

SPEAKOUT

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**ALEXANDRA MURRELL,
WINNER OF THE 2022
INNOVATION AWARDS**

Alex and Mikaylah.

Speech
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2022 look back

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MANAGING THE PROBATIONARY PERIOD OF NEW EMPLOYEES

The effective management of new employees is paramount to the success of your speech pathology practice. Done well, your new recruit will be an asset, contributing to your team's cohesion and performance, which ultimately enhances client satisfaction.

Done poorly, however, the risks and potential consequences are cause for concern. At best, you may need to deal with low productivity and a tense or toxic work culture. At worst, you could face serious complaints and penalties, while jeopardising the safety of your clients and staff.

In most cases, your successful candidate will already have the prerequisite skills to do the job, and hopefully they have impressed you with their positive attitude. **The first few weeks of employment will determine whether they are a good culture fit for your practice!**



THE PROBATIONARY PERIOD

The probationary period is the initial 'trial period' of employment. It provides a crucial opportunity for the practice owner to assess the suitability of their new employee, and for the new employee to decide if the job is right for them.

For a private practice, the duration of a probationary period should typically be six months. An employer can not automatically extend a probationary period. When the probationary period is managed well, an extension of the six

months should not be necessary. Practice owners considering extending a probationary period should seek professional workplace relations advice as a number of factors need to be considered.

Employees on probation should receive their normal entitlements per their employment contract, including accruing and accessing paid annual leave and sick leave. If the new employee does not pass their probation, or if they decide that the job isn't right for them, they are still entitled to have their unused accumulated annual leave hours paid out.

ONBOARDING OR INDUCTION PROCESS

Practice owners need to ensure there are processes in place to increase the possibility of new employees succeeding in their roles. For example, your practice may have an onboarding or induction process. Conducted within the first few days of employment, an onboarding or induction process is designed to familiarise new staff with your workplace culture and the way things operate. Onboarding may include an introduction to:

- organisational vision, mission, values and culture
- policies and procedures including code of conduct
- key stakeholders, key contacts and co-workers within the organisation
- access to technology and/or workspaces
- the scheduling of regular probationary reviews.

It is advisable to have an induction policy and checklist—and follow these!

To manage a probationary period successfully, a practice owner must set clear expectations and key result areas from day one. These measures must align with both the position description and the organisational goals, values, policies and standards.

During the induction process, it is advisable for both practice owners and new employees to keep a copy of the position description on hand and be prepared to ask or answer a range of questions.

PROBATIONARY REVIEWS

An induction process should include some very important dates for follow-up meetings known as probationary reviews. These should be conducted using open, honest, two-way communication.

During the first 2 weeks, the practice owner should meet frequently with the new employee to establish and reinforce a mutual understanding of the expectations and key result areas.

During the months that follow, regular probationary reviews serve to develop the professional manager-employee relationship, provide a safe setting for giving and receiving feedback, and allow the practice owner to assess whether this person fits the culture and is capable of fulfilling their responsibilities.

These probationary reviews should be scheduled at 2 months, 4 months, 5 months and finally at 6 months, at which time the practice owner should confirm whether or not the employee has passed their probationary period.

Probationary reviews and regular check-ins are very important, not only for positive reinforcement, trust building and tracking key result areas, but also for allowing practice owners to notice emerging issues or unusual behaviours before they escalate.



BEHAVIOURAL/ATTITUDINAL FACTORS TO NOTE DURING THE PROBATIONARY PERIOD:

- Are they on time?
- Do they get along with other team members?
- Do they contribute to meetings?
- Do they participate?

WHAT ABOUT EMPLOYEES WORKING OFF-SITE?

Over the past several years, there has been a growing trend in the disability and aged care systems, with an increasing number of individuals wishing to receive care in their own homes. This has created a greater demand for allied health home visits and other similar care options in a community setting.

If members of your team work outside of your main facility most of the time, how do you track their progress? Some important questions you need to consider:

- How do you give and receive feedback with your staff?
- How do you give and receive feedback with your clients?
- How do you measure client feedback? Are you accounting for mood and personality?
- What are the organisational processes and expectations for performance management, ongoing supervision, communications and handling complaints?

WHAT IF IT'S NOT WORKING OUT?

If you find that your new employee does not fit into the practice culture and does not have the right attitude, it is advisable to attend to this during their probationary period. You have the right to terminate the employment arrangement during the probationary period, as long as you are being fair and have applied your HR policies and relevant legislation.

However, termination during the probationary period should not come as a surprise!

It is very poor practice to allow problems or tensions to escalate and say nothing for the entire probationary period, only to then invite the person to attend a meeting on the last day or two of their probation, where you terminate their employment.

Best practice is to establish regular check-ins from the get-go, for feedback and performance management. Make sure you take notes of each meeting.

If you need help managing the probationary period, including establishing regular probationary reviews with appropriate checklists and processes, you can contact an HR consultancy that works closely with the allied health sector such as **WorkPlacePLUS**.

All SPA members receive special SPA member benefits through WorkPlacePLUS for support with HR and IR issues. For more information, contact Anna Pannuzzo on (03) 9492 0958 or visit www.WorkPlacePLUS.com.au

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