The doctor is the last one.

Robert: The ostrich, right? Bury your head in this hand.

Dr. Tiger: Right. So I called the doctor and said, "So do you know all this thing that's going on with your hygienist and the drama that it's creating with the assistants?" and he goes, "I actually thought things were going really well." And I think that's what doctors usually think. They're just like, head in the sand.

Robert: Like no news is good news. Right?

Dr. Tiger: Right, right.

Robert: Yeah.

Dr. Tiger: But, but he is very coachable, and he said, "Okay, well, what do we need to do?" and I said, "Well, I'm gonna start speaking to each hygienist individually, and I'm gonna coach the office manager to have individual coaching sessions with them and to have an individual coaching session with baby hygienist." But it was so interesting how my office manager said, "This is, like, becoming 80% of my job." I said, I feel like coaching the drama, can sometimes feel like 80% of the job.

Ash: Mm.

Dr. Tiger: So that's one example where I feel like, I'm not sure this hygienist is going to make it, but, all this, I always tell my doctors, 50% of your job is doing the dentistry, and 50% of your job is helping with all this drama.

Ash: Oh, they don't want to hear that.

Dr. Tiger: And, and they don't wanna hear that.

Ash: Yeah

Dr. Tiger: But really, if we can't, if we can't have relationship with the team members, if they can't all be in relationship, we're not gonna produce and we're not gonna take good care of patients. So, for them all be in relationship with one another, someone has to coach it. We can't just let it be like if someone is, like, for example, that wonderful office manager, and what I love her about her is she's willing to take risks. She's willing to have one-on-one individual conversations. But I've also had other practices, I just spoke to a doctor this morning, who says she, her office manager, she thinks the reason she keeps losing two people at her front desk is because she thinks the office manager is running them off. But she says, "I don't know that because I'm just doing dentistry, so I don't really know if that's happening." And I said, "Well, you, you have to know." "Well," she says, "I'm doing exit interviews," which are very good to do.

Robert: I was just gonna ask if they were doing exit interviews.

Dr. Tiger: No. And a lot of people don't.

Robert: But who does those? The office manager?

Dr. Tiger: I would have the doctor do the exit interview, 'cause that's the only way the doctor will find out what's really going on. "I understand you're leaving. You're upset. Can you gimme some feedback on?" because even if they're scared of that person at the front desk, they're leaving, so they can say whatever they want to say. But I, I asked my doctor this morning, "Well, can you sit down and talk to her about that, that's what you think is happening?" "Oh," she said, "I don't think I can do that." So I said, "Okay, but if you don't have this conversation with her, you're just gonna keep." 'Cause she wanted to bring me in to consult, and I said, "I don't wanna come in and consult 'til you have your team in place. But if two team members keep leaving every 30 to 60 days, to me, there's a problem with the office manager, so have you thought about probably replacing your office manager?" "Oh no. She's been with me for 15 years. She does everything for me. She knows where everything is. She even helps me with my books and finances and I just could not lose her." I said, "Well, then you're just gonna keep losing your front office team." But there's that fear of, I don't wanna lose that person. So I don't wanna have that conflict-type conversation, but she absolutely needs to. So I encouraged her to sit down with her and have a conversation on, is she being a little bit too hard on the two, the two new people that come in? Or even asking her, "Why do you think two people are always leaving the front desk?"

Robert: So the doctor really needs to kinda keep the office manager at arm's length rather than getting so close to them that they feel like they can't, absolutely can't, do without them.

Dr. Tiger: Right.

Robert: They really need to keep it more at arm's length.

Dr. Tiger: They keep 'em at arms length, but they also need to support them. But they can definitely, they don't, they shouldn't be, like, I have examples of doctors who go to the gym with their office manager, or, and then everyone says, "Why is the, a doctor going to the gym with the office manager, and she doesn't go to the gym with any of us?" I have a great example of a doctor who was working out every morning with her hygienist and huge drama until they finally called me, the team. I and, there, there was so much drama, one person left. And of course the doctor said, "Why didn't someone tell me this?" I said, "Well, they're not gonna tell you to stop working out with that hygienist." But she says, "But I really like working out with her." I said, "But you cannot work out with her. She has to go at one time and you go in another time because you're the doctor." There has to be a line, a little bit of a line. I'm not saying they can't be in relationship, but you, then you need to go work out with the whole team.

