

# DO YOU HAVE THE RIGHT PEOPLE ON YOUR TEAM?

By Roger P. Levin, DDS



Practice Production Whitepaper Series



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## Introduction

Practice managers in multi-doctor practices often lack a comprehensive system for evaluating their dental teams. While there are many performance review methods available to evaluate individual employees, few exist for dental teams.

This is especially important for multi-doctor practices because they experience far more team-related problems than solo practices. According to the Levin Group Data Center™, for every five employees in a practice, the turnover rate increases 20%.

In addition, large group practices suffer from a lack of a unified team identity, lower employee morale and more discipline issues.

I propose a new approach that gives a clearer picture of the whole team's performance in a way that shows changes over time. This tool will be highly useful for multi-doctor practices, where it can be difficult to measure the effectiveness of team performance due to the size of the practice, the relationships between each individual office and the lack of practice-wide systems.

## The S Curve

In *Jumping the S-Curve: How to Beat the Growth Cycle, Get on Top, and Stay There*, authors Paul Nunes and Tim Breene present an intriguing concept for evaluating company performance. Their methodology can be adapted to create an effective new technique for gauging dental staff performance. It involves marking the performance of each team member—and a composite of all team members—on an S curve (see Figure 1).

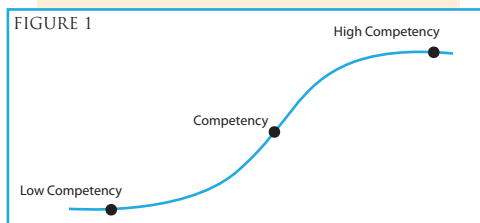
As you can see in the chart, parts of the S curve represent different stages or levels of job performance, as follows:

- *The bottom of the S* (far left) indicates a low competency level and a need for guidance and improvement.
- *The middle of the S* (center) indicates competency, with continuing learning and improvement.
- *The top of the S* (far right) indicates a high level of competency, but possibly with signs of leveling off or actually declining in performance.

It's important to note that competency here represents more than just skills. When thinking about where a particular employee belongs on the S curve, three factors should be considered:

1. Skills
2. Attitude
3. Behavior

A staff member with excellent skills but a negative attitude would be ranked much lower on the S curve than the skills alone would suggest. Conversely, an enthusiastic young employee with developing skills would merit a place higher on the curve.



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## How to Use this Technique

The S curve method is very simple to use:

1. Print out or draw a large letter "S" on a sheet of paper.
2. Using a different color for each staff member, make a sizeable mark on the curve of the "S" that reflects your judgment of that person's overall performance. Factor in skills, attitude and behavior, as discussed above. Here are some examples to help you with this step...
  - A new hire, not yet very competent and in need of guidance, would be marked on the lower part of the S curve as in *Figure 2*.
  - A competent front desk coordinator who needs improved skills, work habits or attitude would get a dot below the center of the S curve as in *Figure 3*.
  - A highly capable treatment coordinator with excellent work habits and a positive attitude would earn a dot at the top part of the center of the S curve as in *Figure 4*.
  - An assistant who has reached the peak of performance in the position would be marked at the very top of the S curve as in *Figure 5*.
  - A hygienist who had been an excellent performer but is now falling behind in some way would have a dot on the downward-curving part at the upper right of the S curve as in *Figure 6*.
3. Now, with a dot for each staff member positioned on the S curve, there is a strong visual representation of where individual staff members stand as contributors to the success of the practice.

The greatest value of this technique is that, when used in conjunction with checklists from traditional performance reviews, it shows a clear, single position for the team member. It quickly puts the true value of an excellent staff member in perspective. This method just as clearly serves as a wake-up call for the employee whose below-average work habits or outdated skills are impairing practice growth.

Suppose that, with a traditional evaluation method, a team member gets high marks in everything except punctuality. That individual probably wouldn't pay much attention to that deficiency because the overall score would be high. However, with the S curve, this staff member's dot would be nearer the center of the S, clearly indicating that there is a need for improvement. As a simple visualization rather than a set of numerical scores, the dotted S curve is a stronger motivator for improving performance before the next review, and clearly demonstrates the value of the best employees.

There's another advantage for the doctors and office managers who use this evaluation method. It serves as an accurate snapshot of the overall performance of the practice itself. In a multi-doctor practice, the S Curve can be used to evaluate the performance of each individual office as well.

