The best thing about a new year is the host of new opportunities it offers. It presents the chance to create a new mindset and the occasion to renew your commitment to making the most of your career, your relationships, your strengths, your team and your practice.

There is no better time to ask yourself, what are you going to do to make 2011 a perfect 10? I have a few suggestions to making this your most successful year in dentistry yet.

No. 1: If you can see it, you can create it
It's called creating your vision and goals. In terms of the growth and success of your practice, where do you want to be one year from today?

Share this with your entire staff and involve them directly in spelling out the plan to ensure that everyone is aiming for the same target, namely, total practice success. Over the coming weeks and months, you and your team should work through various aspects, including:

• improving communication skills and establishing dialogue,
• providing a non-threatening forum for the team to evaluate strengths and weaknesses,
• clearly defining jobs and responsibilities of every staff member,
• assessing individual roles in the group and understanding how each contributes to the practice’s objectives,
• developing specific team processes, such as decision-making and conflict management,
• improving problem-solving strategies,
• creating a culture of accountability. In addition, schedule a two-hour team meeting for every month this year to identify the vision, goals and the strategy for advancing practice success in the coming year.

No. 9: Take the broad goals and objectives and translate them into specific priorities that are individualized for each person
For example, define the priorities of the business team. Spell out how each person’s responsibilities and objectives help to achieve those priorities and how they fit into the larger practice goals.

No. 8: Open the lines of communication wide
Feedback is a cornerstone of new and ongoing communication. Yet, it is more than keeping everyone informed. A culture of accountability is built on a culture of open communication in which the cornerstone is a culture of respect and trust. Encourage staff to offer ongoing constructive suggestions, input and insights aimed at moving the practice forward.

No. 7: Set the example for your team
Pay close attention to your daily actions, behaviors and decisions to ensure they are consistent with practice values and priorities. Do not expect your team to follow you if you are not willing to live by the same principles and uphold the same standards that you require of others.

No. 6: Cut the deadwood and enjoy smooth sailing
Deal with the problem performers on your team. These are the people that you and your star performers have been carrying for far too long and at far too great an expense.

There are a few things more demoralizing to top-flight employees than a boss who looks the other way when one or more members of the team consistently disregard patient priorities, bring poor attitudes to work, generate conflict, make excuse after excuse for why they were late, why they are sick and why they simply cannot get their jobs done.

Yet, the deadwood workers that everyone is stepping over and is forced to just “deal with” get the same pay raises, same vacation time and the same perks as top performers on your team. Understandably, your capable staff will only tolerate this for so long.

As Vince Lombardi once said, “There is nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequals.” You want your team of people to help you and your practice reach the pinnacle this year, not derail your efforts.

Next, take a close look at practice numbers, starting with establishing a realistic financial goal for your practice.

Let’s say you want to achieve $700,000 in clinical production. This translates to $14,583 per week (taking four weeks out for vacation).

Working 40 hours per week means you’ll need to produce about $364 per hour. If you want to work fewer hours, obviously per hour production will need to be higher. Follow the steps below to get there.

No. 5: Create a clear plan of action for production
Establish daily production goals and schedule to meet those goals. Make certain that your scheduling coordinator fully understands exactly how much time is needed for each procedure.

You would be stunned how many business employees simply have to guess the number of units that should be allocated for procedures.

Prescribe a treatment plan for patients that includes everything that needs to be done: appointments necessary, the cost of treatment, an estimated length of treatment time and any treatment options.

Designate a treatment coordinator who is responsible for presenting treatment plans to patients and is expected to secure at least 85 percent case acceptances.

• Implement an interpretive periodontal therapy program.
• Provide superior customer service that will encourage patients to refer friends and family.

Each month run the year-to-date practice analysis report and compare it to the same period last year.

Now consider what needs to happen in the treatment room, which brings us to tip No. 4.

No. 4: The patient needs what the patient needs, regardless of his/her circunstances
Continue to diagnose patients’ needs and wants according to your practice philosophy, not on what you perceive they can afford. Present treatment plans that convey to patients that you are presenting options to address immediate needs, long-term needs and patient desires. In addition to recommending treatment according to both patient needs and wants, continue to educate patients. Emphasizing the importance of oral health and its impact on overall health has never been more important.

No. 3: Monitor and measure the individual areas as a team and study practice reports
From key review key reports including the accounts receivables and outstanding insurance claims reports to monitor exactly how much money is owed to your practice.

In addition, watch the details of your production, new patient flow and patient retention using the production report. Depending on your software system, this report may be called production by provider, practice analysis or production by ADA Code. It is very useful for tracking new patient comprehensive exams.

The production by provider report should also enable you to monitor individual provider production for each dentist and hygienist. It is important to track individual production numbers to determine productivity.

Some systems will allow you to run a production forecast report that can be an excellent tool in determining slow periods so that you can develop a plan of action to combat the potential production shortfalls.

In monitoring each area and discussing the results, staff better comprehend the impact of one system on another and on the success of the practice as a whole. They are then far less likely to sit back and watch problems continue, further strengthenening the culture of accountability and minimizing the “it’s not my job” mentality.

No. 2: Watch overhead carefully
The industry standard for overhead is 55 percent of collections. If you are currently at 60 to 65 percent, you are comfortably within reach. If yours is higher, take action.

Some practices report their overhead as high as 85 percent. They are making a mere 15 cents on the dollar! The first step in controlling overhead is to establish the following budget targets:

• Dental supplies: 5 percent
• Office supplies: 2 percent
• Rent: 5 percent
• Laboratory: 10 percent
• Payroll: 20 percent
• Payroll taxes/benefits: 5 percent
• Miscellaneous: more than 10 percent

No. 1: Make this your best year yet
Invest in your success. Consider working with a management consultant. I know of at least one consulting firm that has enabled practices to realize significant financial return throughout the recession, including major gains in collections, case acceptance, perio production and patient retention.

Do your homework and pick the one with a proven track record.

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