

Lighthouses

by Janice Janssen, RDH, CFE

Recently at a speaking event in Milwaukee, I had the opportunity to go to North Point Lighthouse on Lake Michigan. I have always admired lighthouses. They are simple and beautiful. I had never seen one personally, and it was amazing.

Lighthouses have such an important role in warning water vessels about the dangers of hazardous coastlines as well as direction toward a safe harbor. For me, I think they are a symbol of the means forward and guidance in navigating our way through rough waters. In life, as well as in business there are going to be rough waters. How you make it through them is what is important.

Rough waters can come in various facets. At Global Team Solutions, we work with practices that are navigating through all different types of difficulties. I like to think of us as the lighthouse keepers in some way, continually ensuring that the light is lit and guiding our doctors and teams through the rough waters that may come their way.

One of the areas that I have the privilege of helping doctors through is determining if embezzlement has occurred in their practice. I am not saying that the embezzlement was a good thing, yet I feel it is my privilege to be able to guide these doctors through the actual darkness they are feeling due to this unfortunate occurrence in their office. Each time I speak with a new doctor I feel the sucker punch that they are feeling. I have personally endured that sucker punch, when it occurred in my own office, and although I wasn't the practice owner, I still felt the betrayal, sadness and anger. I am disgusted every time anyone has to go through this and I want to ease the process in any way possible.

Let's talk about statistics. It is a well-known statistic that today, 60% of dental offices have some form of fraudulent activity. That is 3 out of 5 dental offices. If we look at all businesses across the United States, in the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners Report from April of this year, the statistics are even more enlightening.

- The research showed that **a tip detects 50% of embezzlements**. 53% of those were reported by another employee. What does this mean?

- For the doctors and practice owners out there, listen to your employees and take them seriously if they have a concern. There may be times when you think team members just don't like each other, however any tip should be investigated to see if there is any substance to it. Don't just brush it off as drama.
 - To the team members...if something looks suspicious to you, or simply does not seem right, let the doctor or practice owner know. When you are reporting it there should only be facts given. Please do not share hearsay or opinions. Merely state what you have witnessed.
- Internal control weakness accounts for nearly **50%** of embezzlements. Do you have protocols in place for your practice? In my experience, dentists feel that since their businesses are small, they simply do not need internal controls; they think it is for big business. There is nothing farther from the truth. Every business needs internal controls. Large corporations may have larger embezzlement issues that typically get the media attention. Which means the flip side is that in small businesses, the amount taken may not be millions yet rather thousands; it's all relative. By having protocols in place, inappropriate activity can be minimized or even thwarted all together. Wouldn't it be nice to keep your hard-earned money in your own bank account, and not someone else's?
- The final statistic is the median losses for the healthcare industry due to embezzlement. It is **\$100,000**. I have been giving you this statistic for some time now, but I think it is very important. It brings home the point that internal controls and listening to your team members is so very important. **\$100,000** is a significant amount of money. Don't take the chance and let this happen to you.

The phrase in America today is "See something, say something"; for business owners, it's more along the lines of "Feel something isn't right? It probably isn't". If you feel that there is inappropriate activity occurring in your practice, the time to act is immediately. Have an outside eye take a look at what you are feeling. It could be as simple as employees being improperly trained, which could be redirected with expert instruction. Remaining in denial or waiting to see if it corrects itself, is like waiting for that decay to get smaller.

However, if there are the rough waters you are facing right now please do not hesitate to reach out to us and get some help navigating those waters. We certainly hope this is not



the case but do understand it can be confusing and overwhelming. We can help. Nothing else speaks of safety and security in the face of adversity and challenge quite the way a lighthouse does. Let us be your light.

Not having embezzlement concerns right now? What rough waters are you facing right now? Do you need guidance? We handle many types of practice management concerns and would love to help. Please feel free to reach out to me at Janice@GTSgurus.com or visit our website at GTSgurus.com to find out what we are all about.