

# Elevation: What Does That Really Mean Today?

By John Jameson

**E**levation: “Taking your practice to the next level...?”. What does that really mean? Most of our continuous coaching program, or the years of consulting that may follow the initial project, has centered around leadership, decision making and involving the team. We are constantly reviewing and refining the 25 systems of a dental practice. Today, it comes down to those same themes, but it must all focus on EFFICIENCY!

During normal times, when you look around the world, your community or our profession, you will probably agree that there is a complacency that exists. Most people are content with being average. Therefore, when asked to stretch out of their comfort zone to tackle new projects or learn new skills, those people balk. They put up their wall of defensiveness and begin finding fault with whatever is introduced. By discounting the value of a new project, a new procedure, a new idea, etc., they think they won't have to try anything different. And, if they spend enough time pointing out the negative aspects of something, then they won't look bad for not embracing it. Often people criticize a new idea rather than have to adapt to change or face possible failure.

Introduce the economic strains many are facing, and you have some unpredictable deviations from this normal state. Some people are so overwhelmed with challenges and/or fears that they are even less focused on being a productive member of the practice. Others find their fear to be a motivating factor: they strive to outperform themselves to help assure their job security.

*No matter what the signs of the times are, if you are truly interested in elevating your practice to the next level, several things must transpire.*

- There must be strong **leadership**; leadership to outline and/or demonstrate the benefits of any new concept or initiative; leadership to hold

people accountable for putting forth the necessary effort to give excellence a decent try every day; leadership that exemplifies a willingness to change. If the leader expects his/her team to enthusiastically embrace change, then that person must lead by example.

- **Risk** must be embraced and the **goals** must be considered at each step. People must be awakened to the positive side of risk and the benefits of moving forward. If people are not on a continuous path of improvement, then they are ultimately choosing to be on a downward slide. The practice itself may decline right along with them, or it may become stagnant despite the best efforts of other team members.
- Everyone must be focused on discovering and cultivating their own talents and the talents of their colleagues. If someone is coming to the office performing tasks as simply a means to an end (a paycheck), then they will probably never be interested in their own elevation nor in the elevation of the practice. There is no place for this type of complacency in a dental practice that is interested in continuous growth and development.
- There must be an **honest appraisal** of what is happening at the present time and a **strategic plan** must be developed that will move the practice on a steadfast course of improvement. That is the initial step for the development of any business.

Those are true elements of positive ELEVATION **all the time** – in a healthy economy and even more importantly during an economic downturn.

So, what do I mean by efficiency? One idea is to take a hard look at your current operating expenses for supplies, and perhaps re-evaluate any purchases you were planning to make in the next few months or years. Are you getting the

best value for your investment? Can you do better? Consider companies like Parkell that create very competitively priced quality products. As a business model, Parkell offers a number of cost-effective alternatives to higher-priced items, and operates on the premise that smart purchasing translates into “financial fitness” and an improved bottom line for its customers. Compare their prices on everything from core composites and bonding agents to high-end state-of-the-art electronic devices, and you’ll find ways to significantly trim both your monthly operating expenses and your capital improvements budget. For instance, we’ve heard great reports from dentists who use electrosurgery units to perform procedures that were previously believed to be only appropriate for much more expensive laser equipment.

Many healthcare professionals have decided to alleviate their bookkeeping burden and costs by turning to healthcare patient financing organizations. Services like CareCredit can ease your patients’ minds by helping to make their dentistry expenses more manageable. And you are in a better position because your overhead is lower and you’re not trying to carry those accounts on your own books! Look around. Do your research. Efficiencies can be created without losing an ounce of quality. In fact, they can even create time for enhanced quality.

Maybe now is the time to re-examine your scheduling practices...do an in-depth analysis of how many patients you see each day, how efficiently procedures are scheduled and performed in any given time slot. Take a long, hard look at where waste is occurring in both materials and time management. Meet with your hygienist(s) and dental assistant(s) to get their feedback on how the daily routine could run more smoothly. Can you be making more effective use of their skills to maximize workflow? See if there’s some new equipment that would enhance efficiency and ultimately result in increased production.

If you are not already doing some sort of practice promotion, you should be. In addition to the obvious appointment reminder cards, a small investment in birthday, holiday and thank you cards can go a long way in solidifying your relationships with your patients. Consider instituting a patient referral reward program so that your satisfied patients will be sure to recommend you to their friends.

Take a look around your reception area. Is there anything you can do to make it a more welcoming, more pleasant experience?

How about your new patient data forms and paperwork—can you streamline the process to make it easier now and more efficient for future updates? Is your office as “computerized” as it needs to be to efficiently maintain patients’ medical history, appointments, billing, insurance and clinical records? What about your office hours? Are you still doing business as usual – or do you offer additional hours on evenings and weekends to accommodate patients with limited availability? In today’s economy, building your practice means thinking outside the box and doing what’s necessary to set your practice apart from the crowd.

Of course, it’s easy to keep things just like they are. It’s so easy to make excuses for complacency – to delay change because the time may not be “right.” If you think that conditions have to be ideal before you can be in the process of ELEVATION, think again. If everything had to be just right, you would never get married, maybe never have a child. If you wait for the stars to be perfectly aligned, you may never take the necessary steps to develop the practice of your dreams.

My team of coaches and I often find ourselves repeating this truism. We are here to tell you that there is no better time than now. Awaken to the possibilities. Believe in the possibilities. Believe in yourself. Honor yourself to say, “I am so much better than average and I will accept nothing less than outstanding.”

Don’t let anything get in the way of having your ideal practice—whatever that is to you. Get rid of the barriers to your success. And make sure that you are not one of your own barriers. Being in ELEVATION and ultimately being elevated requires honesty above all else.

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