RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL MEDICAL PRACTICE SHOULD BE A DREAM, NOT A NIGHTMARE

A HANDBOOK FOR DOCTORS

TOP PRACTICES
VIRTUAL PRACTICE MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

DR. PETER WISHNIE

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for ordering this book. Our goal at the Top Practices Virtual Practice Management Institute is truly to help physicians of all ages and experience levels get their nights and weekends back. We've worked with many doctors over the years. Although every practice is different, and every doctor has their own needs, we know that most physicians struggle with the same problems. The number one complaint we hear, no matter how long doctors have been in medicine or how big or small their practices are, is that many stay late at the office taking care of extra work or find themselves bringing work home with them. As an experienced practitioner with over 28 years in private practice, and as a practice management consultant, I've heard this complaint many, many times.

There are a lot of reasons why doctors don't have enough time or money (or both), and I can tell you that the state of our current health system is definitely NOT the real reason. For as many physicians struggle, I know many other doctors, both young and older, who have managed to craft a great, balanced lifestyle and still only work 9-5.

My own story is a good example. When I was 29 years old, I purchased a practice straight out of my residency. I never worked for anyone. However, I didn't have any mentors at the time to help me grow my practice, either. I had to learn from my own mistakes—and mistakes I made. I was losing almost $8,000 a month when I first started. However, instead of entertaining lots of negative thoughts like "I am not cut out for this" or "I should have worked for someone instead," I took action. I hired a consulting company for about $20,000. I maxed out two credit cards. I owed the bank $200,000 between the practice purchase and a line of credit, and of course I still had the $100,000 in student loans that I had to pay back. But in one year of working with this consultant, I made more money in that time frame than in *any* year the previous practice owner had made. Now my practice is a thriving, profitable business that provides me with the life I always wanted to live.

So now I want to give back and help others learn the secrets of running an effective and profitable medical practice. These so called "secrets"—and I call them secrets because there wouldn't be any struggling doctors living day-to-day if everyone knew them—will be unveiled in the pages ahead.

You're free to read this book however you would like, but my recommendation is to skim the chapters first to familiarize yourself with the content, and then go through the whole thing again with a pen or highlighter. Take your time and mark the pages or passages that cover the points you need to address immediately. Write down notes as you go. After reading the book, you are invited to a free 30-minute consultation with myself, Tina Del Buono, or Rem Jackson. We are here to help make private practice in medicine fun again.

Sincerely,

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TOP PRACTICES

VIRTUAL PRACTICE MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

This is a publication of the Top Practices Virtual Practice Management Institute.

The Top Practices Virtual Practice Management Institute is designed to end your practice management frustrations and transform you and your staff into a highly functioning medical practice team that enables you to earn the income you deserve while taking back your nights and your weekends.

Members of the Virtual Practice Management Institute enjoy the practice of medicine, enjoy serving their patients, and enjoy the time they have through excellent management skills to have rich personal lives.

Joining is Easy, Find Out More Here

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PART ONE

MASTERING MINDSET

CHAPTER ONE
THE LIFE CYCLE OF A PHYSICIAN

Owning and running a private medical practice is no easy task. It truly is running a business, and it's full of challenges and pitfalls many doctors did not prepare for through their medical training. After all, you went to school to become a doctor and treat patients who need you, not to master skills like hiring, collecting what you're owed, and training staff members. Yet, those are some of the skills you need to manage a successful and profitable practice.

So what does it look like when the average physicain gets into private practice? How do so many doctors end up burned out, exhausted, frustrated, and looking for other options? Let's look at the hypothetical "life cycle" of a doctor.

A doctor spends four years in an undergraduate college, goes to a medical school for four years, does an internship, and then completes anywhere from a 3-6 year residency program. During this 12-15-year educational period, the doctor is working hard, knowing that he or she will one day be successful at his profession.

After the residency, most doctors go to work for someone else. It is rare, especially today, that a doctor opens his or her own practice, especially straight out of residency. So, while employed for someone else, the new associate is working hard, working late, and doing all the things he or she needs to do to make a living as well as gain the respect of the practice owner.

Eventually, the doctor either becomes a partner or moves on to own his or her own practice. No one wants to stay a simple associate forever. In order to achieve the financial freedom that a doctor wants, he or she has to run their own show. Our doctor has to be the "Big Kahuna."

He or she hears the word on the street that it will take 2-3 years to make a profit on a new practice. The doctor is working more than ever, but this is ok, since he or she will put in the time now and reap the rewards later. He or she *has* to work this hard in order to pay the rent and the staff salaries.

Then, things tend to ease up. Patients are coming in and the doctor is making more money. He or she starts feeling good. Maybe he buys the house of his dreams. Maybe she takes that expensive dream vacation. But then, things start to change again. Expenses pile up. Complying with regulations becomes increasingly challenging and tedious. New technologies or other services become the "must haves" in private practice, and he or she wonders if they really need them to stay competitive. Over time, the doctor feels burnt out. He or she realizes that, if they take time off from practicing, the money will stop coming in. Suddenly more and longer hours in the office are necessary, not just a once-and-a-while occurrence. Now they become a slave to their own practice.

> For many physicians, this basic life cycle isn't hypothetical: it's your reality. Your practice is no longer fun. You still love medicine, but you need more time for yourself and your family. Unfortunately, if you give yourself more time, you make less money. This can put a lot of strain on you, your practice, and your loved ones.

Do you still work weekends? Do you come home for dinner or are you still at the office? Do you ever sit down and think about what your life would be like if you had better control over your own time? Could you make your practice work with or without you there overseeing everything? Could you take three months off to travel?

If you don't have control over your own life and you feel that your practice *can't* work without you, then this book is for you.

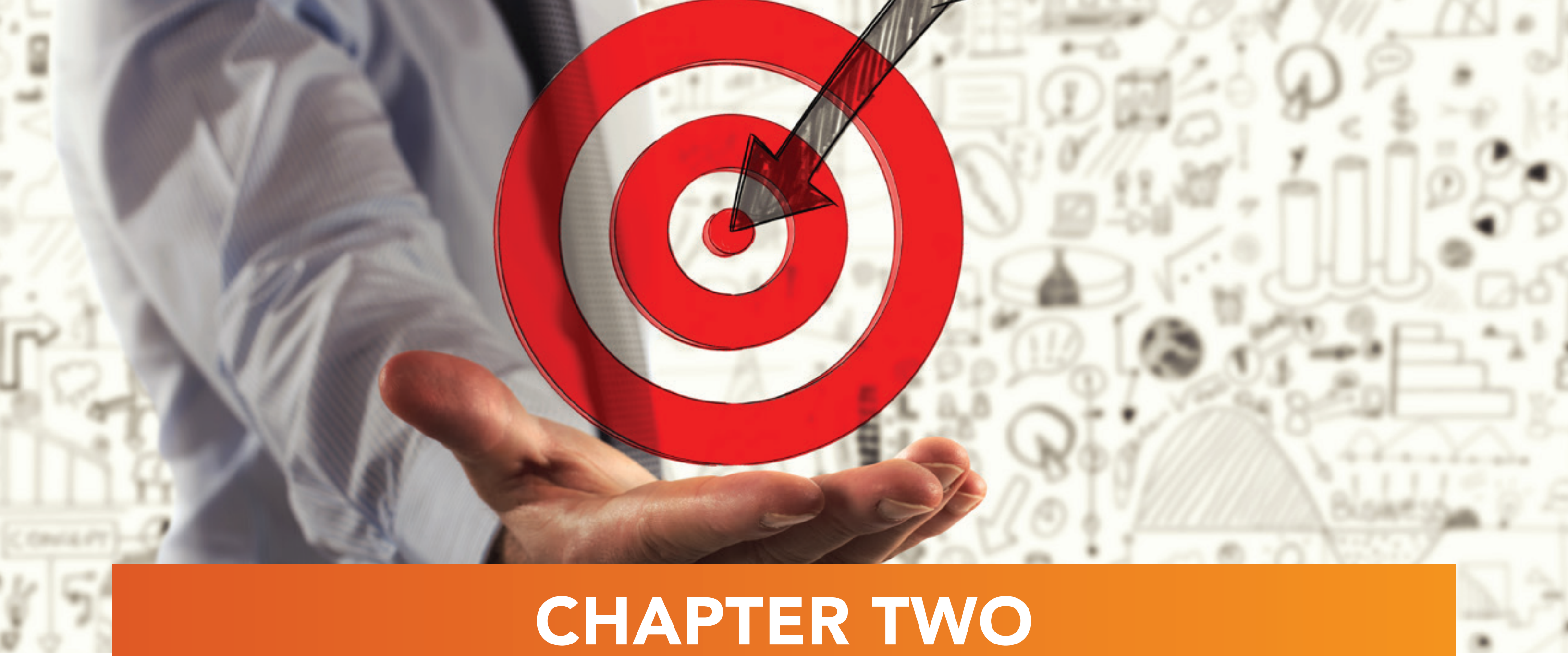
You will learn how systems will help you work *on* your practice instead of just working *in* the practice. You'll learn how your office can be on autopilot and run like a smooth, well-oiled machine. Your practice will become a turnkey operation.

You will finally have solutions to gain control and understand how to set up these systems. You will create predictability in your practice. You will know exactly how to bring in the cash that will generate the lifestyle you so desire.

What you are really building is FREEDOM: the freedom to do whatever you want for your own life, when you want to. Do you have dreams that you have put aside because you felt there was no way they can be achieved? Figure out what they are and write them down, because what you are about to read will bring you new hope and a new vision with a new sense of self-confidence.

