

PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

Pre-Block a Fantastic Life

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Life moves fast. If you do not plan it out well...you will miss it.

Working with dentists over the last two decades, I have come to realize that most MAKE A LIVING instead of CRAFTING A WELL-LIVED LIFE. Life is something that has to be enjoyed by design, not by accident. This month we will examine one of the most important practice management techniques you will ever use...Pre-Blocking a Fantastic Life.

A great exercise to do every year

A great mentor of mine locked me in a room when I was 26. He gave me a YEAR-AT-A GLANCE calendar and told me to plan out every day of next year. He was not going to let me out until it was done. How in the world would I know what I would be doing next October? I did not even know what was going on the next week.

Little did I know that my mentor was teaching me a very important DISCIPLINE.

I started filling the calendar in with what I knew for sure. Then, my creative juices took over. One of the questions I asked myself during that day was, "What cool stuff do I want to do with my life?" The answers came quickly. In a short time, I had filled up most of the calendar.

I have saved all of these calendars for every year since. It is amazing to see almost everything that I scheduled...got done!

Life is so good. I am forever grateful for that perplexing day.

Today I challenge you to live a life worth living. Here are the four critical steps to pre-blocking a fantastic life:

1. Plan All of 2009 in September of 2008

Start thinking about this now, because by September, it will be time to start planning. It is very important to do these things in September as opposed to November or December. If you have children, you know that September is the month that most school year calendars are printed and distributed. And if you know anything about the travel industry, you know this is when the early birds get in on the Spring Break deals. The rest of us are left scrambling for fewer choices and higher prices when we get around to planning this in January.

In September, you will find that the next year is more of a blank canvas to paint something beautiful. In October, November, and December you will find that next year's canvas has already been tainted by someone else's agenda. Your choices may be fewer then than they are in September.

2. Block at Least 4 Weeks of Vacation

Yes, that is not a typo...*block 4 weeks of vacation*. That does not include Continuing Education! This is separate. If you are in a seminar and your spouse (or significant other) is at the pool...that is not vacation. That is a Continuing Education trip.

There is not a prosthodontic practice in the country that can not run on 48 weeks a year. If you cannot block at least 4 weeks of vacation after being in private practice for 2 years, it is a clear sign that your practice is RUNNING YOU instead of YOU RUNNING IT.

Get help if you cannot do this.

Let me point out that taking 4 weeks of vacation is not a reward that only belongs to the wealthy prosthodontist. *Instead, this is a DISCIPLINE that is practiced by the intentional prosthodontist*. You will hear some wise prosthodontists say, "I have always taken 4 weeks of vacation." And you will hear others say, "I only took 1 week last year." You get to choose which one you want to be.

This is, without a doubt, one of the most important disciplines you will ever choose to engage in (or ignore)...so again...BLOCK 4 WEEKS. Do it in September of the previous year.

My wife and I do the same thing every year. In September, our big AT-A-GLANCE wall calendar comes in the mail. I have a big whiteboard sitting on a picture frame ledge in my office. On one side of the white board are the even years, and on the other are the odd years.

We take a big fat magic marker and block out at least 4 weeks. We always do 1 week fun with our kids somewhere (without grandparents, cousins, etc.). I have discovered that my conversations and connections with my kids are more genuine and special without extended family members around. When

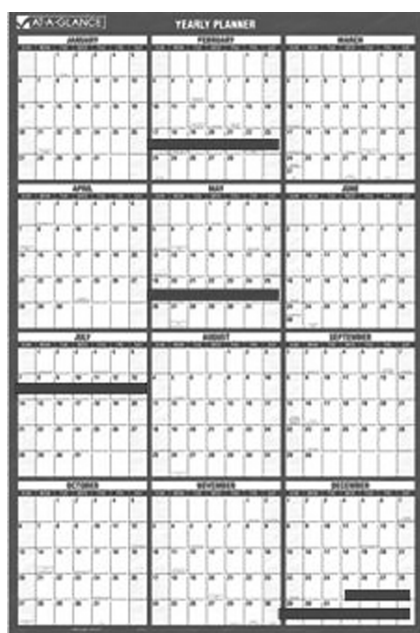


Figure 1 Block 4 weeks.

the cousins and other kids (or adults) are around, I never really get to connect with my kids.

We also take 1 week to rejuvenate our marriage; with no kids. It is amazing how connected we feel. Again, this is a DISCIPLINE we do every year without even thinking about it.

The remaining 2 weeks we usually travel to visit family.

3. Make It Fun

If you have kids, make a decision not to be a boring Dad or Mom.

Your kids only get ONE CHILDHOOD. Make it MEMORABLE.

One of my favorite examples occurred when my wife, Sarah, and I were traveling in business class on a flight to Miami. We met a family of five on that flight (also in business class) that was going on to St. Thomas. The three kids (in this family of five) had no idea where they were going. This was a family

that was having a blast. The father shared with us that every year they go on two vacations where the kids do not know the destination. The only clue the parents give the kids is “warm” or “cold” so they can pack accordingly. Then, the parents hide the boarding passes, rental car info, and lodging info from the kids.

They do not give them any clues until they arrive at their destination. They make it a game of trickery every time. You should have seen the look on these kids’ faces. It was awesome! These kids had some really cool parents.

Make a decision to be a cool parent.

4. “You Only Have 3 Summers Left”

In a recent workshop, one of our coaches was asking Dr. Brian Gray about his family. Brian told him he had three children and the oldest daughter was 13. The coach said to him:

“WELL, YOU ONLY HAVE 3 SUMMERS LEFT WITH HER.”

Brian, disturbed and perplexed, said to him, “What do you mean?”

The coach replied, “When she turns 16, her schedule will be so heavy with friends and other activities that you would not be able to get away and connect with her like you used to. So, basically you have 3 summers left.”

Brian said that hit him like a ton of bricks. Those words have been burning in his brain ever since.

Count the number of summers you have left with your kids. Make every one of them memorable.

Seldom do people accidentally live great lives. Life has to be enjoyed intentionally, by planning it with purpose.

Make a point to craft an incredible 2008. Get started on it now, before someone else (or your practice) decides what that will look like for you.

My very best to you and your family,

Kirk

“Stop TRYING . . . and start TRAINING!”

Kirk Behrendt is the Director of ACT Dental Practice Coaching. He has lectured all over the United States to major meetings and study clubs. He has extensive experience in practice profitability, team building, leadership, and dental practice marketing/branding; Kirk and his team are primarily focused on positively impacting the future of dentistry. . . one practice at a time.

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