

# The Words “Growth” and “Comfort” Do Not Go Together

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**T**RAVELING the country and visiting the best practices, we are often asked this question: “How can we comfortably grow our practice?”

The answer is “You cannot!”

True growth only comes from going beyond where you have been before. Growth by definition is “progressive development.” It requires movement upward. Resistance will come against all movement upward. It is part of the climate. Resistance is an innate characteristic of gravity and competition. So, if you wish to grow your practice in any way, most likely this will require you to engage in some disciplines that are “uncomfortable” in dealing with resistance to move your practice upward.

As a nation, US consumers spent more than they earned in 2005 and 2006. The figures for 2007 are not close to being published yet, but my guess is that the trend would not be reversing. In fact, we might not be shocked to find that it is getting worse in an exponential fashion. We are a culture in love with buying things we do not need, with money we do not have, to impress people we do not even like.

The competition for discretionary spending in this country has become greatly elevated. Long gone are the days when a dentist could get a dental license, hang up a shingle, and become instantly successful. The climate for dentistry, and dental specialty fields like prosthodontics, is changing rapidly. Those who understand this will enjoy a fruitful career in this great profession. Those who do not will have a long and difficult road ahead of them.

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So the question to you becomes, “How do I grow my practice by 10 to 20% per year and avoid the plateaus?” The answer is that you have to think differently and start enjoying the pains that come from the following:

- discipline,
- change,
- risk.

### There is No Comfort in Discipline

If you are going to experience growth in a physical way and lose 20 pounds while training for your first marathon, you will find zero comfort in the process. Chances are that you will have to embrace some disciplines and routines that are quite different than the ones you currently repeat every day. You may have to get out of bed at 5:00 a.m. and run four times a week. You may have to pass on the pizza and heavy carbohydrates you eat three times a week for lunch. All of these are very necessary choices you will have to make. In short, you will find a lot of discomfort along the path to your goal.

The same thing happens in great practices that grow every year. They embrace the disciplines of “world class” customer service that others do not. They are fantastic listeners. They take and use incredible photographs. The quality of their work is uncompromised. And for the most part, this is just a discipline of their work culture.

Some treatment coordinators I know will go to great lengths to cultivate and grow relationships with patients that go much deeper than just the employees in your local dental office. They say things like, “I want patients to feel like they are at home before they even come to the office.” They will take the time to walk a patient to their car after complex treatment. Their phone skills are exquisite and incredibly engaging. They look very sharp. Health is not a concept they sell . . . they actually live it. They pride themselves on enjoying the discipline of being the “best” office in town. Again, this is just a discipline of their work culture.

There is nothing comfortable about discipline. The rewards are tremendous. Most of us want the rewards of a successful esthetic-restorative practice, but many do not want to embrace the daily disciplines that make those rewards easier.

As Jim Rohn says, "We must all suffer from one of two pains. We must suffer from the pain of discipline or the pain of regret. The difference is that the pain of discipline weighs ounces, as where the pain of regret weighs *tons*!"

You pick.

### **There is No Comfort in Change**

We are creatures of habit and security. Unfortunately, some of these habits and security we seek can be quite unhealthy to you or your family if embraced too long.

When my wife and I welcomed our first child into the world, we had to embrace change. Staying the same was not an option. Our habits and routines had to change quickly, or we were not going to entertain trying for a second, third, or even fourth child (if we were even blessed with those opportunities). Even as we welcomed more children into our family, we had to make more changes . . . each time embracing the "discomfort of growth."

Like families, change is critical to the culture of every business in the marketplace. Trends change fast. Dentistry is no exception. If your practice is going to grow in any way, you are going to have to make some big changes along the way.

Being an exceptional practice in today's marketplace requires a team that can communicate in an extraordinary way. Too many times, the practice is held hostage by a few compromised team members who have failed to be "trained or transitioned." If you have been in prosthodontics long enough, you have seen the effects of having a great team. Two great team members can accomplish in 1 hour what takes five average team members to do in a full day.

Jack Canfield said that when you have two average team members,  $1 + 1 = 2$ . When you have two great team members,  $1 + 1 = 11$ , because they can do things that average people cannot. I have often thought that in dentistry, we are currently engaged in what Tom Peters calls a "Great War for Talent." We are desperate for the best team members.

Dentists are infamous for hanging on to team members who are not energizing the practice. As a leader, you have to ask yourself, "Are we making continual progress in the direction I have always wanted to go?" If the answer is "No," then you have to take a good look at what is holding you back and then make the change. You first have to be willing to look deep enough at yourself to make sure it is not you who is holding the practice back.

Failing to make this change can take years (or even decades) off your life. I am convinced that this is where a lot of pathologies occur in dentist's bodies.

It is very evident that . . . *it* is not getting any easier out there for prosthodontists . . . that is why *we* have to get better. This requires embracing change for the betterment of ourselves, the practice, our team, and our families. And there is nothing comfortable about making these changes.

### **There is No Comfort in Risk**

No one achieved anything worthwhile without a substantial amount of risk-taking. Making the decision to become a prosthodontist was the first risk you took. Was it going to work? Would it be a profession you would enjoy? How were you going to buy a practice with all of the debt you still had? These are all risks you had to take in order to grow to where you are right now.

The same principle applies to the "movement upward" you are now trying to make in your practice. The most successful practices in this country understand and enjoy the "no risk . . . no reward" mentality. The risk they embrace in marketing, esthetics, photography, and customer service seem energizing and pleasurable to them. These risks, in fact, pay big financial dividends along with big emotional dividends.

Taking risks with the people you serve is also an important component of growth. People are more afflicted with financial pressures, social pressures, time pressures, and with life in general. The conversations we have with patients in 2007 are quite different than those we were having in 1997. Helping patients make good decisions for them requires a ton of authentic listening and codiscovery. Once this relationship develops into mutual trust, there is another bridge you have to risk crossing. It is at this point that you will

have to have “courageous authentic conversations” with patients for their permission to do complex restorative or esthetic dentistry. These are all good risks that you have to be comfortable taking in catalyzing the growth of your practice.

Your future demands that you take some good risks. Do not expect these risks you take in the

future to be comfortable ones, because there is nothing comfortable about taking risks.

So pick one or the other, because the words “Growth” and “Comfort” do not go together.

Happy Holidays,

Kirk

“stop TRYING . . . and start TRAINING!”

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