

What Makes an Associateship Work?

The decision to hire an associate is often a difficult one for the dentist and, perhaps, his/her family. The reasons run the gamut from technological through personal/emotional. The technological issues, including practice statistics, staff retention, shared practice management, physical facility and layout, business systems and such, can be worked and generally agreed upon. The emotional issues are much more difficult to address. However, the personal/emotional agendas of the dentists involved must be discussed and rectified if there are problems. Successful associateships feel good. Both the junior and senior dentists enjoy peace of mind and a sense of security that comes from having the right person with whom to practice.

Years ago, Dr. Peter Wylie, a consultant who provided advice on business partnerships, suggested a simple exercise for dentists to help clarify the emotional level of the relationship between prospective associates/partners. He called his method TRAC -- Trust, Respect, Affection and Confidence.

Think about your prospective associate. Rate them in each of these categories according to your perceptions:

1. Trust 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

- If score I gave is less than 10, why?
- What does the Dr. have to do to get a 10?
- Do I believe the Dr. could/would make those changes?

2. Respect 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

- If score I gave is less than 10, why?
- What does the Dr. have to do to get a 10?
- Do I believe the Dr. could/would make those changes?

3. Affection/Likeability 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

- If score I gave is less than 10, why?
- What does the Dr. have to do to get a 10?
- Do I believe the Dr. could/would make those changes?

4. Confidence 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

- If score I gave is less than 10, why?
- What does the Dr. have to do to get a 10?
- Do I believe the Dr. could/would make those changes?

The thoughtful answers to these questions will allow the dentist(s) to decide if this is a professional with whom associateship/partnership seems feasible. If so continue discussions; if not, tactfully end them.