

Strong Leadership Skills for Future Success

Great changes have taken place in dentistry in the last 25 years. Below are the major change forces that doctors are currently facing and how strong leadership skills can help doctors better prepare for practice success.

- **Payment at Time of Service:** Gone are the fee-for-service practice days when patients would pay in full and wait for reimbursement from their insurance company.
- **Participating Provider:** Increased market penetration of PPOs, HMOs, and DSOs have changed the game dramatically. Many private practitioners have been forced to meet consumer expectations of becoming a participating provider in various insurance plans. This has resulted in decreased profitability depending on the payor mix in the practice.
- **Group Practices:** Private practice dentists are joining forces to include general and specialty practices under one roof to be able to stay in the game with the DSOs of the world.
- **Concierge Services:** Practices have begun offering dental concierge services to differentiate themselves in order to attract patients and keep up with the instant gratification society we have become.
- **Social Media:** Many dentists practice in fear that one wrong move can result in a bad online review or Facebook post that might sever the community ties they have labored to nurture.
- **Affordable Care Act (ACA):** Dentistry is forced to see their future may be a merging of the medical and dental fields. It's clear our society craves a one-stop shop experience that may create an overwhelming demand for all health service needs to be met at one time, in one place.

There is no room for errors in this new world. Most dental offices that struggle have a common theme: low productivity that spawns from the lack of doctor leadership and vision. These doctors do not understand that the true culprit is within themselves; instead they are quick to place blame in the following areas:

- **Low number of new patients.**
- **The office does not attract the right patient demographics.**
- **Susie, at the front desk, can't seem to smile and communicate well with the parents and patients.**
- **Employees cannot get along.**
- **Employees do not know how to do their job.**
- **Cannot find the right employees.**
- **The DSO that opened up a block away that takes every insurance under the sun.**

Strong Leadership Skills to Put in Place

Most dentists did not choose dentistry because they love leading others; this is why they hire office managers. However, the team still needs their doctor to lead them! Doctors must demonstrate strong leadership and a clearly defined vision to create a united team, or the practice will encounter the above stressors and ultimately experience a negative community reputation and loss of production and collection.



Strong Leadership Takes Place in Many Different Ways

Communication is the Key to A Well-Oiled Dental Machine

- Clearly communicate your vision and practice goals to your team. If a stranger asked your team what are the top three practice goals, what would they say? Would their answers be consistent? At your next team meeting, ask this question, their answers will be your leadership mirror.
- Share your vision regularly so that it becomes engrained in the team. This will be their guiding light when the going gets tough.

Be Open to New Ideas

- Staff members see what you as the dentist cannot. They have a unique view that is not burdened by bills or administrative issues. Use them as your internal consultants. In turn, they will feel further invested in the practice.

Set Clear Goals and Hold Employees Accountable

- Teams need practice goals clearly communicated so they can meet and exceed them; daily production (doctor, recall, hospital), collection ratio, number of work days/month (doctor, recall, hospital), number of new patients/month and overhead expense percentage.
- Hold employees accountable in a timely manner, otherwise the team is playing without rules which causes teamwork and morale to break down.

Have Strong Practice Management Systems

- A strong set of systems helps maximize the skills of each team member, there is less stress and higher productivity and collections because of increased efficiency.

Show Appreciation

- Being a part of a dental team can feel like a thankless job at times, as a leader you are only as good as the team around you. Show appreciation to your employees by praising a unique strength of theirs on a weekly basis. These comments to individual employees will create job satisfaction and loyalty.

Involve Your Team in Future Goal Setting

- Most dental teams are not aware of the amount of administrative work it takes to own a practice. Do not hold the total weight on your shoulders. Your team wants to be a part of growing your business so invite them into the process of setting future goals.

Give Regular Feedback

- Typically, doctors do not give frequent feedback which leaves the employees disillusioned when they are given a less than perfect review. Employees crave feedback; they need it to grow and continue to be a contributing part of the team. The more frequent the feedback, the easier the annual review process will become.

Hold Annual Reviews

- The annual review is separate from a wage increase consideration. The annual review is a time to share with the employee what you appreciate they are contributing and to talk about the next growth areas and goals that you and/or the employee may have and how to achieve them. It is a leader's job to help each employee grow to their full potential. Both parties win with this philosophy.