What I will urge you to do is to not only read the material here, but also put it in action. IMMEDIATELY! You will start loving what you do again. You will wake up every morning excited about going to work.

Get ready and start your engines! Your new life is about to take off.



CHAPTER TWO
BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

Stephen Covey put it best in his best selling book, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*: “begin with the end in mind.” This is important advice. How do you know you’ve reached your destination if you do not know what your destination is? You have to know where you’re headed, or at least where you want to go, in order to not only know when you’ve succeeded, but also how to even get there in the first place. This is true for every facet of your life. Your practice is no exception.

So how do you determine what that destination will be, so you can both work toward it and know when you’ve reached it? Your destination, your so-called “end,” is defined by your **vision** and your **goals**. We’ll cover both vision and goal-setting more in-depth in the following chapters.

First, however, you need to understand why this is so essential for your practice’s success. It all comes down to mindset, which is a step too many medical professionals take for granted.

Dr. Napoleon Hill, the author of the classic book *Think and Grow Rich*, wrote about the “definiteness of purpose.” Definiteness of purpose is having the gut feeling that you will achieve your vision, no matter what. Picture being so crystal clear and centered on your purpose that it is just a matter of time before you achieve it.

Your definiteness of purpose is held in the subconscious mind. The subconscious mind does not have a sense of humor. It always believes what you put in it. You can actually trick the mind to believe in things, no matter how silly they may seem at first. This can work for you, or it can work against you. Fill your mind with doom-and-gloom predictions about the future of medicine, and that will filter through to your daily life and impact the direction of your practice. Fill your mind with a positive attitude and focus completely on your vision and your goals—whatever that looks like for you—and that will filter through instead. You’ll start to develop that definiteness of purpose.

This is why goals matter. They help you set the direction for your future and enable you to recognize your priorities. This is also why you need to both write down all your goals and constantly run a "mental movie" of what it would look like to achieve them in your head.

I'll be honest: it is not easy to write down your goals. Many people don't actually feel their goals are achievable, and so resist writing them out and admitting to them. However, the act of putting them on paper is an essential step. Plenty of books have been written about goals and the effectiveness of writing them down. In fact, what all successful people have in common is that their goals are written down.

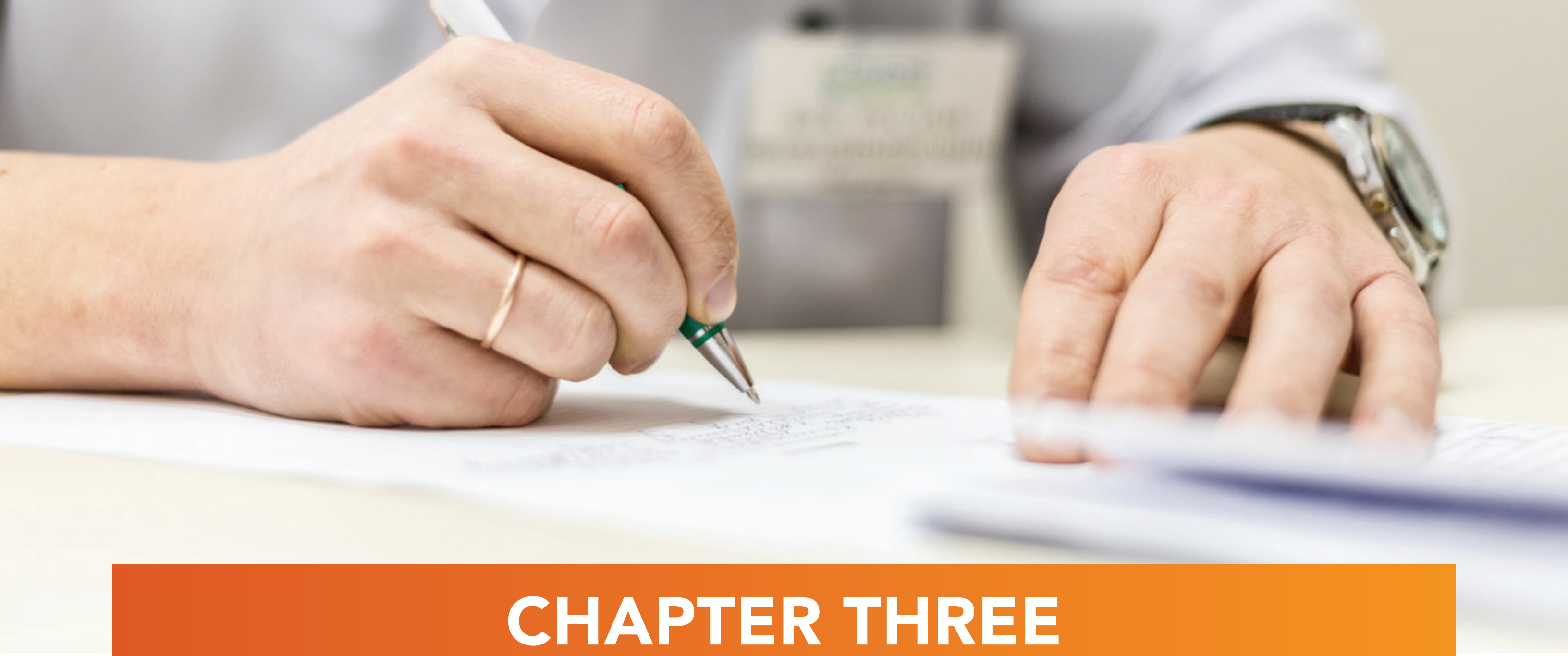
You see, when you write them down, they become clear, instead of just vague aspirations in your head. You can begin to see a way forward. You can achieve pretty much anything that your mind believes it can do. In order to believe in your goals, you actually need to see them in front of you regularly.

Seeing your goals laid out is another way of saying you have a vision. Picture the house you want, the vacations you want, and the way life would look when you are at home with your family. Picture yourself on an island with a drink in your hand, or whatever your own dream vacation happens to look like. Imagine how peaceful everything is. Life is really good.

Writing your goals down is important, but not your only step. After all, you write everything out and then go back to work, where the insanity starts again. You are either over booked or you have more free time then you know what to do with. It's all too easy to forget your dreams and start stressing out again.

You now need to keep those goals in the forefront of your mind as a vision for your future, so you can continually work toward them. Take what you wrote out and imagined and turn it into a "mental movie" almost, so you can keep playing it over and over again in your head. Like any movie or TV episode that you watch repeatedly, the more you see it, the more you can commit it to memory and the clearer the picture becomes in your mind.

So, what is your destination—the "end" you should have in your mind? If you are just starting out in practice, you might not know the end. You are probably not worried about what happens in the next ten, twenty, thirty, or maybe even forty years. It is easier for the established practitioner to figure out how much longer he or she wants to stay in practice and how much money one needs to retire. The key in either instance is to start thinking about the type of practice you want to have. Even if you have been in practice for 15-20 years now, you need to consider this. You might be in a rut and just getting through the day, instead of growing and living the life you want to live. Keep in mind: your practice exists for one thing—to provide the lifestyle you so desire.



CHAPTER THREE
SETTING YOUR GOALS

Most people do not live intentionally. They go through their days on habit. Their days get cluttered with all sorts of things—some good, some not so much—that keep them from living the life they want to live. Goals help you change this. They provide a direction for your life, so everything you do works toward achieving what you want. This gives your life and your practice intentionality as you work toward your purpose. That is why goal-setting is so important.

I am sure you've heard about goal-setting before this. Almost every business or motivational book will mention setting goals. It really is that essential to your success. It's not a step you can skip. You *need* to write down what you really want. Is it more time, more money, or both? How much more time or money do you want?

> Setting a goal for the day, the week, the month, the year, and even 3-5 years from now will help you live with intention. So, how do you start setting goals? It can seem overwhelming when you first sit down to start, especially if you're new to it. There is a key to help you, though. Goals should be **S.M.A.R.T.**: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound.

Specific: Exactly what is it you want? Broad, vague goals are only a starting place. They don't give you the direction and daily intentionality you need to achieve them. You need to get specific. For example: by December 31st, or sooner, my organization will have collected one million dollars, or more.

Measurable: Measurable goals are much easier to achieve than ones that cannot be measured. They allow you to gauge your progress and make adjustments along the way. Otherwise, you have no idea how you're actually doing—until you fail to make your goal, that is. Looking at the above example goal, one can measure how much money you are making daily, weekly, and monthly, and then use those numbers to determine if you are on track or need to make changes.

Achievable: Goals that are not achievable will only frustrate you, making your far more likely to give up too soon. You need something that is high enough to aim for but is possible to achieve. Going back to our example of one million in collections by the end of the calendar year: say you usually collect $500,000 a year. Can you really double your income in a single year? Aiming too low in your goals is also an issue. Underestimating yourself in order to achieve a goal will not allow you to meet your full potential. So, try to make your goal achievable while still stretching you slightly out of your comfort zone. If it is too easy, you will get bored.

Realistic: This goes hand-in-hand with "achievable." There may be plenty of otherwise achievable goals that simply aren't realistic for you at a certain point in time. This usually happens when you aim to conquer too many goals all at once but can also be affected by other factors in your life that may be limiting your time, impacting your health, and so on. Using our example, say you're pretty sure it would be possible to double your income in a calendar year—but your partner suddenly retires for health reasons and you aren't able to replace him for a long time. Your goal may be temporarily unrealistic. Again, if your goal is not achievable, you will quit and get frustrated.

