

Building the Esthetic Team



by
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INTRODUCTION

As a member of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, it's only natural that you would want to know all the secrets of building an esthetic practice. Over the years, I have been able to offer information about many of these secret "pearls"—systems and strategies that have helped many dentists move closer to reaching their cosmetic practice goals. Some of these pearls include systemization of case presentation, asking for commitment, having four financial options, and having consistent internal marketing programs.

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What has not been discussed sufficiently, however, is building the cosmetic practice's culture and the esthetic team.

EVALUATE YOUR TEAM

This is not an article about theory. My goal is to present practical steps to increase your team's awareness of building an esthetic practice and then turn that team into your most valuable resource and support system.

Let's begin with hiring and training. Most dental practices hire team members based upon a quick desire to fill a spot. In most cases, a team member has to be on the "wrong side of terrible" before we dismiss them from a practice. Why? Because the aggravation of finding and training someone new far outweighs the inconvenience of keeping a less-than-ideal team member.

On the other hand, what is “ideal”? Answer these questions:

- Have we fully trained our team in every necessary skill set in our practice?
- Have we explained the practice goals and objectives to our team?
- Does the team embody the philosophy and feeling of building an esthetic practice?
- Does the team want to participate in the building of an esthetic practice?
- Have you as the leader created a culture for an esthetic practice?

Most practices cannot answer “yes” to most of the above questions. That’s because even though the desire to build an esthetic practice may come from the dentist, he or she unfortunately has very little time to train, communicate, and grow the dental team with the same desire. Unfortunately, unless the team becomes intimately involved in the quest to build an esthetic practice, your long-term results will be significantly decreased.

WHERE TO BEGIN

The desire to build a cosmetic practice is a fantastic quest. It is invigorating, exciting, and keeps dentists extremely motivated. It’s what keeps you from becoming the 52-year-old dentist who is bored and tired of doing the same things day in and day out, but has not put away enough money to retire. You don’t want to be the dentist who spends the bulk of your career simply trying to accumulate enough money to be able to do something else.

So if you are truly excited about cosmetic dentistry, how do you begin building and growing your team?

CREATE AND LIVE A VISION

Every dentist should have a vision. In fact, every business owner should have a vision for their business. A vision is a written statement that reflects where you want your practice or business to be in 3 years, 5 years, 7 years or longer. Once you have written this vision statement, it is essential to share it with every team member. Talk about it as much as you can. Read it at the beginning of every morning meeting. Discuss it at staff meetings. Set goals to achieve the vision that include the team members’ participation. Make sure your team understands that the practice is being oriented toward cosmetics, what that means, and why you are so dedicated to helping people with their cosmetic enhancement.

EDUCATE THE TEAM ABOUT COSMETICS

Make sure everyone on the team has cosmetic knowledge. Train your front-desk people in clinical procedures and your clinical staff in cosmetic communication. Ensure that everyone has a full understanding of every available cosmetic service, when those services should be used, and how the patient will benefit. Bring your front-desk people into the clinical area to see intraoral camera or diagnostic imaging work-ups. Bring them back to see the final case. Let them begin to appreciate the wonderful change in a patient that they don’t normally take the time to notice at the front desk. Let them believe in your results.

TRAIN YOUR FINANCIAL COORDINATOR

Financial coordinators typically are front-desk people who are given a set

of policies to follow in presenting fees to patients. The truth is that 95% of all practices have never spent time or money training financial coordinators to present these fees. Simply knowing what the office policies are is not sufficient—there should be a written script for every financial option in the practice and how those options are to be presented.

One of the biggest problems in building a cosmetic practice is trying to include high-end dentistry in an office that has medium-end systems.

Financial coordinators should be measured by the number of presentations they make and the level of case acceptance. They should further be measured by the size of the cases that are presented and their success rate. Many financial coordinators are highly successful at working out the financial options for a single unit crown, but have a terrible close rate when it comes to \$4,000, \$6,000, or \$10,000 cases.

Why is this so important? Because doctors do not close cases. We present the overall case and patients are generally excited. However, a dental case is not closed until a financial option has been accepted. The dentist should not be presenting the financial options. A highly skilled person able to negotiate with the patient in a win-win situation should be the one presenting them.

Many practices, however, have the case acceptance fall apart at the financial coordinator level. What’s needed is someone who can give the patient the proper time, attention, and enthusiasm. The financial presentation should take place in a quiet setting with no interruptions, with the patient feeling wonderful about their decision to accept treatment.

