



Implant Game Changers

A Whitepaper Series By Roger P. Levin, DDS

Implant Game Changers is a monthly whitepaper on an important implant practice management topic. It provides you with a quick and easy way to understand a specific business challenge and how to translate the solution into higher production and profit, greater efficiency, more implant patients, lower stress and greater personal satisfaction.

The 4 Stages of the Entrepreneurial Practice – Part 2

In part 1 of this white paper, we looked at the first two stages of the entrepreneurial practice. Stage 1 is characterized by “entrepreneurial energy.” Stage 2 is a period of “growth and team building.”

Most practices get stuck in Stage 2 and very few advance into the third stage of entrepreneurship. Only a small minority make it into the fourth stage. This is not unusual in entrepreneur-based companies in general.

Stage 3:

Making it into Stage 3 is not guaranteed. It takes effort, systems, leadership, and an understanding that plateauing in Stage 2 and getting back into chaos and frustration is no longer acceptable. It is perfectly normal for practices to go through cycles as they move through the stages of entrepreneurship. Hiring more staff in Stage 2 can relieve some pressure, but growing again will simply add it back. At some point there will be no more growth opportunity without harder work, more frustration, stress, and chaos. The only solution at this point for gaining significant growth is to move into Stage 3 of dental practice entrepreneurship.

The key to moving into Stage 3 is quite simple. You must have a real office manager. Note the emphasis on the word “real.” Most office managers are not real office managers. What I mean is that instead of finding a qualified office manager, dentists often select a team member who they like, trust, or that has been there for 20 years and makes that person the office manager. In observational studies by Levin Group, we estimate that 96% of all dental office managers have no management background. In fact, one of our recently enrolled clients had just appointed a new office manager who was his dental assistant of 20 years. This person had no other work experience besides being a dental assistant.

While being a dental assistant is an admirable and responsible job, it doesn’t prepare you to be an office manager. Basically, he selected someone he knew and trusted and put her in a position where she wouldn’t be able to handle the new job without training. If she fails, it will not just be her failure, but it will also represent the failure of the practice.

In Stage 3 of dental practice entrepreneurship, practices grow again and many grow by 30 - 50%. The reason so many dentists and specialists resist the idea that they can grow 30% - 50% in three years is that they don’t know how. One way is to put an effective office manager in place.

A real office manager should have a very straightforward job description. Simply put, the office manager is responsible for all day-to-day operations. This means that anything non-clinical comes under the auspices of the office manager. Whether or not the office manager knows exactly how to do a job is not the question. It is whether he or she can manage all day-to-day operations, which includes managing the team.

Managing the team is one of, if not the most essential aspects of an office manager’s job. The team should be re-trained in a positive way that teaches them to no longer go to doctors to ask questions that the office manager can answer. The manager is the person that hires, trains, terminates, reviews, inspires, motivates, and leads the team. Certainly, the doctor is still the leader in terms of creating the culture and environment, but it is the office manager that handles all daily facets of managing the team.

Office managers need to become excellent leaders, but a different type of leader than the doctor. The doctor focuses on clinical dentistry and the office manager focuses on everything else. What makes the

office manager's job description different is that they must manage up and down. If the office manager can't become the buffer between the doctor and the team while facilitating excellent results, then the office manager can't do the job.

It is very likely that many specialists reading this white paper already have an office manager. If you do, don't worry. Even if your office manager doesn't have a management background, it's still possible to provide training to help them excel. In some cases, the office manager may have some experience and do parts of the job well, but you must fill in the gaps. You need the best office manager you can have to allow the practice to move into and remain in Stage 3 of dental practice entrepreneurship.

Training for office managers should be ongoing. Courses, webinars, online programs, books, consultants, etc. can all add to the knowledge base and growth of an office manager.

In Stage 3, the practice has reached an even higher level of production, profit, cash, and income. While doing so, the practice has eliminated chaos, stress, and frustration.

Stage 3 is the last stage that most practices achieve. We estimate less than 5% of practices ever move into Stage 4 which is another level of production, profit, cash and income. Stage 4 is also the most enjoyable way to practice and can extend a career due to the sheer enjoyment and satisfaction that it provides. As one financially independent specialist recently said to me, "Why would I retire? I'm having the best time of my entire career."

