

THE KEY ELEMENTS OF A QUALITY ORTHODONTIC PRACTICE

By: Charlene White

What are the Key Elements to a Top Quality Orthodontic Practice?

Fortunately, I have had an opportunity to work with over 700 orthodontists since 1983. It has been a pleasure and an honor to observe many of these practices become what I call a "Peak Performance" practice. When Dr. Chang asked to write an article on the "Key Elements of a Top Quality Orthodontic Practice", I immediately thought about the many doctors and team members I have met over the years. A pattern was evident among the highly respected practices. In this article I will summarize the 15 key elements that define these practices.

1. CONTINUING EDUCATION

To create a top quality practice means you must continue your education. This includes both the doctor and the team. Continuing education is fundamental to creating a quality practice. There are many options available: journals, newsletters, the internet, webinars, seminars, conventions, and study clubs just to name a few. Posting of the certificates and listing of the courses taken by the doctor and team is both appropriate and impressive to patients. This information should be displayed in your office and on your website. With current technology, it is easy to purchase DVD's and CD's of courses from around the world. When I observed the changing element of staff going to courses, I shifted to interactive webinars. The entire team can enjoy and learn together in the comfort of your office.

Having presented over 200 courses and workshops in eight countries, I have learned that the cream of the crop invest in continuing education.

Key Idea:

Post the courses taken by the doctor and staff in your office, your website and on your phone message each year. Make presenting an educational 15 minute talk to the team a requirement each year as part of your evaluation.

2. LEADERSHIP

Everything filters down from the top. The leader(s) of the practice set the standards and communicate the vision of the practice. In order to project and uphold a quality image, the leader must be committed to quality. They do not sacrifice quality to do it cheaper, quicker, or easier. They set an example that is steadfast and unwavering. The purpose and vision is clear to the team. Leadership is a learned skill. It takes focus and discipline to become an effective leader. Excellent leaders lead through example. They truly care about their team members. They have developed the skill of being firm and compassionate which is a delicate balance. Excellent leaders have the respect of their team members and of others in the community.

I served on the Board of the AAOF for six years which gave me some insight into the time and effort that goes into the leadership of the doctors who dedicate their time to the AAO. In addition I have also worked with many Head of Departments of Universities who have sacrificed income for passion for the path they have chosen. I have also worked with many orthodontists, managers, Clinical Coordinators mothers and fathers who were excellent leaders. Their efforts bring quality results.

Key Idea:

No matter what your leadership role is in life, pick one top trait that people are looking for in an excellent leader. The author of the book "Credibility" learned through thousands of surveys, the four top qualities people want in a leader are: inspiration, honesty, vision, or competence.

3. TEAM BUILDING

A quality orthodontic practice only earns that reputation by having a top notch team. They understand that every person on the team plays a role in creating a quality experience for the patient. A top notch team member contributes more than the average person and they earn more than the average person. They are willing to study to elevate their skills. They perform their job well and display an excellent attitude. They are proud to promote their doctor and team. A win/win formula is in place where the doctor, the team and the patient all feel well cared for in the environment.

In my consulting career, I have personally interviewed over 4,200 team members. The vast majority are moms, wives, single females who are hard working predominately women who are dedicated to orthodontics. They come to work with a positive attitude no matter what they are dealing with at home. My hat is off to these team members who help create beautiful smiles everyday.

Key Idea:

Plan at least one team building event each year. One of my favorites is a ROPES COURSE. Check out the one that is closest to you. Individually commit to doing one thing each day to go the extra mile to do something for someone on your team.

4. CUTTING EDGE IMAGE

Image brings patients to the door and quality keeps them there. A top quality practice has an excellent image. The doctor(s) reinvests in the practice every year. One year it may be a digital x-ray machine and the next year it may be going paperless. Every 5-7 years the decor must be updated. Everything from the parking lot, front door, reception area, coffee area, bathroom, clinic, games, music, lighting, and the consult rooms must be top notch. Flat screen slide shows must replace bulletin boards. Have Signature Pads instead of piles of paper. These are all important to building the "WOW" factor.

It is so much fun to walk into a new start up office that created the "WOW" factor on a dime and in addition has found a way to put the new digital x-ray into their budget. Successful Orthodontists are notorious for creating an excellent image.

Key Idea:

Focus on one or two areas this year to improve your image. If you are getting compliments on a regular basis in any area, you have arrived. If you are not getting compliments for example on your scrubs, it is time to kick it up a notch. Choose an area and brain storm together. It could be the landscaping, the front door, your website or the lighting in your office.