Time-bound: Your goals need a specific end-date when you plan on achieving them. This is so you can't continually put them off or procrastinate making those changes and taking daily steps to achieve them. Without a date in mind, it's all too easy to go without ever succeeding, or at least take much longer than you would have otherwise.

Michael Hyatt has added to the traditional S.M.A.R.T. goal system. His acronym is S.M.A.R,T,E,R, E is for exciting and R is for relevant.

Exciting goals are goals that inspire you. Studies have shown that enjoyment is the key indicator to success. Your goals need to personally inspire you in order to motivate you when times get tough.

Relevant meaning relevant to your life. Sometimes we aim to do too much at a time and we get overwhelmed. You will need to know the demands you have in your life presently and understand your values. You will increase your stress If you have family or other obligations and you make goals that are not in alignment with your values. This doesn't mean you should not stretch yourself, it means making sure all of your goals are aligned with one another.

Write your goals with enthusiasm and with a vision and purpose in mind: "It is December 31st, and I am so elated my organization has brought in $1 million. This will enable me to help so many more people and will allow me to have my weekends free, so I can spend them with my family."

To set your S.M.A.R.T. goals, start by working backwards. Determine where you want to be in the next 3-5 years (the "end" you're working toward) then figure out what would need to happen in your practice and personal life to get there.

Let's look at an example: how much money do you want to make each year—this year, and even a few years down the line? Be specific. Now you must lay out what it will take to achieve this. Break down your *Per Visit Value*, or how much each patient visit is worth to the practice on average. (To get this figure, take your yearly collections and divide that figure by the total number of patient visits you have seen in that given year.) This number allows you to determine the number of patients you need to see in a year, a month, and even a week to make your desired income. You can then use those numbers to set your specific, measurable, achievable, and realistic goals within the time frame you need in order to successfully make the money you want to make.

> You should have separate goals for all the different areas of your life. Typically, this means you will end up with a list of business, financial, health, family, and fun goals. Break these large goals into specific years, months, and weeks, and even days. This helps you make sure you're keeping everything S.M.A.R.T. so you can constantly make progress.

Writing all this out is a lot of work and might be hard for some. You might be the kind of person who likes to fly-by-night and lives day-to-day. For you, this exercise will definitely be difficult. However, if you could see the future and begin with your end in mind, you will see that being this specific and organized will ultimately give you more time. You will achieve your goals faster and your life will have more meaning and purpose.

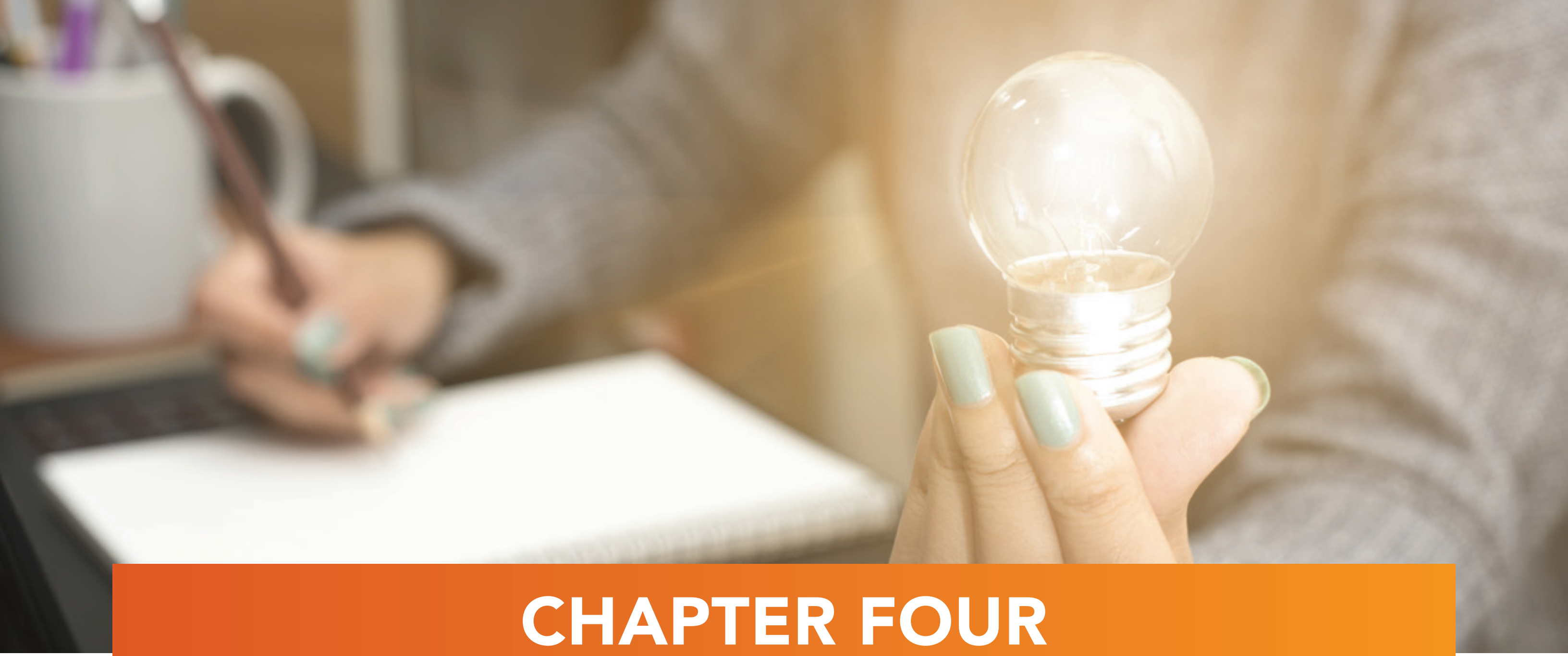
In the appendix you will find goal sheets you can use and information on how to break your yearly goals into 90-day increments. This specific time frame is based on *The 12 Week Year* by Brian Moran to help you make measurable progress on those yearly goals. After all, a whole year seems far away, so you might not even start working on them for the first six months, or even longer. Then all of a sudden, the year just zips by and you look at the calendar and it's September. By then most people say forget it, it is too late to accomplish those goals. Breaking your goals down into quarters and focusing on the one thing you need to do daily will help you eliminate frustration and achieve more.

Now, as you dive in, let me caution you. Goals alone do not work. Wait, what gives? I just said you *need* to have goals to succeed, and now I say goals do not work. Here is the truth: goals do not work if you only focus on the end result. You need to focus on today. How can you make today the best day possible and what can you do today to get you one step closer to your end goal?

Another note: there is no actual *end* goal. There is nothing you achieve that means you've suddenly arrived and no longer need to do anything. There is always room to continue growing and succeeding, even if what that looks like for you may change. According to author and speaker Earl Nightingale's definition, a success is a progressive realization of a worthy ideal. There is no official "end." So, a success is the farmer who is growing crops because that's what he wants to do. A success is the entrepreneur who starts her own company because that was her dream. A success is a physician who can live the kind of life he or she wants to live, no matter what the raw numbers of their bottom line happens to be.

Enjoy the journey. Reaching a goal can cause anxiety in some. That is because once the goal is achieved, they have either nothing to do, or they have to come up with a new goal. This is where your **purpose,** your reason for continuing, comes in. Your purpose should be to help others in any capacity you choose. For a physician, your purpose might sound something like, "to have raving patients who are educated in their health care, get better quickly, and refer others to the practice."

Keep your purpose in mind and you will always have goals to set and strive toward.



CHAPTER FOUR
BE A VISIONARY

What one can conceive, one can achieve. You might have heard this before, but like most people, you probably haven't practiced it. Goals are essential for providing you with something specific to constantly work toward. Tied up with your goals, and another essential part of growing a successful practice, is your **vision**. Being a visionary requires picturing what you want in your life and seeing how it would happen.

In the 1984 Olympics, Mary Lou Retton needed a perfect ten on the vault in order to secure the individual all-around women's gymnastics gold medal. She paused and took her time before she was ready to do the vault. She closed her eyes before starting, and not just for a quick second. Was she praying? No—she was visualizing the full vault in her mind. She pictured herself running towards the vault, executing her routine, and sticking a perfect landing. When she opened her eyes, she took off running. Her routine—and well-deserved perfect ten—earned her a standing ovation and gold medal.

Jack Nicholson stated he also employed visualization techniques prior to every golf shot. He would picture making the perfect swing and imagined how the golf club would strike the ball. He visualized the flight of the ball, its landing, and even how it rolled on the green.

This isn't unusual. Plenty of other successful and famous people have used visualization techniques to help them see their paths forward and pursue them, include actors Jim Carrey and Will Smith; top athletes Misty May-Treanor and Kerri Walsh (Olympians in beach volleyball) as well as Lindsey Vonn (World Cup Alpine ski racer); media personality Oprah Winfrey; and body builder/actor/politician Arnold Schwarzenegger.

The fact is, visualization works in tandem with your goals. It paints a picture of the "end" you're supposed to keep in mind, that all your goals are working toward. Basically, it provides you with a path forward. Much like with your goal-setting, the best way to start visualizing what you want for your practice is to write it out. Start with what you have, then move to the details of your perfect practice.

What does your future practice look like, particularly compared to what you have now? Picture the walls. Will you have wallpaper or paint? Imagine the color schemes. What kind of flooring does your perfect office have? Don't forget the cabinetry. Do you have enough storage, or will you need a better organizational system for the perfect office? Don't stop there, either. How does your office smell? Will it have a fresh, just-cleaned smell? Will you have coffee brewing to fill it with that robust aroma?