Ash: Absolute solution. Get everybody to work out!

Dr. Tiger: Get everyone to work out! That's healthy!

Ash: Yeah.

Dr. Tiger: So, so I think, that's a interest, and I've seen male doctors get into really bad situations where they're really good friends with their assistant because they work knee to knee and eye to eye with one another all the time and they, they're close with them and I've seen it affect marriages, breakups in relationships at home.

Robert: Well, dentists have a high divorce rate anyway. I mean it it's, it's a fact.

Dr. Tiger: And I've seen it many times that then the assistant ends up getting divorced, the doctor ends up getting divorced, all out of creating this relationship with the assistant that was different than any of the other relationships, which you can't be. You can have relationships. I guess my big golden answer is you can't have a relationship with one person that's different than all the, they can be different, but they can't be stronger. It can't be that you have this strong relationship with this assistant and not have that same strong relationship. It could be other types of relationships, but not the type of closeness that makes the other team members ask questions.

Ash: I see. So there cannot be any bias or partial,

Dr. Tiger: Right.

Ash: towards any one specific employee.

Dr. Tiger: Right. And I hear that a lot. I hear that, sometimes when a, a team member picks me up at the airport, before I go to a brand new consult, I send out questionnaires ahead of time saying, "What's working and what's not working?" And you would be shocked, the things they tell me, and they don't even know me! But they write 'em on the sheets 'cause they're desperate for it to be taken care of. So,

Robert: And, and it's anonymous, right?

Dr. Tiger: It's anonymous.

Robert: So it's, yeah. So they open up.

Dr. Tiger: So it's like, "Doctor having affair with hygienist. Hygienist, or assistant having affair with doctor, or office manager somehow taking money from the front desk." When, when patient pays in cash, they've seen the office manager somehow pocket that and somehow adjust it in the computer.

Ash: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Tiger: But they didn't tell the doctor, no one went and told the doctor and no one told anyone.

Robert: So they tell the consultant? They don't tell the doctor?

Dr. Tiger: Well, you, you know, you would like them. And sometimes people leave over these things, and the doctor didn't even know

Robert: Yeah.

Dr. Tiger: why they left.

Robert: Yeah.

Dr. Tiger: So this conflict, I think the biggest thing is it always has to be addressed. We always have to address conflict in the office. If we don't, then it just gets outta control. And then the doctors, although, of course, the last ones to know, so if they don't stay in touch. That's why I love my doctors at my last session. I talked about having coaching sessions once a week with a different team member, because, I will tell you, they'll tell the doctor in the coaching session, things that he didn't even know was going on, just because they're feeling that bond, that they can talk, even if they have eight team members and they only get to them once every eighth week, they're still getting to find that information. And we, and there's always, I always tell my doctors, there is always gonna be drama. There may be a few weeks with no drama, but there's always gonna be some type of drama. I've had drama just recently in a practice where there were four assistants and all of them, all of them, decided to leave, to walk out.

Robert: Wow.

Dr. Tiger: Just decided to walk out because they felt like the doctor was favoring the hygienist and not treating them fairly.

Robert: Well, kinda like going on strike.

Ash: Right?

Dr. Tiger: Yeah.

Ash: That's what it sounds like.

Dr. Tiger: But if, if a doctor doesn't stay in touch and see what's going on, I think the conflict continues and there'll always be drama. And I know the doctor's first thing is "I don't want anymore drama," but if you would stay in relationship with them and have coaching sessions and find out what's going on once a week with a different team member and have your, I also have my office manager meeting with the team members also. We just have to make sure the office manager is not the queen of the drama.

Robert: So when you have the doctor meet with a team member each week, that's it? Really, one person each week.

Dr. Tiger: Yeah, but if you have 10 team members,

Robert: Yeah.

Dr. Tiger: I sometimes won't meet with them for three months.

Robert: Right.

Dr. Tiger: So I said to him, I say to my doctor, "So if something's going on, please don't wait 10 weeks." "Well, I, I, I'll tell that person when I meet with them in 10 weeks."

Ash: Right.

Dr. Tiger: You know.

Ash: That's too long.

Dr. Tiger: Meet with them sooner, and, and you'll just put another person off.

Ash: I see.

