

Annual Goal Planning Leads to Practice Success

By Julie H. Weir

One of my favorite sayings is "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail". Dedicate a staff meeting each year to annual goal planning. This is an excellent exercise to do as a team. The purpose of this exercise is to answer three important questions about the practice; 1) Where have we been? 2) Where do we want to go? and 3) How will we get there?

Three Steps to this Meeting

Doctor Shares Vision The doctor explains to the team his vision and goals of what he wants his dental practice to be. If team members clearly understand the vision and goals of the practice, success of achieving them is more likely because all team members will be working toward the same end result.

Evaluate the Practice Discuss if the practice is currently meeting the doctors vision/goals and, if not, what changes need to take place. As changes are discussed and goals set, be specific so the team can easily know when goals are met. For example, just setting a goal of a "good" collection rate is not measurable. Be specific and have as a goal "collection rate of 98% or better".

Create a Plan As you discuss the changes you want to make, it is important that an Action Plan is created to define the steps to implement the desired changes. Assign a team member to be responsible for each step and it's completion date. This is vital to assure that changes are implemented in a timely manner. When a good plan for improving the practice is made by the team you create a plan for success and bring your dental practice closer to your vision.

Areas to Evaluate as a Team

Case Acceptance: Are you achieving a case acceptance rate of 75% or better? If not, look at how you are treating your patients during the first phone call, new patient exam, treatment conference, and the financial options available for treatment. High case acceptance is based on three things, first, the patient trusting and liking the doctor and staff. Second, excellent patient education so the patient understands and values good dentistry and oral health. And third, making dentistry affordable.

Scheduling: The team should have definite daily scheduling goals for the doctor and hygienist. This is the only way to assure that the practice financial goals can be met. Is the schedule too stressful? Then get it organized. There are specific scheduling tools that can be used to have productive days that are not killers!

Practice Finance: Every practice should have a yearly financial plan. This plan should define: the fee increase, monthly production and collection amounts, budget for expenses, doctor's salary and retirement contributions. Each team member that spends practice money should know and understand their monthly budget. If you do not have a yearly financial plan, make one and you will see more profits!

Internal Marketing: What can be done to WOW the patient and exceed patient expectations? What new services and/or amenities do you want to offer? Highly satisfied patients remain loyal to the practice and refer friends and family.

Team Satisfaction: Evaluate size, roles, skills, relationships, excitement, attitude. What continuing education would you like to attend? You must have a well trained and enthusiastic team to create highly satisfied patients.

Growth: Do you want to increase the number of new patients per month? What type of patients would you like and how are you going to find them?

Services: What clinical services are offered? Which services do you want to refer, increase or add? Can you improve the clinical standards of any procedure?

Facility: Evaluate location, size, design, and organization. Are you meeting OSHA standards?

Future Technology: What will help the practice stay current, operate more efficiently and better serve the patient? Some things to consider: computer software, charting systems, terminals in the operatory, e-mail, internet, intra oral camera, digital radiography, air abrasion and laser dentistry.

As you make your plan for the next year and decide what changes you want to make always ask two questions. First, is it good for the patient? Second, is it good for the practice? If the answers are yes to both you will know you are on the right track to creating a successful dental practice.