FIGURE 2

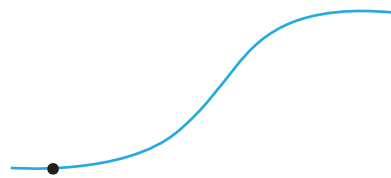


FIGURE 3

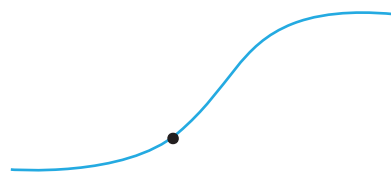


FIGURE 4

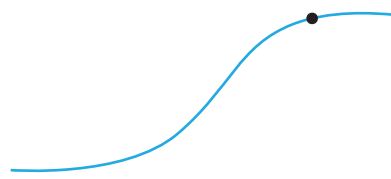


FIGURE 5

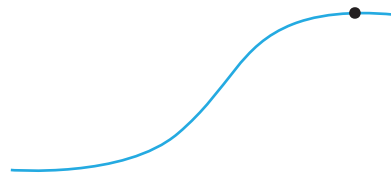
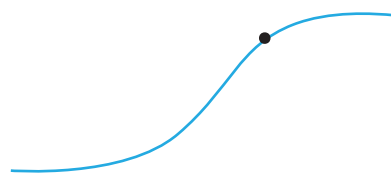


FIGURE 6



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## Seeing the Big Picture

In most multi-doctor practices, the performance of each team member is evaluated but not that of the entire team. The S curve method changes that dramatically. With all of the individuals' dots charted in a single place, it can send doctors and office managers a striking message of a type they've never seen before. Here are some examples of what a completed S curve might be saying about a practice:

- If the graphic looks like *Figure 7*, then there is a clear indication that the team's performance is weak and will inhibit future growth.
- If the graphic looks like *Figure 8*, then there is a diversity of performance levels within the team. This does not represent balance, but instead indicates that there is a need for significant improvement on the part of many team members, but also that others have the skills to coach and mentor them.
- If the graphic looks like *Figure 9*, then the team shows excellent performance and will be a positive factor in future growth.
- If the graphic looks like *Figure 10*, then the team has a great deal of experience but has lost confidence or capabilities as the practice itself has changed over time. This team can be responsible for as much weak performance and lack of future growth as the team in *Figure 7*.
- The ideal S curve looks like *Figure 11*, where the majority of team members are performing at a high competency level with excellent attitudes and behaviors with a smaller number of staff members who need to grow and improve in their jobs.

## Conclusion

Used alone or in conjunction with traditional approaches, the S curve technique is a simple and powerful method for evaluating individual team members *and* the entire team collectively. For staff members, it provides a quick, clear understanding of their overall performance level—and a strong motivation for making necessary improvements. For dentists, specialists and office managers in a multi-doctor practice, it can be a real eye-opener. Many multi-doctor practices have been quite surprised by what it reveals and have been able to quickly improve the performance of individual team members and the team as a whole. Best of all, the S curve technique is simple to use, and the visual results are easy to interpret. Any multi-doctor practice that's serious about growth and improved performance should consider grading its staff members on this curve.

FIGURE 7

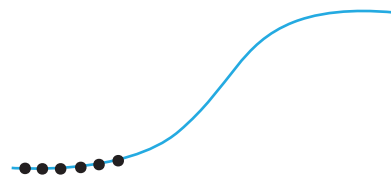


FIGURE 8

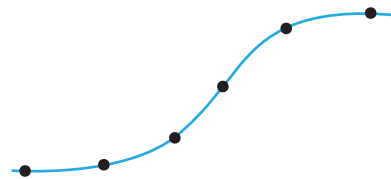


FIGURE 9

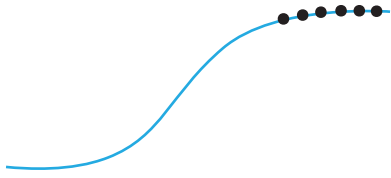


FIGURE 10

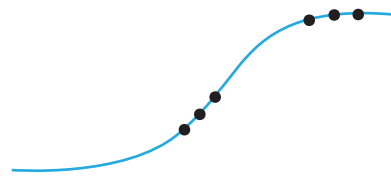
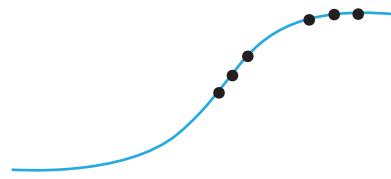


FIGURE 11



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## Dr. Roger P. Levin

Dr. Roger P. Levin is a third-generation general dentist and the Chairman and CEO of Levin Group, Inc., the largest dental practice consulting firm in North America. A keynote speaker for major dental conferences, Dr. Levin presents more than 100 seminars per year. He has authored 68 books and more than 4,000 articles. In 2014, he received the Dental Excellence Award for Best Practice Management Consultant from *DrBicuspid.com*. For the past 12 years, he has been named one of the "Leaders in Dental Consulting" by *Dentistry Today* magazine.



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