Dr. Tiger: But the dramas that happen are just. I had to fly down to Seattle to fire a front desk person because my doctor was scared of the hygienist.

Ash: Wow.

Dr. Tiger: Or the front desk person, excuse me. And so I said, "Well, we're gonna do it together." First of all, you really don't need me to fly down to do this. We could do it on the phone. I'll be on the phone. But she was really scared of this front desk person. So I flew down there and we both fired her together and let her go.

Robert: So how'd that go? Did it go is according to plan?

Dr. Tiger: No. What happened is just what the doctor thought would happen. She got really hysterical and really confrontational.

Ash: Hmm

Dr. Tiger: And I almost thought that she was gonna hit the doctor.

Ash: Oh my goodness.

Dr. Tiger: But, she stood up, and it looked like, but that didn't happen.

Ash: Okay. Goodness.

Dr. Tiger: Cause I said, "Okay," well I said, "You need to pack up your stuff." Cause what I like the doctors say is nothing. Like, "This isn't working, and so today's your last day." And I like them to do that at the end of the day, at the end of the week.

Robert: So when they do something like that, do you suggest that they consult with an employment attorney first?

Dr. Tiger: Well, Texas is an At Will state. So.

Robert: But not all of our clients and not all of our listeners are in Texas.

Dr. Tiger: Right. Well, the ones that are not At Will states, they definitely should consult someone like Bent Ericksen. I don't know if you refer them at all.

Robert: We do. They're out of Oregon, I believe?

Dr. Tiger: Yeah. Bent Ericksen and Associates, and you can find that out from Robert's office or look them up online. They have attorneys for every state and they charge you per a certain period of time for every 15 minutes. They're very reasonable and you can call up and say, "Okay, here's what happens. I'm having this. What do you suggest?" They are a great resource.

Robert: And I think they just take individual questions too. [Dr. Tiger: Right, right. So if you have a question like that, you ask 'em, you get billed a couple hundred bucks, and it's well worth it

Dr. Tiger: Well worth it.

Robert: to protect yourself.

Dr. Tiger: Especially if you have someone who's 55 or 60 or 65 and you're hesitant to let them go because of age discrimination, that's another reason to call Bent Ericksen. And that's another conflict that, that cause in the office or someone feels like this 75-year-old insurance person that it, it's time for her to leave, not because she's 75, but because she's just not doing her job well anymore. I don't care if they're 80, as long as they're doing their job well. And I feel like those are conversations you need to have with Bent Ericksen, so that you do it the right way. And they will really guide you and send you the paperwork you need to make it legal.

Ash: I see.

Robert: Okay, good. Good advice.

Dr. Tiger: You just have to be very careful that when you say something, you say, "This just is not working," and not go into all the reasons why that they can come back and sue you on.

Robert: Because reasons can always be challenged. But if you just say, "It's not working."

Dr. Tiger: It's just not working.

Robert: It's just not working.

Dr. Tiger: Just not working. "Well, what's not working?" "It's just not working. Today's your last day, so I need you to go get your stuff."

Robert: It's not working.

- This situation's not working, right.

Dr. Tiger: "The situation's not working, and so you need to get your stuff and today will be your last day, and I have your check for you."

Ash: I see. So conflicts that happen within the office, from what I'm hearing, is that it's important for either the owner or the office manager to maintain a good relationship with all the staff there.

Dr. Tiger: Right.

Ash: Be responsible for coaching them,

Dr. Tiger: Coaching

Ash: them on a one-on-one basis.

Dr. Tiger: On a regular basis. Right.

Ash: And also on a regular basis. And that will help strengthen the relationship and also have a platform where one another can have a better understanding.

Dr. Tiger: And, and once you have those relationships, it's not so hard to go. I tell my doctors, it's not so hard to approach them after you've been meeting with them regularly.

Ash: Right.

Dr. Tiger: It doesn't become so scary because we've all been meeting regularly.

Ash: Right. Right, right, right.

Dr. Tiger: I also think it's good to give the personality test to the team.

Robert: Oh, absolutely. Yeah.

Dr. Tiger: So they, there's DISC, D I S C. There's many personality tests you can find online. So the team can learn about each other's styles and see why that person is that way.

Robert: And so, you know, better how to deal with those people

Dr. Tiger: Yeah.

- based on their styles.

Dr. Tiger: And it shows you how to communicate with those people.