Now consider how your patients are greeted. Is your receptionist warm and friendly? Does she hide behind a big wooden window? Is she a perfect hostess, assisting the patients in filling out forms and offering a snack or a beverage? How does she answer the phone? Could it be better? Many medical office receptionists answer by saying, "Doctor's office," or "Dr. Jones's office." But a better way to answer the phone is saying, "Welcome to Ocean County Medical Practice, this is Jane, how may I help you?" How do things change and improve in your vision?

Keep on visualizing. Imagine the patient's experience in the treatment room, and what it would take for the patient to walk out feeling like they had an amazing visit. What does that look like for you? How can you give them that "wow" experience—the kind that makes them go out and tell others about you? Again, don't stop there. What happens when the patient is home? Do you call all your new patients the next day to see how they are doing and ask them if they have any questions they might have thought of since their visit? Do you send them a thank you letter or your card? Do you contact the referring physician with a report of your findings? Will you change any of that in your "perfect practice"?

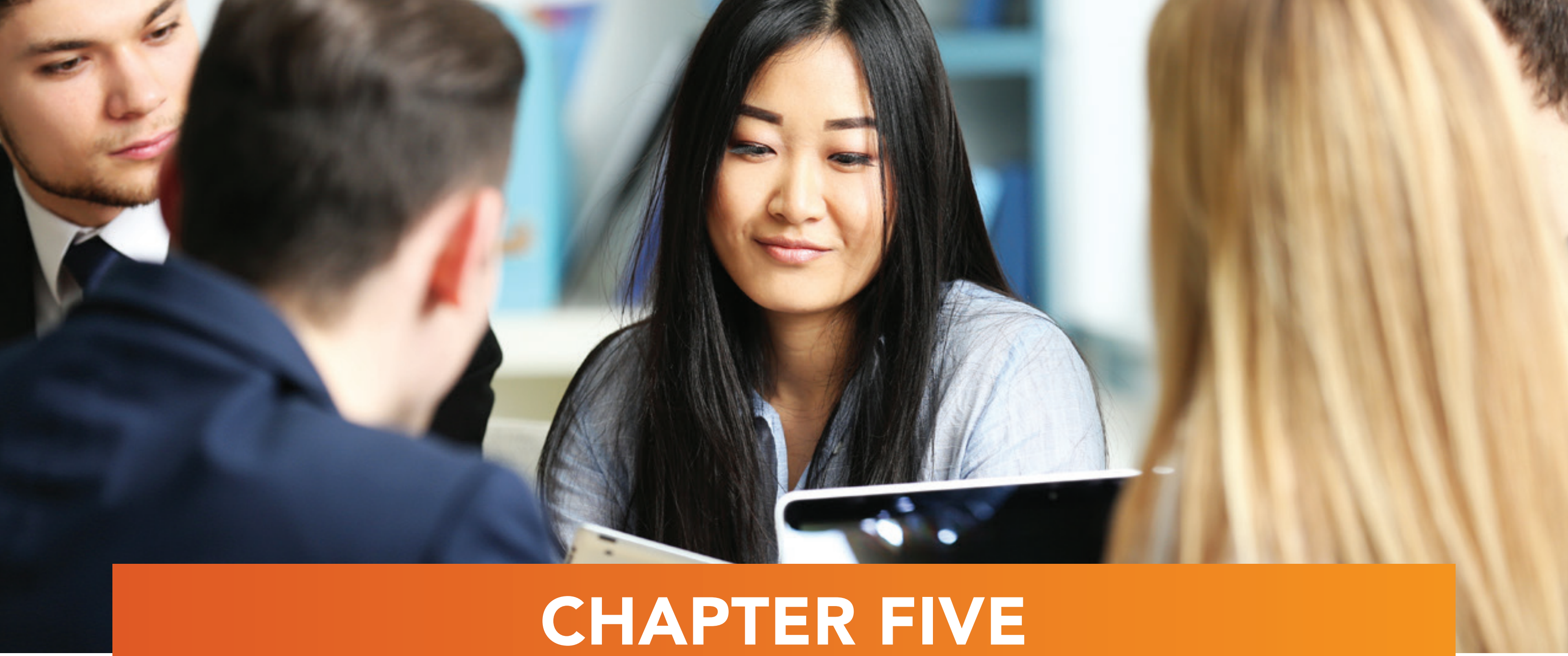
> The key is to write all this out and share it with your staff. Get them involved and ask them to contribute to the office's vision. Once the vision is written down, picture this vision everyday. At night, review areas in your practice that need some fixing up in order to achieve that vision. Gone are the days of daydreaming being a bad thing. Keep on dreaming and believing.

The visualization process isn't just for your practice, either. It's a part of working toward all your life goals, whether they're for your family, your health, your finances, your hobbies, or anything else. Take time to really picture what you want your life to look like and the goals that will get you there. What kind of life do you want? Do you have children? Do you want to put them through college at a prestigious university? How many vacations do you want per year? What kind of home would you like? Do you want a vacation house? How many hours a day do you want to work?

Dream, and dream big. Like I said before, if you can picture it, you can have it. But you need to have the desire and the persistence to continue to strive towards your vision.

PART TWO

KEYS TO EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT



CHAPTER FIVE
WHAT COMES FIRST, THE CAKE OR THE RECIPE?

You've worked through the first crucial part of transforming your practice and your practice management. You have your goals laid out and your vision on paper. Now it is time to put everything into action to turn those dreams and goals into a reality. You are ready to "make the cake," as it were.

Still, you have choices to make: stumble through guessing the exact measurements and ingredients you need to get what you want, or follow a proven recipe? In both actual baking and running a medical practice, following a recipe will give you a better chance to make a delectable cake. In your practice, your "recipe" for efficient, effective management is all laid out in your **systems and protocols**. Writing these down and actually following them is the KEY to your success.

Systems make it easier for your staff to get things done the right way and avoid steps getting missed or forgotten. Have you ever become frustrated with a staff member over how they did something? Have you ever wondered how they came up with their ideas to do something around the office, or said to yourself, "I can't believe she did that"? If you give a group of people a task but don't have specific instructions for how to complete it, every person in that group will have a different perspective on the best way to get the job done. That might work for some people and industries, but it can potentially lead to missed steps, mistakes, and chaos in a medical practice. Specific systems and protocols allow you to lay out all the necessary steps for a task, so staff all execute the task the same way and nothing gets missed. Organized systems lead to the best outcomes.

Systems Are a Necessity

Without systems in place, you have chaos. Let's go back to our metaphor: food and following recipes. Imagine going to Starbucks and your barista doesn't have protocols on how to make a mint mocha Frappuccino. He might miss some steps and your drink will be ruined. Or, he might have to ask someone for help and that person would have to stop what she is doing to teach him the best way to make the drink—all while you are left waiting. Just imagine the line growing from the delay, and all the grumbling customers behind you! What a great way to lose a customer and even get a bad online review.

Let's consider another food chain giant: McDonald's. McDonald's success was based on duplication and strict protocols for making every single meal and side. No matter which restaurant you go to, even in other cities, across state lines, and in other countries, the systems are the same. All Big Macs are basically identical. It makes their customers comfortable *and* it makes it easier to train the staff, so quality and taste stay consistent, no matter where you go.

The same principle applies to your own staff and your practice.

Systems help your staff take care of every aspect of their jobs without missing important pieces. This leads to better efficiency with scheduling, testing, cleaning, making phone calls, marketing, billing—everything. They also help your team answer the tough questions patients might have for them, so they don't have to constantly interrupt other staff members, or even you, to get the right answers. Great customer service requires knowing exactly what that looks like. Do your team members know how to answer the phone in a way that makes the office sound warm and welcoming? Do they know the best way to take patient information and help people with paperwork? Do they know all the steps that need to happen when someone goes back to an exam room to ensure the patient gets the very best care and experience? Do they know all the steps involved in cleaning every part of the office at the end of the day?

This isn't just limited to your front desk or medical tech staff. If you have an associate doctor, does she know what is expected of her? Does she know all the steps that need to be covered in each appointment, or the right way to approach certain topics with patients? If you want the best outcomes for your patients while making more money, then your associate needs to understand your protocols. She needs to know why you have them, be trained in them, believe in them, and follow them through in every encounter.

Organized, written-out systems and protocols allow you, the owner, to go about your day seeing patients, or even leave and go on vacation, without worrying if the office is running well. They take all the guesswork out of your management. Fewer decisions will need to be made, especially on the fly, because each situation will have a set of steps in place that everyone can follow. Common problems and daily issues can be solved by simply looking up the answers and protocols in your office manual.

Cut Stress and Strengthen Your Practice

Ultimately, your systems help you work *on* the practice, not just in it, or at least not all the time. You simply ensure the protocols are being followed, allowing you to manage from a distance. Your personal presence is not required because your systems manage the practice. This alleviates stress—which is vital, since stress can negatively impact your physical health, tank your motivation, short-change your vision, and contribute to feelings of frustration in your career. You want to make your life as stress-free as possible. Of course, that is easier said than done. Successful business owners take risks, and with risks, come stress. So, how do you eliminate stress?

Well, you don't *eliminate* it. You take *distress* and make it a *eustress*. Eustress is stress that benefits you, enabling you to succeed. Think of it as a motivating pressure, instead of a paralyzing force. It is the stress you feel when your business is growing. Your systems and protocols play a key role in alleviating and transforming your stress. During the day, stressful situations will inevitably arise. These situations are usually due to poor (or nonexistent) organization, improperly trained staff, or a lack of protocols.