EXPOSE YOUR TEAM TO OUTSIDERS

No matter how good we are as doctors or leaders, the truth is that being in the practice with our team every day diminishes our ability to motivate and have an impact on them. This is not to say we cannot do a great deal to keep our teams excited and growing, but an outsider is often a tremendous help in motivating teams. You need to expose your team to outside experts through audiocassettes, videos, live seminars, or other means on a regular basis. Invest in materials about esthetics and use parts of them at different staff meetings. In my experience, most team members do not get as excited about reading cosmetic dentistry articles as they do about the opportunity to interact with a live presentation. Take your team to hear speakers not only on cosmetic dentistry, but also on team-building, motivation, and management.

DOCUMENT YOUR SYSTEMS

I cannot say this often enough: system documentation is the most fundamental aspect that you must apply to customer service. Before we discuss customer service, it is essential to realize that without written, step-by-step defined systems for current and new staff members to study, you will never provide great customer service.

The fact is that systems prevent practice breakdown, patient dissatisfaction, or unhappiness. Believe it or not, a patient who accepts a \$5,000 or \$10,000 case may become disenchanted and cancel if they could not get the right appointment time or were not spoken to in the right way. Once again, it is not the doctors who are the points of contact for scheduling or

patient communication—it is the team.

DEVELOP AN “OUTRAGEOUS” CUSTOMER SERVICE CULTURE

When you are building a cosmetic practice, you want patients to be WOWED! This is not as easy to achieve as it might sound. I can't go into all the details of customer service here, but I can tell you that it is absolutely necessary to create a culture where dentists want to do as much as they can for the patient.

The reality is that people do not buy porcelain or composite; they buy and value the experience.

Patients are the recipients, not only of cosmetic care, but also of the entire experience and feeling that goes with it. In fact, a great deal of new literature on customer service focuses on the patient or customer experience rather than on the technical product. A great set of veneers doesn't make up for poor scheduling, miscommunication, or disappointed patients who don't believe that you are worth your fees. A great experience, however, may compensate for a perceived less-than-perfect result.

The reality is that people do not buy porcelain or composite; they buy and value the experience. In a recent seminar, I mentioned that practices should offer coffee in the reception area. A very young woman raised her hand and informed me that that was a terrible idea—the practice was not in the hospitality business. One thing is certain—with that attitude, that office will never build a high-end cosmetic practice. You may not want to be, but you'd *better* be hospitable!

The dentist in that practice came up to me later during a break to tell me that her comment was exactly what he was battling and that his practice had been flat or declining for the past 4 years. I think the objective answer for most of us is obvious, but when you work with people every day, it is sometimes difficult to focus on helping them grow. Now, you may be thinking that you would simply terminate this individual so you wouldn't have to deal with this type of attitude. However, the goal should be to build the culture, drive the vision, and work with this individual so that she understands that yes, you are indeed in the hospitality business.

You would be amazed by how many staff members are able to grow into a new culture when it is properly presented to them through both culture and documented business systems. For practices that don't believe their staff will ever be able to convert, keep in mind that when you change any employee, you are simply changing your problems.

STAY THE COURSE

One of the other major problems I see in regard to building cosmetic practices is that the dentist often is inconsistent. One month, he or she is highly focused on cosmetics due to some course recently attended, but the next month they are back to regular dentistry and don't even mention the word “cosmetics.” Staying the course is a critical business skill that will allow you to patiently build just about anything over time.

If you talk about it, focus on it, get your team excited, get them involved, solicit their input, and ask for their recommendations, you will gradually build exactly what you want. If you suddenly forget about cosmetics and

the next week are focused on TMJ, occlusion, the stock market, or the NFL, the team will not continue to grow with the cosmetic culture. Decide if this is what you really want and, if so, find hundreds of little ways to continue letting everyone know cosmetics is an major focus of your practice.

PROVIDE AN INCENTIVE

The fact is that people do what they are paid to do. If you pay someone to assist, they will assist. If you pay someone to schedule, they will schedule. If they think their goal is simply to fill

the schedule, that is what they will do. If you truly want to build a cosmetic culture, then reward your team.

There is no statement more important than putting money on the table. Set up an incentive program with benchmarks and, if those benchmarks are achieved, reward the team with certain bonuses. Determine the what, how, or where of the bonus. Should it be money? (Probably.) Or what about a trip? (Only if everyone really wants to go together.) Or should it be time off? The point is that you have to let people know what is important by rewarding them accordingly.

SUMMARY

If your major new vision is to build an esthetic practice, then you have to include your team in that process and coach, train, and motivate them. For those of you who think incentives don't work, it usually means that the team has not bought into your vision. Follow the steps outlined here and your team should become as motivated as you are about making cosmetics a practice priority. *AH*



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