

## **The Dental Hygienist**

Dr. Emerson was a dentist in a large metropolitan area. He had been in practice for seven years after buying out a partner who was ready to retire. During the past year, competition had increased as a result of two additional dentist offices opening near his. He continued to increase his patient load, however, by spending money on advertising and office improvements, and by trying to offer good service to all who were under his care.

Jeanine was a dental hygienist employed by Dr. Emerson six months ago. She had been highly recommended by the school she had attended and had graduated with the top grades in her class. As Dr. Emerson observed Jeanine's work, he saw that she was very skilled and that she did a good job applying the knowledge she had learned in school. She was able to operate several modern pieces of equipment recently purchased for the office that his other hygienists had not yet learned to use.

Recently, Dr. Emerson was reviewing a monthly report that was produced by a new computer system now being used in the office, and he discovered that on a percentage basis, patients who had been seen by Jeanine were not returning for further services. He was to have a staff meeting this morning with his office manager, and he decided to inquire further about the apparent trend.

When Dr. Emerson asked his office manager about the report, she was evasive at first. When questioned further, she told him that several patients had complained about Jeanine. One had said that she was not very cheerful and another thought she was not friendly. The office manager had also been told by one of the other hygienists that Jeanine usually jogged in the mornings before work and did not take enough time fixing her hair and making herself presentable before coming to work. With the close working conditions between patient and hygienist, careful attention to personal grooming was an issue the office manager felt was important.

Six months later . . .

Dr. Emerson faced increased competition, and the number of patients he is seeing has declined. In spite of efforts to reverse the decline, patients continue to switch to other dentists. The office manager continues to suggest that a major part of the problem is Jeanine. She points to reports generated by the computer system which indicate that Jeanine has a higher percentage of patients who do not return than do the other hygienists.

With the reduced patient load, Dr. Emerson will now need to fire one of his hygienists. Jeanine is more skilled in her actual dental work and made better grades in school.

Which hygienist should Dr. Emerson fire? Why?