> The key for any of those situations is to have your guide or manual with a step-by-step "recipe" of how things need to be done in your office. Remember, if it is not written down, your system will not be followed. If it is written down but your staff is not trained, your system cannot not be executed correctly. If it is written down and your staff is trained but not constantly being retrained, your system will be used, but not consistently.

Don't short-change yourself or your staff and make life more stressful than it needs to be. Write down all your protocols, train your staff on how each system should be executed, and then retrain them monthly to ensure consistency.

5 More Reasons to Write Out and Follow Your Protocols to a T

If everything we just discussed hasn't totally convinced you, here are five more reasons you should invest time and energy into writing out, organizing, and training your team on your systems and protocols:

1. Consistent protocols make *you* consistent in caring for your patients and contribute to better patient experiences.

2. Patients won't suddenly discover something was missed/skipped/forgotten in their care that a friend or loved one received from your office. You never want your patients to wonder why one was treated differently (or worse) from another for the same care!

3. In a practice with multiple doctors, partners and associates can fill in for each other when you or someone else goes on vacation, without your patients feeling like their care was interrupted or suddenly changed. After all, everyone is following the same protocols.

4. You will increase your bottom line. By following through all your systems for care, you ensure the patient gets all that is needed to feel better today.

5. It speeds up the flow of the patient through your office. With well-trained staff that know your systems inside and out, there is never a question about who should do what or when something should happen during an appointment. Your medical assistants will have all the materials and equipment ready for you as soon as you get into the room.

So, now you know just how necessary systems and protocols are. How do you get them written out so you can train and re-train your team? Plenty of doctors have systems that they themselves follow or are sort of in place, but not written out or refined. It's not hard to change this. Here are some tips:

Writing Out Your Systems and Protocols

1. As you go through your day, either you, your assistant, or your scribe write down exactly what you did for every patient encounter.

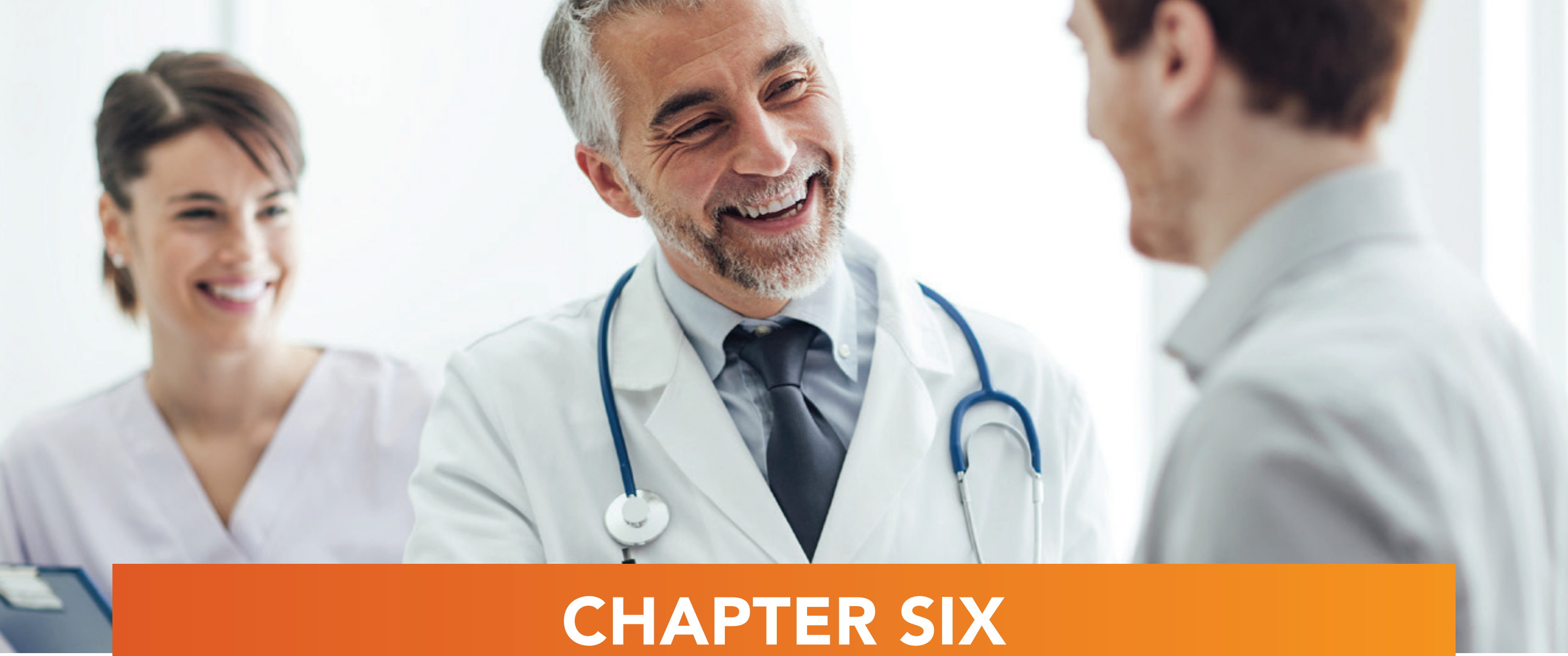
2. Go through a patient's ledger with a specific diagnosis and type out exactly what you did for each step of their care.

3. Review what you have been doing during patient encounters and see what steps are potentially missing. Determine if you can add any other treatments or products to the protocols to round out your regular patient care and boost your bottom line.

4. Tackle just one or two systems at a time. Focus on one or two a day, every couple of days, covering every step completely and thoroughly. Pretty soon you will have everything you do, and all your various staff tasks covered.

Your systems and protocols should be a central part of your vision for your practice. Picture an ordinary day, or better yet, a *perfect* day at the office, where you and your staff seamlessly rise to meet every challenge. The better systems you have in place, the more this can become your reality and the better equipped your team will be to meet your goals.

Problems will always come up. You can't change that. What you can change, however, is how you handle those problems and how you allow them to contribute to your stressors. As a business owner you have a choice in how you want to practice. Put a smile on your face as well as your staff members and patients' faces. Reduce your stress. Enjoy the ride. Life is a journey, not a destination.



CHAPTER SIX
HIRING GREAT PEOPLE

Staff: you *need* them. You can't go at it alone in your practice. It's impossible for you to do everything without help. It stands to reason, then, the better your staff, the more successful and efficient your practice will be. Your connection to your staff is a relationship. At times, you can't live with them, but you know you can't live without them. They will make or break you.

Staffing problems are the number one issue in most businesses—not just medical practices, but all businesses. Good staff allows your business to run smoothly and effortlessly. Bad staff bog you down, cause discontent and strife, and cost you money. No one wants to end up with bad staff members. Unfortunately, many people don't know how to find and hire the right people, which can lead to issues with poor or under-staffing. Yes, with more people there is a greater potential for problems. One team member may pick on another. Simple office gossip can spread like a deadly virus and cause all kinds of hard feelings and damage. However, this shouldn't deter you from learning how to hire effectively and making sure your practice is filled with the staff you need.

> It is up to the business owner to set the tone. Leadership starts from the top. The more people you have under your employ, the better you need to be as a leader.

Finding the Right People

The first step to building a great team is to find good people. This isn't as simple as looking at resumes and picking out the ones with the most experience. You need to know what your practice needs and how to get people to work together as a team to really find the right people to hire.

Personally, I hire for customer service and personality over experience. You can never train someone for personality, but as long as the potential hire is smart, capable, and willing, you can teach them almost anything. (Of course, training is easier if you have your systems written down in the form of a manual, as we discussed in the last chapter.) You can find these people anywhere: coffee shops, retail stores, or even servers at a bar or restaurant. There are also the standard ways to find staff. A list of these standard methods can be found in the appendix. Put together a list of exactly what skills are necessary for the position you're looking for, and what traits are important for the job, then use a variety of methods to find people who may fit the bill.

Once you have a group of names and resumes for a specific position, it's time to review your applicants. Have your office manager and/or a key staff member who is familiar with the position you are hiring for look over the resumes. Most resumes will not tell you much on the surface, but you are looking for inconsistencies. How long do applicants stay at a job? Are there any long breaks between jobs? Do they have the basic skills required to do the job well? If these skills really are required, don't short-change your practice by compromising on them. If you need ten traits and/or skills, then do not settle for nine. Look for someone who has all ten.

The next step is to have your administrator call the good applicants. Make sure your administrator screens them appropriately. Can this applicant work the hours you need? Do they sound lively on the phone, or do they sound depressed? Your administrator should ask about any inconsistencies in the applicant's resume, and why they are looking for a new job now. What happened at their last job?

Have your administrator explain the position to this person so they understand what would be expected of them. Do not sugarcoat the job. If the applicant passes the screening process and still seems like a good candidate, have them come in for their first interview with your administrator. Make this interview during office hours. The interview should feature a variety of questions to help your administrator determine if the person will be a good fit for the position, the staff, and the practice as a whole. You can check the appendix of this book for a list of interview questions to get you started.

If your administrator likes this person, then the applicant should come in for a second interview to meet *you*. Try to make each interview at different times. This is to see if the person really can work the hours you want them to. This is not always possible, especially if they have a current job, but it may give you some insight into the applicant anyway.