5. COMPUTER UTILIZATION

A quality practice knows how to use technology to their advantage. The doctor is not afraid to invest in the latest and best software and hardware to get the job done efficiently. They attend their software user meetings or they have a trainer in each year to make sure they are optimizing their usage of the software. They work with a hardware support company who helps them maintain and update their hardware. Their website reflects the image of their practice. The sites are not "under construction", they are completed. They attend meetings and spend time on the exhibit floor to make sure they are in tune to the latest available. They are always looking for an easier way to get the job done.

Key Idea:

If you have not explored putting a detailed treatment plan in the patient's chart via the software, get started today. The clinical team is truly empowered by having a treatment plan that guides them step by step through the treatment. It takes an investment of time to set it up, but it is well worth the process.

6. EFFICIENT SYSTEMS

Top quality practices hear all the time from patients, "You run such an organized practice. I wish more businesses were run like yours." I am proud to report that the peak performance practices that I have coached over the years hear this often. It is rewarding for me to return to a practice that has all of the systems we've been working on over the years in place. It is running like a well oiled machine. Scheduling, recall, new patient process, telephone scripting, clinical systems, bookkeeping, accounts receivables, insurance, marketing and personnel management are all functioning at a high level.

Key Idea:

Scheduling an in-office consultation periodically is a sure way to know that you are on top of your systems. It's like working with a personal trainer. There is nothing like having an excellent check up to assure that you are on the right track in every area of your practice.

7. CLINICAL EFFICIENCY AND QUALITY

There is nothing better for practice building than happy patients telling others about their orthodontic result and their experience in your office. A top quality team runs on schedule, they have 3% or less repairs, they are proud to show their final records at the study club

meeting, decalcification is minimal, less than 10% of their patients are past their target date, their collections per visit is higher than average \$300+, they perform the procedures in the allotted time and the patients feel well informed. All of these results do not just happen. It starts with an excellent well written treatment plan on the patient record that encompasses all of the treatment goals and the plan to get there. Systems must be followed to reduce repairs and run on schedule. The doctor also is willing to invest in top quality clinical supplies. Photographs are taken routinely to document the case and also used to educate the patient.

Key Idea:

Are you proud to show off your before and after smiling photos? Well, get to work and display them on slide show throughout the office. Patients do not like to see intra-orals of anyone but themselves. They like to see attractive smiling faces of patients who have an attractive smile arch and full smiles. Do a collage as a screen saver.

8. RELAXED FUN ATMOSPHERE

A top quality practice also has a fun and relaxed atmosphere. They have worked hard to make it look easy. The patients enjoy coming to the office therefore; they do not have many no-shows. People are laughing and having engaging conversations. Kids run in the door and go to their favorite "spot". The front desk staff recognizes you, smiles and chit chats. Cookies and coffee are available. Mom can sit and enjoy the latest magazines or dad can watch the close caption TV. Wii, Xbox, Disney movies are available. There is something for every age group. The team wears matching outfits that look crisp and current. Does the top quality practice encounter problems? Of course they do everyday. The difference is they come up with quick solutions and move on to their tasks at hand. They do not look back. They are moving forward.

Key Idea:

Brainstorm together as a team. What is one excellent idea you can implement in the next 30 days that will add to your fun atmosphere? Have a beach week for the month of June. Add a Nerf ball hoop in the clinic so kids can throw to win a prize. Have a wheel that you spin if you have good hygiene to win a prize. People love to get involved.

9. MARKETING

It is not smart to bank on "If I deliver quality treatment, I should not have to market my practice". Having a strategic marketing plan in place is the key to the success of any practice. Number one is location. No marketing plan can overcome a poor location. Quality practices do their homework. They understand the importance of demographics and how to stay ahead of the competition. Competition is not necessarily another Orthodontist. It can be discretionary dollars in the family budget. They do not just sit back and hope someone will call. They are proactive in the office, the community and in their planning.

Key Idea:

For 25 years I had a small 50 page marketing book that was not in high demand. When the recession started to hit, I got to work on a marketing tool kit of 500 pages for the orthodontic team. You need a plan, ideas, direction, a formula for success and a handbook for the marketing coordinator. Our new Marketing Tool Kit has been a big hit with the marketing coordinators. It makes their job easier and it works. I have also been coaching several offices these past two year and their new patient numbers are up in a down economy. A quality office knows and understands that as the external factors change, the internal action plan must change also.

