The Most Successful Dental Office Does?

There are a bunch of great ideas out there. This is a fantastic collection.

1. Treats its patients like family.
   Let’s keep the list going and see how many we can add.

I hear they have seamless systems and policies and people-oriented staff with great operational manuals… oh and clean bathrooms.

In other words you have appointed someone to be in charge of it to make sure everything is scheduled where it should be, someone is working to make sure doctor and hygienist are not standing around temporarily unemployed and the practice goals are being met.

“Not” is very important in this sentence.

The most successful dental offices do the following:

• They have a good, solid, ethical team with a great attitude. There is a strong leader, they are organized and have real-world systems that give more predictability to their schedule. They run like a well-oiled machine. There are few hiccups because they have a plan. Duties are divided, and staff do not share a lot of duties, which is very inefficient.

• They are good communicators, which with good systems will grow the practice, retain patients and help control patient upsets. They run to upset patients instead of away from them. The doctor is not afraid to talk to patients when they have a problem, instead he or she helps them understand their treatment plans and they are really engaged in the experience. The doctor enjoys being a dentist and every aspect of it including running a business. The successful dental office doesn’t have pack leaders.

• There is positive energy in successful practices. Negative energy works against success.

• The practice has production goals for each provider. The practice has a vision and goals that the team created together.

• The person answering the phone is one of the most skilled in communicating. Many times practices put the least skilled “new girl” as receptionist, big mistake.

• No matter how many people work at the front desk, one should be most senior over the schedule. In other words, you have appointed someone to be in charge of it to make sure everything is scheduled where it should be, someone is working to make sure doctor and hygienist are not standing around temporarily unemployed and the practice goals are being met. This one action can boost your numbers.

• The office is updated, and clean (yes, clean bathrooms are important), outdoor sign looks sharp, the building looks fresh (no mildew and missing shutters). The phones are answered by real people during regular business hours. They file insurance for their patients and yes, they do send statements. They personally call to confirm patients because they know the tone of voice the patient has when confirming is key. They keep score; each team member tracks their work and reports at staff meetings which are held every single month without fail.
They don’t have a lot of rules for the prospective patient when they call in and have never even met them. (That tells me the practice is out of control and has had to make rules in an effort to try to gain control, which keeps them small.) When someone calls the practice, they don’t try to change the person’s viewpoint about what they he or she wants, instead they get the person in fast. They are service-oriented. The team is aware of the importance of internal marketing and they have a plan. They are getting the majority of new patients by referral. That is the true measurement of how well you are doing with service.

They send a quarterly newsletter, birthday cards, Christmas cards and they have a strong recall system. They are retaining 80 percent of their patients. They are good at presenting treatment plans; this is part of a key internal system. Their outstanding insurance and practice collections are under control.

The doctor is aware of the overhead and how much money he is making. Expenses are monitored and under control. Doctor is the boss and is not letting staff tell him or her what to buy and when to take off, etc.

The practice has safeguards in place to prevent embezzlement. The team takes CE on a regular basis, staying away from “Flavor of the Month” practice management. In other words, they don’t keep changing the way they do things once they find systems that produce stellar results.

Remember, no energy vampires!
Off the top of my head in no particular order:

1. The doctor and all staff members really care about their patients. They are not “money motivated.”
2. The doctor has been trained on the basics of being a good executive.
3. The doctor continues to educate himself as a dentist.
4. The doctor ensures that his staff is well-trained.
5. The doctor only retains staff with a high level of responsibility.
6. The doctor monitors the office using statistics. All staff have some sort of production statistic.
7. The doctor creates an environment that is business-like but friendly and is a fun place to work at.
8. As conditions in the practice allow, the doctor sets up a bonus system or some kind of profit sharing.
9. All policies are in writing. Each employee has a training manual both as an employee and for their specific function.
10. When the staff make errors, there is a standard system in place for correcting the employee mistake.
11. All staff are excellent at educating the patients so that the patients place value on their treatment.
12. All functions of the office are assigned to a specific employee. No function is allowed to simply be handled randomly or by whomever happens to “grab the ball.”

A great location and effective internal/external marketing.

Lots and lots of “Kaizen!” In business, this was a major revolution from Japan in the ’70s and ’80s. It means “constant improvement,” constantly evaluating your systems, people and marketing looking for smarter ways of working, then using leadership to bring in change in a way that the whole team can engage in. In my experience, the most kaizen you can find is by surfing Dentaltown as the main “brain trust” every other day or so.

The greatest kaizen improvement we’ve had in recent months is moving away from phoning patients for recalls, and using an automated e-mail service. For us, it turns out to be far more effective than calling.

1. Hire a hygiene coordinator. Her job is to make sure the RDH schedule is full. We believe in recare.
2. Office facelift. Cover all white walls, please. Hire an interior decorator. I can’t tell you how many women come in for their appointment and praise the looks of our office. Choose soothing colors.
3. Go digital as soon as possible.
4. Do not do any more amalgam fillings. Works for me...
5. Goals for each providers, doctor and hygienists.
6. Bonus system on production or collection – whatever is your liking.
7. You have to like what you do. Refer out procedures that you do not like to do. Expect referrals from your specialists. If no, ask why.
8. Love your staff. They are the strength of your practice.
9. Love your patients. They pay your bills. Fire the disruptive ones.
10. Take vacation.
Here’s a little tale that might shed some light on the logic of production goals. When I purchased our practice in 1995, I had a goal in the back of my mind that I’d like to get to $1 million in production and collection. At the time of the purchase, the office had three ops, three staff (front, back, hygiene) and produced about $300K per year.

With that goal in mind, over time we increased to five ops and six staff members (two of everything). After 10 years, we finally hit the $1 million mark for the first time in 2004. The production goal was never in the forefront of my mind, but it was a goal that was set, and certain things needed to be done to reach that goal. The goal provided the “infrastructure” within which we built the practice.

At the time, I knew there would be a bit of a letdown after hitting that mark. The goal was $1.1 million the following year, and we hit it. The goal was $1.2 million for 2006, we didn’t hit it, and truth be told, we’ve never hit it. We’ve been hovering between $1.1 and $1.2 million ever since 2005.