Again, keep in mind during your interview that you are looking for someone who can provide great customer service. Experience is wonderful, but an inexperienced person can still be taught. You can't fix personality. If the applicant passes this round, they need to come back and spend a couple of hours with the department they will be working in. If they are applying to be your front desk receptionist, they should spend time there, shadowing the job and current employees. Get feedback from your existing staff. Find out if they feel they can get along with the applicant and if the person asked questions and got involved—or if she just sat in the background and didn't seem to care. Make sure you, the doctor, take a peek at the applicant's interactions with patients and staff. One more note: if at anytime the applicant is late for any of the interviews, consider this as a disqualification for the position.

From New Hire to Team Member

Once you go through your thorough hiring process and choose your newest team member, you will need to train that person extensively. *This* is where the ball is usually dropped, potentially leading to staff problems for you later. Many offices do not sufficiently train their new staff. No matter how experienced (or inexperienced) a new hire is coming in, they don't know *your* systems and protocols. They will have to be taught everything. Failing to do this leads to inefficiency in the office and frustration for everyone. The new staff member gets frustrated because they cannot do their job properly, and you get frustrated because you thought they knew how to do the job based on their resume.

If you have to continually correct someone's actions, then you know you must train and retrain this person on that specific issue. Never assume your staff member knows how to do something. Make sure your employee is familiar with your manual of written systems and protocols, and then demonstrate to the person how to perform the specific task that is causing problems. Once the person is trained, they should still be retrained every month to ensure they understand your protocols inside and out and can complete all their tasks correctly and consistently.

Never forget, though, that you can hire the best people in the world, but your staff still takes all their cues from you, the doctor. You are a leader. You are a coach. The staff looks at you for guidance. You set the table. If you are late to work, they will be late. If you work hard, they will work hard. If you respect your staff, they will respect you. Treat your staff the way you want to be treated. I always say, treat your patients like they are your grandmother: with love and respect. Do the same for your staff, and they will go the extra mile for you.

You Have a Great Team, But Do You Have a Bullpen?

What is a bullpen? In baseball, the term "bullpen" refers to the place where relief pitchers stay during the ballgame and warm up prior to heading out to the mound. In your practice, the bullpen is the extra staff member that can fill in anywhere, at anytime. If another staff member is out sick or on vacation, then you have an available team player ready on the sidelines, so your practice doesn't miss a beat.

Now, I know what you are thinking. You are saying, "Hold on now, I don't need that extra expense added to my payroll. Are you kidding me? You want me to have a bullpen in my office?" Yes, absolutely. Here is why. You want the very best possible team at all times, no matter the schedule. This means cultivating your staff to reach that point and having people available to cover for those who are unavailable or ready to move on to something else in their lives.

How do you cultivate your staff to make the most of your best employees and build up a potential bullpen? Make a list of all your staff members and divide your team into A's, B's, and C's. Your A's are your best players. Your B's are good staff members but have some growing and improving to do before they can be considered some of your best. And your C's, well, these are the staff that ultimately have to go—either by improving their performance to become B's or A's, or by leaving the job. Your goal is to have all A's on staff.

So, now a prospective team player comes along, and you really think she would be a great fit for your practice. You know if you had her on your team, the office would be better overall. She is a superstar in the making. I say go ahead and hire her to create your bullpen. Hiring another awesome team player can make some of your C's jealous enough to either improve or quit, which cuts the slack in your staff. But the key is to also work on raising your B's up to A's.

A note about your budget and expenses: there is a key statistic for your staff to keep in mind. Your payroll should be between 22-26% of the total collections of the office. This does not include the physicians' salaries. Initially you might spend a little more adding extra top-quality staff to build a bullpen, but if that bullpen is All-Star quality, then you just won big time.

How I Manage My Team

What is the difference between a practice that has over-stressed employees and the practice that runs smoothly with happy staff? The answer is **Leadership**.

Leadership begins with you, the doctor/owner. Your staff wants to do a great job. They want to wake up in the morning and feel good about going to work. They want to contribute to the success of the practice. However, they rely on you to give them the knowledge they need in order to take charge of their positions. The bottom line: they need direction.

Direction starts with training. As I mentioned before, most offices do not spend enough time training their staff. Training connects your team to your systems and protocols. It shows them exactly how you want things done and eliminates guessing. If your team isn't trained, how can they possibly execute their jobs the way you want them to? After all, no one can read your mind. Many doctors get frustrated with their staff because they don't do things the way they want them done. Doctor frustration leads to a disgruntled team, which leads to a stressed-out staff that won't perform at their best.

Training requires a guide, a manual, or a complete job description of each position's daily requirements. This all goes back to your systems and protocols. Your manual is not a to-do list, but rather a step-by-step "cookbook" on how to perform every aspect of every job—which we covered in the previous chapter. Once you have your systems and protocols written out, you can use them to train every member of your staff on everything that needs to be done around the office, from answering the phone to cleaning the waiting area and more. You're able to demonstrate, step-by-step, what is expected of each person and each position. Then your staff can review the manual themselves and complete additional training on a regular basis, so you can be sure everyone knows exactly what to do.

Training is only one part, though a huge part, of the team management process. Good team management also includes:

1. Proper communication between you and your staff.
2. Goal setting and setting up incentives to achieve these goals.
3. Effective team meetings to keep your staff focused.
4. Building your team's spirit with trust and growth through continuing education programs and promotions.

Whatever your office goals are, you need great staff, and you need to *lead* this staff. The most productive use of your time will be encouraging and motivating your staff. Don't worry if you're not sure how to do this, or how to be a leader in general. This is something you can learn. Leaders are not born, they are made.

CHAPTER SEVEN
8 WAYS TO MOTIVATE YOUR STAFF

Motivated employees are one of your practice's greatest assets. They take responsibility and want to do their best. They maintain a high energy without a lot of complaining. They take action and they want to complete their tasks. And yes, if this sounds a little too good to be true, they *are* out there.

The question is: how do you motivate your staff?

> Now, you do need to keep in mind that you cannot motivate someone who is not willing to be motivated. Some people just go through the motions of the job and expect a paycheck. If you have staff like that, get rid of them. They aren't contributing to your successes. They are a drain on your practice, holding everything back.

Motivating your team all begins with you and your managers. Studies have shown that when people are given a choice of jobs with equal pay, job applicants chose the job with the best boss and best working conditions. As a matter of fact, most people are not ultimately motivated by money, but by respect and being appreciated in their work. Opportunities on the job to grow and become better can be stronger motivations than your average bonus. Understanding this can help you get to the root of what actually motivates your staff to do their best.

As the manager and owner, it is your job to set the tone, motivate the group, and inspire responsibility. Here are a few steps to help you do just that:

1. **Make sure you are constantly communicating with your staff.**
   Morning huddles, weekly staff meeting, training sessions, performance reviews, lunch meetings or private one-on-one sessions are not just advised but are mandatory. They ensure you and your team are on the same page and working together toward your goals.

2. **Treat your staff fairly, equally, and with trust and respect.**
   You reap what you sow! Treat people poorly and you get poor performances back. Treat them like they are smart and with tremendous respect and you get great results.

3. **Share your vision and goals with your staff.**
   Better yet, sit down with your staff and ask them what *their* visions and goals are and how you and your company can help them achieve them. Your team *wants* to contribute to the success of the practice and feel like they are a part of something bigger. Telling staff that you are going to add offices, or buy a new building, can help them get excited about new possibilities and growth within your company. Then tell them how these new ventures can help them achieve what *they* want as well.

4. **Explain the purpose of a task.**
   When giving a staff member an assignment, explain its purpose. Then ask the person if they understand the reason and repeat the task back to you. Clarity and understanding will make sure the job is done properly and will help the staff member build a sense of accomplishment, as well as eliminate the feeling that they're just executing random, meaningless tasks.

5. **Stay positive.**
   Always have a positive attitude and walk around with a smile. This maybe hard to do at times, but if the boss is acting positive, the staff will, too.

6. **Remove negative and poorly performing team members.**
   Fire them quickly, no matter what. It only takes one bad apple and the rest of the bunch can sour quickly. No one likes to hang around a negative person. It creates tension and stress. And people get upset when another staff member is not doing her job, meaning everyone else has to do more work. Staff may or may not come to you to complain about these issues but observing any change in behaviors or bad habits around the office is a clue something is going on. Ask questions and observe.

7. **Delegate.**
   Staff will stay motivated if you trust them with key assignments. Make sure you train employees frequently and ask them questions in order to make sure they understand the tasks you are entrusting to them. Do ask for status updates for that key assignment. You are not looking over their shoulders, but you *are* helping them succeed.

8. **Maintain your own motivation.**
   Keep on learning new ways to better yourself as a person, as a physician, and as a businessman. Listen to CDs in your car and read ten pages of a good book every night. And definitely stay away from the news! It will only bring you down.

Improving motivation in your staff doesn't happen over night. But if you have a great team, working to help them feel valued and providing them with opportunities to improve and grow in their jobs can make a huge difference in a short amount of time. Never forget: *you* are the leader, doctor. You will always set the tone and provide an example to your team. The better you lead and the more you invest in your staff, the more you invest in your practice's success overall.

CHAPTER EIGHT
WOW CUSTOMER SERVICE

There are all kinds of customer service: poor, just ok, good, great. And then there is the kind of customer service that makes people stop and say WOW! Imagine if you could wow your patients every time they came into your office. What would that do for you and your organization?

People have become accustomed to ordinary service. You go to a restaurant and the hostess doesn't seem to care. She doesn't smile, she is not friendly, or she appears not to like her job. Truly extraordinary customer service stands out because it's now the exception instead of the norm. Wouldn't it be great to go to a place where everyone knows your name, and you're treated like a VIP?