10. THEY GIVE BACK TO THE COMMUNITY

Successful orthodontic practices thrive off of the community where they are located. The quality practices enjoy giving back to the people in their community. Whether it is a scholarship program, habitat for humanity, walk a thon, sports support or a scout troop tour, the team is excited to be involved in community events. I have witnessed many clients and team members over the years dedicate hours and money to supporting their community.

Key Idea:

Set up a budget for donations for the year. Put someone in charge of the budget. When requests come in, send them to that person. Give them an application and let the person know you will put them in for approval this year or maybe next year if the budget is depleted. Put photos of all community events you support on your website. Always look for ways to bring people back to your office for a pizza party at the end of the event.

11. GIVING BACK TO THEIR SPECIALTY OR ASSOCIATION

There are lots of ways to give back to your specialty. Being an active member of your association, donation to your university, being a part time professor or holding office in your association. Quality oriented orthodontists give back time and money to their specialty. That means missing nights or weekends at home with their family at times. Staff can participate in local associations. You can mentor young people who may be interested in dentistry as a career.

Key Idea:

Sponsoring a booth on career day at local schools can bring great returns. You can also invite young patients to be an assistant for a day in your office. This type of program has inspired many young people to go into dentistry.

12. THEY HAVE A PIONEER SPIRIT

A pioneer trusts their instincts and is willing to go out on a limb to try new technology. They move ahead of the "pack". If everyone sat back and waited, nothing would happen. If no one had the guts to question the status quo, the profession would not move forward. Laser

treatment, tads, cone beam x-ray, clear aligners and self ligated brackets are all in the fore front today. Staff that works in a pioneer spirited office, cannot afford to have the attitude of "why do we need to change". Things are moving at light speed. Do not get left behind.

Key Idea:

You can Google the latest and newest concepts on the market in dentistry. Talk about it at your next staff meeting.

13. KEEPING IT ALL IN BALANCE

Many orthodontists will tell you that they became an orthodontist because they admired the orthodontist life style. Their goal was to have a successful practice, a balanced life and a happy home life. They wanted to be part of their children's lives. I see more and more that the young orthodontists want to work at maximum efficiency to create a quality life in their practice and at home. They want to be at the ball games and the school events. They want their kids to remember mom and dad being there to support them. I have some clients who worked 12 days a month when their kids were younger, who are now working more days a month because the kids are off to college and require less time. As I have said for years, the beauty is, "Design is the way you want it."

Key Idea:

Ask yourself... what would I change if I designed it the way I wanted it? Do not wait. Life is too short. I have helped many doctors redesign their template, produce more and work fewer days or hours.

14. LIVING BY A CODE OF CONDUCT

It is like a Marine, the top quality performers live by a code of conduct. The team knows the key rules and the consequences for breaking them. You do not hire a staff member from a top referring doctor without consequences. You do not get lack on documenting charts or developing a treatment plan without consequences. You cannot get lazy with you marketing without consequences. You cannot neglect your health without consequences. You do not allow the rude staff member to stay on the team without consequences.

Key Idea:

Design your code of conduct for your team and strive to follow it each day.

15. EMPLOY EXCELLENT ADVISORS

It takes a lot of focus and talent to become a top quality orthodontist. No one can be all things to all people. Orthodontist's who know how to manage their time to fullest, know they can get where they want to go much faster if they employ skilled advisors in other areas of their life. They go to the experts in their field before making an important decision. The top 20% of profitable orthodontists use consulting services. The results are printed in surveys

every year. A skilled practice management consultant, tax consultant, investment advisor, accountant, or lawyers etc. play a major role in the success of a practice. The following are actual statistics from practices that have benefited from my consulting services. These are truly "Peak Performance" practices.

Measurable Results Office # 1

	May 2007	August 2009
Staff Salaries	24.4%	19.2%
Clinical Supply Cost	12.0%	6.8%
# of Active Patients	1,614	1,291
AVG Months in Tx	36 months	26 months
# of Overruns	498	287
AVG Starts per Month	48	51
AVG Exams per Month	81	80
Total Income	2.6 million	3.0 million

	May 2007	August 2009
AVG Monthly Production	\$200,155	\$241,477
Percentage of Overhead	74%	64%
AVG Number of Patients per Day	125	100
# of Business Staff	7	5
Number of Lab Staff	2	1
Number of X-ray Staff	3	3
Number of Assistants	12	9

	May 2007	August 2009
AVG Number of Starts per Month	44	51
AVG Number of Exams per Month	62	80
Overruns	498	287
Reduction in Payroll Cost		5.1%
AVG Months in Treatment	36	26