

Chapter 2

Why You Need a Template for Growth and Success of Your Dental Practice

When I began researching information on how to start and build my first dental practice, I was surprised to find that very few of the authors on this subject were actually dentists. These pundits were typically marketing majors, English majors, advertising specialists and occasionally dental hygienists. They could not fully relate to my situation because they were never wet-handed dentists. I was discouraged by their lack of understanding of the fundamental emotions and complexities of the job of health care provider. They had a product to sell but not a problem to solve.

Articles, journals and books written about running a business rarely address the unique needs of the individual dental practice owner. Ours is a highly specialized industry with very specific business requirements. When the literature is directed toward the individual dental practice there is little comprehensive attention given to the intricate details involved in growing an existing practice, and even less to starting a practice from scratch.

Much of the practice transition literature we receive is dedicated to purchase/sale arrangements, occasionally considering the topic of associating. There are consultants and brokers on seemingly every corner offering views on how best to take advantage of the dental transaction marketplace. There is an abundance of information available on how to buy a dental practice and more still on how to sell one. Why then is there a void in the literature and on the lecture circuit regarding the

way in which dentists can profit from growing existing practices or starting and growing their practices from scratch?

The obvious answer is that there is no money in it for the proponents of these sales arrangements. The practice brokers certainly will not benefit from your starting your own practice. They will not benefit from your growing your practice to the point of requiring an associate. This book is intended to help fill that void and assist you in realizing your potential in the business of dentistry. The most experienced and knowledgeable people in the area of growing dental practices and starting practices from scratch are dentists who are busy doing dentistry and growing their practices.

When dentists are involved in lecturing, writing and disseminating information to the dental professional, it is typically in the form of *clinical* dentistry. While the importance of honing one's clinical skills during professional school cannot be overstated, learning how to intelligently manage the operations of the business can be argued to hold equal value in determining the success of your dental practice. The utilization of a template for growth and success of your dental practice will help remove the roadblocks that may be inhibiting you from reaching your potential in the business of dentistry.

Implementing the tested action steps will help allay the fears and uncertainties that may discourage you from starting your own practice. The template for growth and success offered in this book is multifaceted and begins with choosing a practice location, which cannot be overemphasized in terms of its importance to the success of any new business. This template incorporates information relating to office design and atmosphere, hiring and training staff, insurance terminology, participation and selection, fee setting, collection protocol, treatment planning and patient and account management.

The section on dental insurance in this book provides definitions and explanations to help you understand the alphabet soup of insurance terminology, a topic particularly foreign to me when I initially entered the dental marketplace. Typically this is an area of expertise acquired only through managing your business. An attempt is made here to help you start or advance your practice with advanced knowledge of the dental insurance industry and its potential impact on your career success.

Likely the most important elements of the initial and continued success of a dental practice are marketing and advertising. The dental marketing section in this book is exhaustive. It includes internal marketing strategies which focus on recall appointments, getting treatment scheduled, referral programs and staying in front of your patients with quarterly newsletters and seasonal reminders. This book outlines multiple external marketing techniques including the critical new resident mailer program and local advertising campaigns.

Arguably the most important piece of marketing information provided is that pertaining to website design, recognition and optimization. These seemingly esoteric terms define the wave of the future in terms of business marketing. If you are not on this wave, you are, to use a term from my surfing days in Southern California, caught inside. That is to say, the wave is carrying the tide, but you are not riding it and are about to be crushed by it. I have dedicated two lengthy chapters to this information, emphasizing its importance in the successful growth of the practice of the future. As I review the mountain of marketing materials I have accumulated over the last two decades, very little information exists that simply explains what dentists need to know to grow their practices through Internet marketing.

Marketing for dental practices, and for most products and services, has transformed greatly in the past decade as technology continues to move us toward receiving most of our information from Internet sources. We are currently living in an age where business advertising is defined by the Internet Marketing Revolution. The multi-billion dollar business Google is best known for being an Internet search company, though its extraordinary revenues come from advertising. It is therefore truly an advertising company.

Website presence and recognition are imperative to the maximal success of the growing dental practice. Proper site construction and positioning will determine the success or failure of your Internet marketing campaign. Today more than half of our new patients come from searching and finding us on the Internet. Of course, when I started practicing, none of my new patients even had the Internet.

The information and terminology contained herein can seem overwhelming and possibly too *techie* for most people working outside the world of information technology. I have attempted to simplify this

language to help you clearly understand the decisions you will make on website design, maintenance and optimization. This information is invaluable to the achievement of optimal business recognition and capturing of the potential new patient population.

The practice management section of this book offers cost controlling strategies to effectively reduce your business overhead, allowing you to run an optimally profitable dental practice. Time and efficiency methods including scheduling for production and clinical material selection are detailed to assist dentists in maximizing our most precious commodity, time.

I offer strategies for staff training which assure control of your daily schedule, thereby reducing stress and promoting productivity. Business organizational skills are encouraged for those dentists not so enamored with the idea of running a business. This section also deals with the all too real but little discussed topic of professional burnout. I delve into the psychology of management, as it relates not only to that of your staff and patient population, but also to the area of self-management in the stress-laden workplace in which we as dentists operate.

The template delineated in this book also includes suggestions on paying yourself and saving for the future as well as possible ways in which to avoid the business mistakes I have made. The mistakes section is intended to immediately advance you years down the road in your business development by outlining avoidable pitfalls that have entrenched me during my years of experience in starting three dental practices from scratch.

This book concludes with a true story of the transformation of a dental practice neophyte to that of a successful business owner managing a highly productive and profitable practice. This account is intended to help allay the fears we all have when we go out on that limb of uncertainty and choose to hang our shingle. Starting, growing and managing a business with your name on the sign can be an intimidating endeavor, but it can also be the source of excitement, personal and professional growth and great reward! I hope to be able to relieve some of your uncertainty and provide real world solutions to your practice growth challenges with the template for success I present in this book. I know it works. I am excited to see it work for you!