Recently, while lecturing to senior dental students at Western University College of Dental Medicine, I asked about their future plans. Here are the results: 90% will be looking for a corporate or private practice job; 3% are going to practice within their family and another 8% are going on to specialty training. Many told me they were ill equipped financially, (average debt of the graduates from dental school today is over $250,000), and ill prepared to open and manage a dental practice.

That data led to this newsletter. What are the management skills or hats that one must master to run a successful dental practice? Review this list and rate your practice management. Where do you rate a 10 and where do you fall short? Your rating will then guide you to areas for improvement. I will be writing more about each hat in future blog posts – look for them.

1. Human Resources Hat – Dental staff members can find out about labor laws on their cell phone today. Therefore, dental managers must be well versed in human resource management laws and how they impact the dental practice policies and procedures. Labor laws impact everything from hiring do's and don'ts to effectively and legally disciplining or firing a staff member.

2. Overhead Hat – Insurance reimbursement reductions and sluggish dental buying effect your overhead. Do you have a clear understanding of how best to run a profitable practice By-the-Numbers? If you want to approach your overhead problem with proven By-the-Numbers methods that work, see item #7.

3. Hiring Hat – Recruitment and hiring skills ensure a full staff every shift. As dental practices grow to multi-dentist and multi-location practices, having a full team for all open hours is the most profitable model. Are you a pro at hiring, training new hires and finding temps?
4. **Marketing Hat** – Practices are actively competing for patients. How broad is your understanding of marketing modes such as: internet/website, social media, internal and external marketing and patient referrals, systems? Specialty practices need a marketing plan including the activities and the budget.

5. **Practice Systems Hat** – Running an efficient and profitable dental practice requires defined systems which form the basis for training new dental staff members and then holding the team accountable. Each practice needs to determine its own best systems through education and research, and then adjust the systems to fit your practice philosophy. Newly hired dental team members should have a checklist of systems to learn through video, photo, online or in-person training methods.

6. **Technology Hat** – Cloud computing, dental practice software updates, digital radiology, chartless practice, clinical technology, patient information security and more can boggle even the most tech-savvy managers. Are you keeping abreast of new technologies and keeping the practice up to date?

7. **Leadership Hat** – Most dentists and dental office managers are not formally trained in either leadership or management. Leadership skill development is an infinite cycle as well as a learning curve. Is this an ongoing learning process for your practice?

8. **Facilities Hat** – Are you sparkling and spotlessly clean with no clutter and A-one in OSHA compliance? Do you have a maintenance checklist for upkeep such as carpet cleaning and landscape care? Do you have a handy list of trusted vendors to take care of the overflowing toilet or the broken compressor?

9. **Patient Satisfaction Hat** – You can run, but you cannot hide. Patients share on social media thus creating an open book on your dental practice. Satisfied patients may come back (unless their insurance changes). Dissatisfied patients will often blast you online. SUPER Satisfied patients will refer friends and family. Are you tuned into all avenues available to know the practice's TRUE satisfaction ratings? Specialists need definitive statistics about referral sources and their satisfaction levels. (If you have not conducted a Referring Dentist Satisfaction Survey, email me: linda@dreyenstedt.com.)

10. **Culture Curator Hat** – Who are you as a practice and why should I want to work for you or be your patient? All dentists "believe" they do quality work and that should be enough. That belief has become hackneyed. Have you defined why you should be considered a practice of distinction?
Remember the Plato quote as you review these ten hats;

"The unexamined life is not worth living."

The same is true for the unexamined practice.

Feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

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