

Steps to become reenergized



BACKGROUND

What should you do when dentistry becomes something that is so stressful that you begin to hate it? Some dentists quit, but if you take a step back and decide to make dentistry enjoyable, there may be solutions to the problem that will reinvigorate your professional life.

HOW IT CAME ABOUT

Having reached a point where he wanted to quit dentistry, Dr. Culver took a 1½ -month voyage in a small sailboat around Vancouver Island. Along the way he encountered blinding fog, dangerous coastal rocks, and continual mechanical breakdowns. This solitude and the diversion of sailing gave him the opportunity to consider what he really wanted. He kept a written record of his thoughts, which eventually led to his desire to make dentistry enjoyable again. Rather than quit, he decided to reboot his career.

STEPS IN REBOOTING

The following steps worked for Dr. Culver and may help to awaken your interest in making changes in your approach to dentistry and the way you practice.

1. Find a larger, modern and design it the way you want it. Dr. Culver found that his income increased 3-fold and he was much less fatigued at the end of the day. It was the best single step he took.
2. Cut stress. Stress occurs because it has an outside cause that works on a receptive host. In his case, Dr. Culver recognized that associates caused him stress, so when he felt stress, he closed the door to the operatory and allowed no interruptions. This isolated him with a single assistant and the patient. He didn't take on additional associates until he needed one to take over his practice when he was phasing out.
3. Focus on teeth, not business. This includes delegating responsibility to staff and taking on fewer tasks for yourself. Dr. Culver's staff told him which patients to see next and what was needed. The receptionist became his business manager and supervised the staff. Even though the staff of 7 may have been too many for the practice, it made his life easier and he never regretted the increased percentage of overhead.
4. Don't be a slave to the schedule. Dr. Culver scheduled 20% more time for each procedure so he could complete each one without rushing. He also shifted his weight to the back rest and let his shoulders relax.
5. Increase production without stress. Dr. Culver decided to make all his movements count. He timed his performance of procedures he felt he performed slowly and the time it

took decreased. He used auxiliaries to inject anesthetic, pack retraction cord, hold and remove impressions, make and place temporaries, and take on other expanded duties.

6. Increase income. Dr. Culver increased his fees as much as possible. As a result, he lost some patients, but the majority of those who stayed must have believed the work was worth the cost.
7. Improve your staff's performance. He hired the best staff and paid them well. Their duties were defined in writing, which required some time, but it resulted in a happier dentist.
8. Eliminate difficult patients. Dr. Culver achieved this by setting treatment conditions so that difficult patients eliminated themselves. For each patient, he offered a recommended treatment plan. Rather than respond to all their arguments, he told them that this was the only treatment he believed they should have.
9. Improve laboratory work quality. Dr. Culver hired a quality lab technician and equipped a room the way he wanted it. The lab work cost more, but crowns and bridges fit better and the patients liked being able to see the shades and translucencies.
10. Improve dental work quality. Often dentists don't enjoy doing dental work that seems like they're part of an assembly line rather than craftsmen. Because quality is 90% motivation and 10% ability, Dr. Culver set the goal of only doing the absolute best quality work, and that produced a sense of satisfaction that had been missing. The bonus was having the patient express appreciation for the quality of the work.
11. Take more time for yourself. Dr. Culver shortened his work schedule to 4 days a week and 10 months a year. He also took a 2-month sailboat trip to the Bahamas with his family. Setting aside time for himself and his family helped him recharge and do a better job.

Clinical Significance

Enjoying dentistry is important when you're a dentist, but it's also important to recognize that you aren't *just* a dentist. Having stress in your life can take all the joy out of practicing dentistry and everything else in your life. Having a good balance between your professional and personal life can sometimes require that you make changes in how, where, and when you practice. It's OK to take time for yourself and to reboot your practice to help you do your very best work.

12. Limit your responsibility. Although he continued to remind patients about the need for better plaque control, proper brushing, and flossing, if the patient then developed caries or periodontal disease after these reminders, Dr. Culver felt no further responsibility. Obsessive-compulsive dentists tend to think their work should never fail even when circumstances are beyond their control.
13. Get help from a study club. Dr. Culver joined a study club to help identify what changes were needed and how to

make them. The group met regularly to critically assess each other's offices in a way that none of the members could have done alone.

Culver NC: Don't shut down—reboot. *Dentaltown*, Oct 2018, pp 82-84

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STRATEGIC PLANNING

Dental practice plans for success



BACKGROUND

Strategic planning is done by businesses to help them identify where they want to go and what will be needed to reach that goal. Dental practices rarely engage in this practice, but it can help to provide a clear blueprint for the near future and what it will take to get to that objective. The major aspects of strategic planning are the vision statement; the mission statement; a statement of core values; the analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis); establishing goals; formulating action plans; and committing to success.

VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS

The vision statement declares where the dentist wants the practice to be in the future, usually projecting about 5 years out. The vision statement should identify the “what” and “why” of everything that the practice intends to do in the next 5 years.

The mission statement describes today's purpose for the dental practice. It focuses on what is the core business of the practice, who is being served, and/or how the practice plans to serve their customers. It's usually much easier to craft this statement than the vision statement because it reflects what is being done now.

CORE VALUES

Core values are the deepest-held beliefs and the behaviors derived from those beliefs. The dentist and team believe these values will allow the achievement of the vision and mission.

Sample core values are as follows:

- Teamwork: Everyone contributes to improving practice each day.
- Accountability: Team members always do what they say they will do.

SWOT ANALYSIS

The SWOT analysis is among the most powerful and meaningful aspects of the strategic plan. In this analysis, the dental team takes a realistic view of the practice to create a viable pathway forward.

Many factors can be identified through the SWOT analysis. For example, the skill set of the team, the years of experience they bring, or the practice location can be strengths; areas that can be improved such as customer service, limited hours, or loss of clients through insurance participation can be weaknesses; opening of a second location or expanding through the purchase of the practice of a retiring dentist in the area may represent opportunities; and new competition, lower insurance reimbursements, or team members who are nearing retirement can be seen as threats.

The SWOT analysis should be done every 6 months by the dentist along with the entire dental team. Both internal and external factors need to be understood for their impact on the practice if the exercise is to set appropriate objectives and action plans. When everyone understands what the situation is with respect to SWOT, decisions can be made to address them into the future.

The SWOT analysis can also help the practice reexamine its business principles relative to all factors. When the dental team realizes the implications of the changes needed to improve the situation, it's possible to act more expeditiously and possibly avoid negative outcomes.

GOALS AND ACTION PLANS

The tactical aspect of strategic planning is represented by setting goals. The specific endpoints desired are set out at the times that they are desired, such as in the next 12, 24, 36, or 48 months. From goal setting will flow timelines and action plans to accomplish the goals.