Everything starts with a phone call.

Phone Etiquette for the Proper First Impression

Your phones provide the very first impression patients get of your practice. This makes them an incredibly powerful tool. Your phones, and how you use them, are a reflection of you, the doctor, as well as your staff. In business, you rarely get a chance for a second impression, so proper phone etiquette is essential—and is your first chance to WOW your patients.

Do you feel rushed when answering the phones? The receptionist, also known as a patient care coordinator, has multiple tasks that she has to do in any given day. So, it is very likely that when she answers the phone, she was in the middle of another task. She then may answer the phone in a rush. Unfortunately, to the patient it sounds like your receptionist doesn't care and might even come off as rude.

A patient care coordinator is a reflection of how well the doctor will treat the patient. If the patient care coordinator is rude, then the patient will assume the doctor will be rude, too. Why would a compassionate and caring physician hire a rude employee? Thoughts like these end up running through the minds of your potential patients.

Thousands of dollars are lost every week in doctors' offices because of improper phone etiquette. The phone is the bloodline to your office. The purpose of any marketing you do to bring in more patients is to make the phones ring. The purpose of the patient care coordinator is to make appointments. When an appointment is not made, not only did you lose money in the marketing end, but you also lost money by not treating the patient. Even worse, if the patient was referred to you by another patient or physician, and does not make an appointment, then the prospective patient might tell their friend or family member or their doctor that your staff was rude on the phone. Now you lost money by not getting referrals. It is a trickle-down effect.

There should be only one reason a prospective patient calls the office: to make an appointment. It is your staff's job to provide a flawless first impression over the phone and move a prospective patient through to the point they actually schedule an appointment to see you. This can mean answering their questions and handling their concerns while still moving them in the right direction. Your receptionists need to be fully trained on the best way to answer the phone as well as how to handle common "phone scenarios"—the new patient, the phone shopper, the angry patient, etc.—with grace and professionalism.

The New Patient

There are three main reasons why a patient will not make an appointment when they are referred or when they call into your office: handling time, fear, and money. Handling time is how long it takes for your patient care coordinator to get to their call and address their needs. Fear of what will happen during the appointment—or what treatments they might require—are common concerns that lead to people putting off needed care. Money concerns and the cost of care, whether they have insurance or not, can deter people from making an appointment as well. It is up to your receptionist to handle each new caller in a timely, professional manner while assuaging medical and monetary fears. She needs to be able to communicate just how much you, the doctor, and the practice as a whole care about your patients. When the patient is at ease, an appointment can be scheduled.

The Phone Shopper

Medical costs can upset a lot of people, leading to certain patients calling in and complaining about their bills. They want to see if their bills can be adjusted, or if your competition might be cheaper for the same services. They question whether or not you actually billed their insurance or if you used the right codes. It can be all too easy to dismiss these types of patients out of hand as simply looking to short-change you what you are owed. However, your patient care coordinator still needs to speak to this caller with grace and professionalism, answering all their questions and referring them to the right department if necessary. You still need to get paid, but the way your staff handles this kind of call can mean the difference between a future returning patient or even referrals down the line.

The Angry Patient

Whatever happened, this patient is angry. Maybe they're mad about how their treatment is going, or pain they're still experiencing, or any other number of issues. It could be this patient is simply having a bad day. In any case, it is up to your patient care coordinator to get to the root of what is upsetting this caller and handle those concerns as completely as possible over the phone. This does mean staying calm in the face of someone being quite rude. A note: your staff should have a special protocol for handling a caller as firmly but professionally as possible if the call turns abusive. They need to do what they can for an angry patient, but sitting and listening to someone swear and scream abuse won't help anyone.

These common phone scenarios should be a regular part of your staff training. Set up situations in which your staff act out the rolls of receptionist and caller for each scenario, so they can all practice proper phone etiquette and handling these situations.

Here are a few more essentials for excellent phone etiquette:

1. *Everyone* in the office should know how to answer the phones and handle the common phone scenarios.

2. Calls should not be rerouted if at all possible. Do not answer a call and immediately put a patient on hold if you can help it. If you have to do this, tell the caller you just need a minute. During that minute, get someone else to handle the call, and go back to the other call that you are currently on. If you say a minute, it must be a minute.

3. Answer the phone by the third ring.

4. The financial team and marketing coordinator should have separate phone lines. Encourage patients to use their direct numbers for any needs they can help with. If a patient calls the main line and it has to do with their account, the patient care coordinator should be able to handle

simple questions; otherwise do reroute the call to the financial team. While doing so, however, give the patient the direct number for that department for the next time they call: "Mrs. Jones, I would be glad to give you to Andrea, our financial manager. In order to make things easier for you, if in the future you have any questions regarding your account, please call [this number] instead. Andrea is wonderful, and she will be more than glad to answer any question you might have about your account."

5. If you reroute the call and the other staff member is on another line, let the patient know to expect an immediate call back: "Mrs. Jones, the best person to answer that question is Andrea, our financial manager. Andrea is on another call at the present moment. Here is her direct line. However, I will give her your message and she will call you back as soon as she gets off the phone. Will that be ok with you? Is this the number where you can be reached in the next ten minutes?" As soon as you're off the phone, message Andrea and let her know to call this patient back immediately.

How your team answers the phone is your first chance to knock your customer service out of the park, so don't overlook it.

An Easy Way to Make Patients Love You

You want to know what makes one company better than another company and inspires customer loyalty? They build relationships. Because of my shoe size, I have to go to Nordstroms for my shoes. It could be about a year between my shoe purchases, but every time I walked into the shoe department, the salesman would always greet me by my name. He would say, "*How are you doing today, Dr. Wishnie*?"

> I always wondered how he remembered my name. Well, I observed that every time I came into the store, he would go to a back room first and then come out and greet me. The salesman had an index card that had a full description of me that he referred to, so he could always give me personal attention when I stopped in.

My shoe salesman isn't the only one who has built up a kind of relationship with me that gets me to keep coming back. I know a few insurance salesmen that would cut out articles or forward an email to me regarding something of interest. They knew I love baseball and if they found something they thought would interest me, they would mail it to me. Even in today's high-tech times, getting snail mail with something that actually interests me feels thoughtful and caring. It's a great technique for building a good rapport and solid relationship.

You can use this skill to up your customer service game and build solid relationships with your patients. After all, the more they feel you remember them, care about them and their interests, and are invested in them and their lives, the more likely they'll continue coming to you and refer others to you.

So, imagine a patient telling you they like golf. You then see an interesting golf story and mail it to the patient with a little post-it note that says, "*Thought you might be interested in this*." Wow, what an effect you will have on the patient! Do you think they will refer others? I am very confident they will.

There are many ways you can do things like this. Certain practice management software programs will have an area for social information about patients. You can then run a report to access this information. You can assign a staff member, or your marketing person, to gather information or articles or other fun tidbits on individual topics that interest patients and start mailing them out. If your software doesn't have that option, you can also have the medical assistant put the information in an excel spreadsheet so you can access it that way. Just make different categories based on the patient's hobbies.

This is a little time consuming for you and your staff, but what an inexpensive and fantastic way to WOW your patients. It even contributes directly to your internal marketing strategies.

There are so many other ways you can impress and wow your patients with excellent customer service, like warm cookies and drinks, fresh brewed coffee, thank you letters for referring a patient, calling all your new patients the next day, and having a clean and modern office. However, the biggest and easiest way to provide an excellent patient experience is to make sure everyone in your office is smiling and being attentive to a patient's needs. Listen carefully and make sure you show the patient you understand their needs. The more they feel you care about them, the more they will appreciate you and your practice.

> Just follow this simple advice: treat everyone—your staff, your patients, and even the UPS person—the way you would treat your grandmother. The more attentive and caring you are, whatever form that takes, the more your patients will love you.

Listening for Success

We need to listen twice as much as we speak. We are born with two ears and one mouth for a reason. The best doctors, salesman, attorneys, etc., are the best listeners. Listening is not as easy as it seems on the surface, though. We, as doctors, want to cut to the chase and find out what exactly is the patient's main problem. We do not want to hear what happened 15 years ago. So, we interrupt them when they're talking and try to get the patient back on track.

The information we receive is based on the questions we ask. Just like a computer, if you put garbage in, you get garbage out. When we interrupt, we appear rude to the patient. Just as importantly, some studies have shown that about 75% of what we hear is actually heard incorrectly. When we interrupt or are not fully present to hear what someone is really saying, we miss clues that the patient is giving us. We definitely miss their tone and facial expressions. This is a problem and a missed opportunity. After all, it is not only what they say, but also how they say it, which gives us an idea for how we need to handle their problem.

Remember I said you interrupted to cut to the chase of why the patient came in? Well, ironically, interrupting does not save you time. Ultimately it costs you time. When you interrupt, you do not get the full meaning of what the patient was saying. This is where mistakes can happen, or more commonly, you aren't able to fully address the issue or patient concerns. So, what happens? Later the patient calls to speak to you. Now you have to interrupt your day to call the patient back and spend extra time on the phone to actually listen. By not listening with intent the first time, you might just lose the patient to another doctor.

Here are some tips to help you improve your listening skills and connect better with your patients:

1. Stop talking. This is pretty obvious, but you might want to remind yourself to slow down and listen during an appointment.

2. Watch the patient's body language. Is their body language telling you they are nervous, angry, or upset? Note their posture, facial expressions, gestures, movements, and eye contact. Ask the patient if something is bothering them. Let them know you are here to help, so they should not be embarrassed to tell you the truth.

