

Occupational Health Management™

A monthly advisory for hospital-based occupational health programs

Reader Questions

Don't write off employees who stop using your clinic

Question: What is the best way to approach employers who used to be regular customers but now don't use our clinic anymore? In some cases, I know that they just took their business to another occupational health program. In other cases, they have just stopped using some services like ergonomic consulting. Is it worth our time to pursue them again, or should we just forget them and not waste our marketing time and money?

Answer: This is an exceptional opportunity to determine how your program may be stumbling a bit and to improve your relationship with this client, says **Georgia Casciato**, a health care business development consultant in Downers Grove, IL. She says you should always pursue the client who is walking away from your relationship, even if, in some circumstances, you may ultimately have to let that one go and not keep trying to win the client back.

Ideally, it should never come as a surprise to you that a client has stopped sending business your way. Occupational health salespeople must keep in touch with clients after they are brought into the program, and a good relationship will let you know when the client is dissatisfied or has undergone a change that alters the need for some services.

"You should know long before clients get to the point of ending your relationship or before you look at the revenue sheet and see that they didn't send you any business last month," she says. "If you have a lot of people who just end up there and it's a surprise to you, you have salespeople who are not doing their jobs."

Casciato offers one word of caution: Don't always assume there is a grave problem just because revenue has fallen off from a particular client. It is possible that the client was in an aggressive hiring mode when the company first came to you, for instance, and now the preplacement physicals are needed very rarely. Whatever the reason, you need to ask and see if there is any service that client may need now. The earlier you can deal with a client's dissatisfaction or new

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Always pursue clients who leave your program because they are dissatisfied. This is a golden opportunity to improve your program and solidify your relationship with the client.

- Never argue about the client's dissatisfaction.
- Let the client vent.
- After initially pursuing the unhappy client, you may have to let the client go.

workplace needs, the easier it will be to solve the problem and bring the client back into a solid relationship, she says. "This is the opportunity to showcase the customer service part of what your facility has to offer."

If you wait and let the customer become so dissatisfied that he or she actually decides not to work with you anymore, your job is more difficult. The client may call to "break up" with you, or you may just find that he or she doesn't return your calls, and the client's employees just stop showing up at your door. Regardless of how you find out about the problem, you have to act quickly. It always is worth your time and effort to pursue these clients, at least until you make a good effort and find that the client just cannot be satisfied. (See p. 7 for tips on how to approach the client.) If the client was worth your effort to bring into the program, the client is worth your effort to try and keep.

However, there will be some cases in which you have to agree to part ways after investigating. As long as the client has realistic expectations, you should not stop working until you have satisfied the client. Remember that even if the unhappy client is not responsible for a lot of revenue, the dissatisfaction may be shared by larger clients who have not spoken up yet. This is your opportunity to improve your program.

But after that good faith effort, you may find that some clients just cannot be made happy. Every provider has a number of clients who make unreasonable demands, and the effort to satisfy them can drain resources away from other clients. When you're sure that is the case, it may be wise to gently tell the client that your relationship is not working out.

There also will be some cases in which you try very hard to keep the client but are not successful. In that case, keep the client on your list of possibilities and check back once in a while to see if you can be of any service.