Stage 4

This is an amazing stage. It's stage where you get to go to work, see patients, plan cases, communicate with referring doctors in a relaxed manner, and go home. Your production, profit, cash, and income have never been higher and continue to grow. You've either developed or are on your way to developing the practice of choice for your community.

At the end of the day, you're generally not even tired. The practice is operated by a real office manager, the staff understands all their job descriptions and follow systems with scripting, you're helping patients and have time to enjoy meeting them. One day you wake up and think about how great your attitude is and how much fun you're having. This is Stage 4.

In Stage 4, the specialist has moved from entrepreneur to CEO, which means you oversee the practice but don't oversee it with day-to-day administration. You work in the practice as a doctor, but you also work in the practice as a CEO. The day-to-day operations, decisions, questions, etc. are all handled by the team. The office manager has gone to a new level as well. He or she now has developed a team that handles their jobs extremely well and knows what to do as team members have been trained to make decisions in the best interest of the practice. Any mistakes they make are considered teachable moments. There is no blame, fault, or criticism. It's an organization working to improve every day, provide excellent clinical care and five-star customer service for both referring doctors and patients. It is a fun, positive atmosphere. One role of the specialist as a CEO is to let the team know they are appreciated, recognize jobs well done, and create a positive environment.

The office manager is the one that works on team development, job improvement, and all the aspects of operating the practice that would be distracting and unpleasant for the doctor.

Welcome to Stage 4 of dental practice entrepreneurship. The truth is it doesn't get much better. Doctors get to do what doctors are trained to do. They have time to build and maintain great relationships with referral sources who should be thought of as the primary customers of the practice. The team makes great decisions based on being trained to ask themselves if the decision will help the practice or hurt the practice. Rarely will they make a significant mistake. On most days everyone is happy, has a good time, works as a team, starts the day with energy, and ends the day on time. If this sounds like it's too good to be true, for most practices it is. Unfortunately,

most practices will not reach Stage 4 because it's not something you can simply jump into. You still must typically pass through the other three stages, master some level of leadership as a doctor and specialist, and continue to meet with your office manager who is developing top performance management skills.

In Stage 4, both the office manager and the specialist measure the practice more than they manage the team. There's a key set of measurements so that the doctor as a CEO and the office manager both know exactly how the practice is performing. These key performance indicators are reviewed regularly, and the doctor and the office manager also meet regularly to review them together. They recognize that numbers tell a story and will reveal the real performance of the practice. You can't hide from numbers.

When they find areas that seem to be slowing or weakening, they are immediately addressed by the office manager who sometimes uses creative strategies to get the best results. The practice is never taken by surprise (short of a pandemic) and continues to grow and perform at exceptional levels.

In Stage 4, part of the job of the specialist as a CEO involves strategic thinking. This can take place independently, or include advisors, the office manager, or others but it is the job of the CEO to plan strategy for the practice going forward. One client recently decided

to purchase a general practice that was available to feed the specialty practice. It has turned out to be an incredibly positive move and added 15% production to the specialty practice. This was a strategic decision that could only be made by the specialist as a CEO, although he did include the office manager in the analysis process. Another set of eyes and ears is always a good idea.

Summary

There's so much more that could be said about moving through the four stages of dental entrepreneurship. In fact, an entire book could be written on the subject. The main point is that practices that don't move past Stage 2 won't realize the opportunities, both financially and in terms of career satisfaction, which are in front of them.

One of the major objectives of this white paper was to help specialists understand that there are four stages of dental entrepreneurship and that each one is far better than the one before it. However, it does take time, work, and effort that many specialists are unwilling to put in or are unknowledgeable about. By reviewing this white paper you'll be able to determine which stage of dental entrepreneurship your practice is currently in and what it would take to move to the next level. Having observed thousands of specialty practices move to the next stage, I can guarantee that if you make that jump, you will look back and wonder why you didn't make it sooner.

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Roger P. Levin, DDS is the CEO and Founder of Levin Group, a leading practice management consulting firm that has worked with over 30,000 practices to increase production. A recognized expert on dental practice management and marketing, he has written 67 books and over 4,000 articles and regularly presents seminars in the U.S. and around the world.

To contact Dr. Levin or to join the 40,000 dental professionals who receive his *Practice Production Tip of the Day*, visit www.levingroup.com or email rlevin@levingroup.com.