Ash: I see.

Dr. Tiger: Not necessarily that every team member will follow that, but I tell you, I think it's an aha moment for some of them when they take that test.

Ash: I see.

Dr. Tiger: So I think that helps with a lot of conflict resolution.

Ash: I see. Okay.

Dr. Tiger: And so, so it's not culture index. It's more your,

Robert: Your traditional test.

Dr. Tiger: traditional test.

Robert: Briggs and, and the others.

Ash: Yes. And we actually had an episode earlier where someone talks more about these personality tests and how it could be useful when running a practice. The, the specific one that she was talking about was interesting, and something to do with animals, let's just put it that way.

Robert: Yeah. I can't exactly remember the four animals, but it was lions and tigers and

Ash: beavers

Robert: beavers and something else.

Ash: Right. But great information there. And so, yeah, no, that definitely helps. And, you know.

Dr. Tiger: But if we don't maintain those ongoing relationships and conversations, we can never lessen the drama.

Ash: Right. Right.

Dr. Tiger: I have a personality test that I use. If anyone wants to email me about that, where it's driver, expressive, pleaser, and analytic. They, they take this test and they figure out by the scores, which they are. And sometimes they're a combination. The driver, which is the strong personality. The expressive, which is a little social butterfly who loves to talk to everyone. The pleaser is,

Robert: Wants to be everybody's friend.

Dr. Tiger: just wants everyone together and wants to be everyone's friend.

Robert: Everyone to get along.

Dr. Tiger: The pleaser is dangerous because if they're upset, they're just gonna leave. They won't tell anyone. They won't tell you what's wrong because they just want everyone to get along.

Ash: I see.

Dr. Tiger: And their analytic is your real detailed person.

Robert: Just leave me alone. Let me look at my numbers. Right?

Dr. Tiger: Look at my numbers, right.

Robert: That's like with most accountants. Right?

Ash: Most account.

Dr. Tiger: But I do feel the more you can do with communication exercises, with team building exercises. I have a lot of my doctors who quarterly take a half a day off, so they feel like they're getting paid, or three hours off, so they feel like they're getting paid for it, and do some kind of team building, Whether it's, what's that house called? What's it called when you're all trying to solve the problem?

Robert: Escape room.

Dr. Tiger: Escape rooms.

Robert: Yeah.

Ash: Mm.

Dr. Tiger: Escape rooms are great. I just had an office that just did escape rooms.

Robert: Cause they have to work together to solve

Ash: Right, right

Robert: the problem.

Dr. Tiger: There's so many different type of team building things, if you go on Google, that you can do, and I think once a quarter, taking the three hours off is worth it to keep those relationships in place.

Robert: And better relationships, help increase productivity.

Dr. Tiger: And decrease drama.

Ash: I was just gonna say that. Decrease drama. Right?

Robert: Yep. The best of both worlds.

- I just had an office that went on a scavenger hunt. I mean, they think of, I just had another office that went bowling for three hours. They all just went bowling together. So it's not like tough to do.

Ash: Right.

Dr. Tiger: And I know sometimes it's hard for them go, "I'm paying them for this," but it's just worth it at the, at the end to have less drama and less conflict.

Ash: Right, right, right.

Robert: And higher productivity.

Dr. Tiger: Right, and higher productivity. Absolutely.

Robert: That's the analytic talking. Well, thanks for the information. That is great information today. We appreciate you being here.

Dr. Tiger: I love coming back.

Ash: Oh yes. It's always a pleasure having you here. Dr. Tiger.

Dr. Tiger: Okay.

Ash: Now, if you would like to share your contact information with the listeners.

Dr. Tiger: And so my email is txtiger2@gmail.com. If you wanna get the personality test that I use, which is called Behavior Styles, or any other information about coaching questions. I also have a coaching form that you can use when you're coaching. So I'd be happy to email that back to anyone who's interested.

Ash: Great resources there, Dr. Tiger. And for all you listeners out there, if you guys need to get in touch with us about a specific subject matter, or just to talk more about the topic that we covered today, please reach us at info@eandassociates.com and that, and is spelled out A N D. Thank you for being with us here today.

Dr. Tiger: Thanks for having me.

Ash: Absolutely always.

Robert: Thank you. Thanks Ash.

Ash: Thank you.

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