Motivate Team Members With Incentive Programs

- An incentive program should be metric based. Typically this is built around a collection, production, and new patient goal, but can be customized to whatever metric needs the most attention. This program can not only boost staff morale, but the bottom line as well.

Delegate Non-clinical Tasks

- Doctors are the CEO, CFO, manufacturer, customer service department, and the marketing/sales rep all wrapped up into one very exhausted package. To be able to dedicate the time and energy needed to patients, doctors must clearly delegate non-clinical duties to others in the office and hold them accountable to complete the tasks correctly and on time.

Train New Team Members Well

- Most turnovers that occur with new hires are due to poor training. Make sure a senior team member is dedicated to the training of the new hire. Have an up-to-date Standard Operating Systems (SOP) manual to use in the training process. Set clear and concise expectations and provide regular feedback on their performance. The investment spent in the beginning will pay off with a long-term productive employee.

Practice Strong Financial Management

- Many dentists do not have checks and balances for their daily deposits and office costs, making them prime targets for embezzlement. Work with a consultant or an accountant to set up a system to mitigate the opportunity for loss.
- Know your break-even point and tie production and collections goals to this number to meet overhead expenses, doctor income and retirement savings. A good CPA or consultant can put together a business plan for your practice.

Make the Leadership Delineation Clear Between the Doctor and the Office Manager

- When leadership tasks are unclear, staff will not know who to approach with questions and whose leadership to follow. Therefore, having a detailed leadership organizational chart illustrating all tasks involved is very important.



Make Necessary Staff Changes

- Sometimes employees simply do not fit into your vision. When these issues arise, ask yourself; is this a question of training or work ethic? If the employee needs further training, provide it and move forward. If the employee has had thorough training, then it is a work ethic issue and cannot always be changed. Remember that crazy and lazy are like cancer, they spread; cut them out and cut them out fast.
- It is never easy to deal with the discipline or termination of a team member. However, teams appreciate the leadership it takes to do what is necessary with employees who are not fitting in and will feel the doctor is being authentic to the practice vision.



What does all this mean for the stand alone dental practice and the new front line of doctors charging out of school with their drills high in the air? It means it is time for doctors to get their game face on. It's time for doctors to do all they can to help shape their future instead of dreading it. It's time for doctors to learn and demonstrate strong leadership skills in their practice. Though we are not sure what the future of practicing dentistry brings, we do know the stronger one is going into battle, the more likely they are to win. Doctors armed with strong leadership skills will be ready for whatever battles come their way.

"The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new."

~ Socrates

Do You or Your Office Manager Need a Refresher Course?

SAVE THE DATE

Business Leadership Training Academy in Paradise
At the beautiful Marriott on Marco Island, FL

First Time Attendees Sept 19-21, 2016 / Alumni Sept 21-23, 2016
Early Bird Registration Savings until July 15, 2016

- Learn to be an effective leader and hold staff accountable
- Increase staff morale, learn to train employees, and create a cohesive team
- Use your dental software and its reports to its full potential
- Utilize integrated technology to maximize patient contact and referral opportunities
- Market your practice through social media and on-line reviews



Full Service Practice Management Consulting Specializing in Pediatric Dentistry since 1996

Consulting * Marketing * Success Products * Speaking * 303-660-4390 * www.julieweir.com



AMERICA'S PEDIATRIC DENTISTS
THE BIG AUTHORITY on little teeth®



.....
AMERICA'S PEDIATRIC DENTISTS
THE BIG AUTHORITY on little teeth®

American Academy Of Pediatric Dentistry
211 East Chicago Avenue, Suite 1600
Chicago, Illinois 60611-2637



Published four times per year as a direct membership benefit by the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD), 211 East Chicago Avenue, Suite 1600, Chicago, IL 60611-2637, (312) 337-2169. Copyright © 2016 by the AAPD. All rights reserved. ISSN 1064-1203. aapdinfo@aapd.org, www.aapd.org. Writer: Julie Weir has built an outstanding reputation as a consultant, international speaker and author in the business of dentistry. Opinions and recommendations are those of the author and should not be considered AAPD policy. Chief Executive Officer: Dr. John S. Rutkauskas; Publications Director: Cindy Hansen; Publications Manager: Adriana Loaiza; Publications Associate: Kenneth Berry.

