



The Blame Game

When someone hands you an envelope, the first thing you do is look at it, right? Retrieving a pile of mail from the mailbox? You will look at the letters to see who they are from and perhaps look to see if they have been addressed to you. Even when you know the contents, you look at the outside. For example, when it's payday and you are handed your paycheck, you probably read the name on the envelope to make sure it's the right one.

With these scenarios in mind, let's flashback to the recent Oscars fiasco starring Warren Beatty, Faye Dunaway and that accountant from PwC.

- Mistake 1: The accountant handed the wrong envelope to Mr. Beatty backstage.
- Mistake 2: Mr. Beatty failed to read the outside of the envelope before he took the stage.
- Mistake 3: When Mr. Beatty opened the envelope and hesitated to read the name because it didn't make sense, he didn't take a second to check the front of the envelope.
- Mistake 4: In his confusion, Mr. Beatty showed the card to Ms. Dunaway hoping for some advice. Instead, she just blurted out the first name of a movie she could see.
- Mistake 5: There was hesitation from the stage manager and others to run out and correct the mistake.

After the dust settled, everyone blamed the accountant. He was the first person in this string of unfortunate events, but was he solely responsible? I don't think so.

How do you handle errors in your office? Are you a movie star who cannot admit your role in the error, or do you take a critical look at everything that went wrong? So many things that happen in our offices every day rely on people getting the little details right. When a mistake is made, does the next person in line identify the problem and make the culprit aware of what happened? Here are a couple scenarios to consider:

A lab case is delivered to the office, is checked in on the lab case clipboard and put away. On the day of the crown seat, the front office staff is calling the lab because the case was not logged in the practice management software. What went wrong? The person checking in the case did not complete the task. The assistants did not look ahead in the schedule to see that a lab case for the next day was not marked here.

Your hygiene patient arrives late to her appointment. Her fault? Yes. When you notify her that she has arrived late, she responds, "The last two times I was in the office I waited more than 15 minutes to be seated." In this example, she was late, but your office contributed to her attitude about arriving on time.

A lab case comes back from the lab, and it is the wrong crown for the patient in your chair. Is it the lab's fault? Yes. Should you verify the contents of your lab cases when they arrive in the office prior to the patient's appointment? Yes.

I'm sure you can think of dozens of things that went wrong in your practice, and it's human nature to identify the culprits and assign blame. In this context, assigning blame should really read: You identified an opportunity for additional training or coaching for the people involved. In addition, if you as the doctor are part of the problem, you should own your role in the mistake. Don't be like Mr. Beatty and Ms. Dunaway, acting like you had nothing to do with it. ■



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