3. If you have to enter information into the computer and cannot make direct eye contact, tell the patient what you are doing and that after you enter their information, you will give them your undivided attention.

4. If the patient is sitting down, which they usually are, you should be sitting as well, in order to give them direct eye contact.

5. Don't be cold. Show empathy. Tell the patient you understand their situation.

6. Repeat what they have told you. This is the best way to make sure you understand the patient's main issue and for the patient to see that you were truly listening.

7. Be patient. Don't assume you know what the patient is going to say.

8. Look for areas of agreement. In order to communicate properly, you need to agree on something. If you continually disagree with the patient, the patient won't feel heard and probably

will not return. You can say something like, "*I understand Ms. Jones. If I was in your shoes, I would totally feel the same way*." This does not mean you are agreeing to something false. You are just saying you can see how they came to that conclusion.

9. Ask better questions. Ask the questions you need to get the answers you are seeking.

Listening is a crucial part of your customer service. It will make you a better doctor, make the patient feel at ease, and save you time in the long run. In addition, listening will increase the likelihood the patient will return in the future or refer another friend or family member. Don't take it for granted!

How to Prevent Patients from Drifting Away

You want your new patients to feel better as fast as possible. They should feel comfortable coming to your practice for help. You want them to know if they ever have a problem that they came to the right place and they are welcome to return any time they need to.

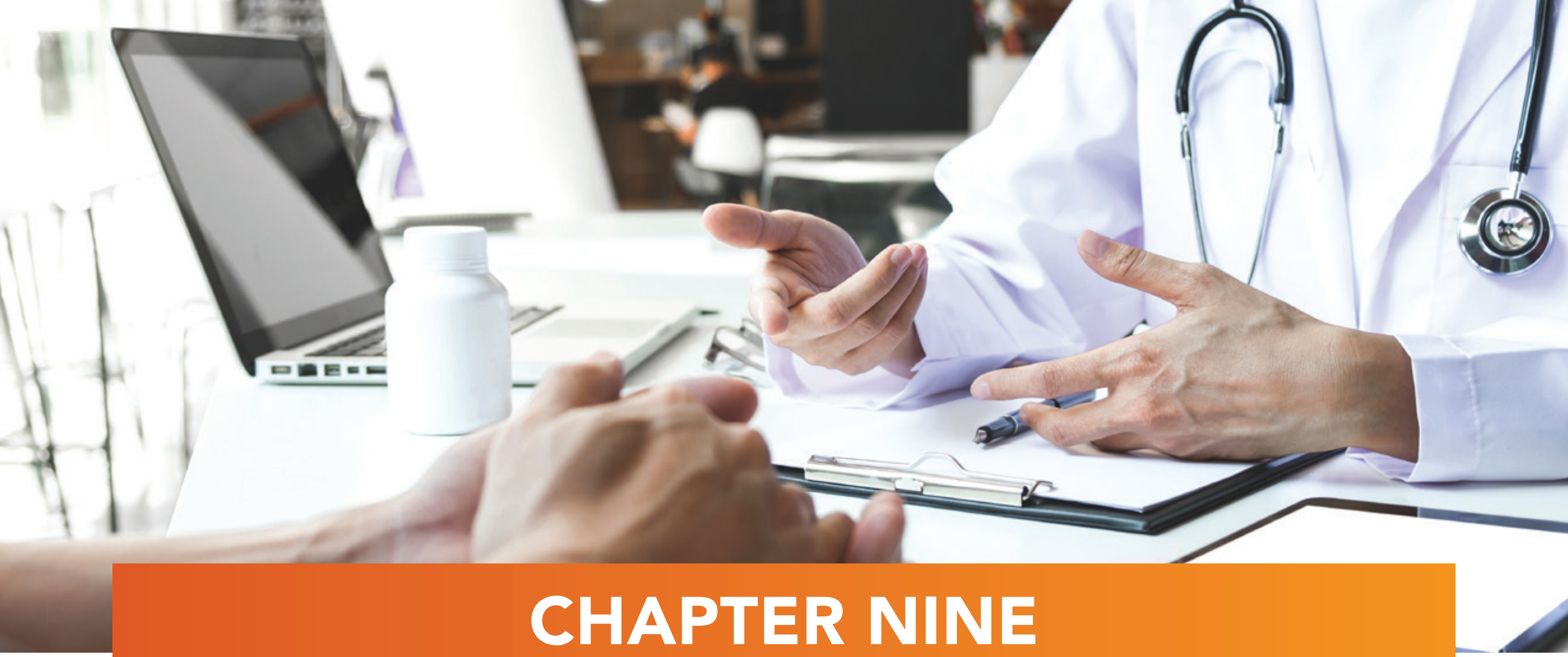
However, some patients never come back. They drift away. This usually happens for a variety of reasons, ranging from the length of their recovery to discontent with your office environment to your customer service.

One reason patients tend to leave is that they feel their problem is not resolving quickly enough or it is too expensive to keep coming back. This problem can be corrected or prevented during an appointment through better communication. You need to explain the problem thoroughly and give the patient a reasonable time frame for how long to expect it will take to get better. Explain to them that they have been suffering with this problem for a while and you are confident that you can get them better, but it is going to take several visits. I am not suggesting you tell them the exact number of visits. Just give them a game plan. Patients who are well-educated about their condition and care are less likely to drift away.

Another way to improve customer service through communication and prevent drifting is to call all your new patients the next day. They might have some questions they forgot to ask you. This gives them the opportunity to ask, as well as showing you care about their concerns and well-being.

Office appearance can also play a role in patient drift. An out-of-date or unclean office makes patients uncomfortable. Whether you like it or not, how things look around your practice tells patients how much you care and pay attention to detail. If they don't like how it looks, they aren't going to want to come back. Make sure your office is clean and presentable. Get rid of any furniture that is old and falling apart or was built at the turn of the century (unless it is a valuable antique). Make your office look more welcoming or homey instead.

Another major reason patients leave your office and never return is your staff. Your staff is a reflection of you. You could be the best doctor since Dr. Welby, but if your staff is rude, your patients will leave. You can't WOW patients with your customer service if your staff aren't providing the best possible experience. This, of course, goes back to your hiring and training practices. You can't change people's personalities, so make sure you do a great job interviewing potential staff members and thoroughly training the people who work for you.Customer service is one of those areas that many people assume is fine, but don't fully invest in. Yet it's an area that can make or break a patient's experience in your office, determining if they'll come back in the future or ever refer others to you. It can have a massive impact on your bottom line overall. Whether it's answering your phones, building patient relationships, listening to others, or anything else, you and your team need to give it the attention it deserves. Your patients—and your practice overall—will thank you for it in the long run.



CHAPTER NINE
GETTING PAID

You need to get paid for the services you provide. It sounds obvious, but it's amazing how many doctors can struggle in this area. Getting paid begins with your ability to sell your services to your patients. It is always recommended to get all the patients' benefits prior to their visit. This will allow you to provide all the necessary treatments at the time of service. Beyond that, in order to completely give the patients what they need, you must believe in yourself and your services. You can't be afraid to recommend something that may cost extra or go beyond insurance if it truly will help. This is how you grow your bottom line and ensure you are paid for all your different services.

Get Patients to Say Yes to Your Recommendations

There will be times your patients really would benefit from a treatment that costs a little extra or goes outside what insurance normally covers. Many doctors hesitate to recommend these things, afraid their recommendations will be rejected immediately simply because of the extra cost. And in some cases, this will happen. This doesn't mean you shouldn't believe in these treatments and recommend them when they really would be beneficial.

In order for patients to say yes to your recommendations, you need to develop a good rapport with them. Why do some people buy from one company over another? It really has very little to do with cost. People buy from people they like and trust. They are willing to spend a little extra if they believe the benefits of what they get outweigh the upfront costs. This applies to your treatments, too.

Once you show people you care and build up that relationship, they will trust you and your recommendations. This is the first step to getting paid.

Trust really begins with the first phone call. (You can go back to the previous chapter to read all about answering phones and making a good first impression.) Rapport continues with the first meet-and-greet with the staff at their appointment, and then continues through their encounter with you, the doctor. It's up to you to build a relationship with each patient that inspires future trust. Use the **F.O.R.M.** approach to conversations—family, occupation, recreation, miscellaneous—when developing rapport with the patient to find out more about them and help them relax and trust you. It doesn't take much to spend a few minutes getting to know the patient and find out what they like to do. Then find out what they cannot do because of their pain or injury.

Ask questions and *truly* listen. As I said in the previous chapter, if the patient thinks you are distracted, they might think you do not care. Remember, people buy from people who care about them. You can't afford for them to think you do not care.

Ask questions like, why did you leave your last doctor? What are your goals or outcomes you would like to see happen? If the patient is nervous, try to make them really comfortable. Ask them what their concerns are and how can you make them feel more comfortable.

This is your opportunity to discover some of the patient's real needs and desires. It could be as simple as "I want to work all day without pain." Another patient may say things like, "I would like to run again," or "I want to be able to run around and play with my grandchildren." Whatever it is, paint a realistic picture of their outcomes as well as give them confidence that you will do whatever it takes to help them meet their goals. The more they believe you are invested in them, the more likely they will trust your recommendations for their care.

Why Patients Don't Buy

There are three main reasons why patients do not buy from you: time, fear, and money. If it's not convenient for a patient to receive consistent care from you, a person is overly worried about what treatment requires, or they can't afford treatment in general, they aren't going to follow your recommendations, no matter how much they want to and trust you. You need to handle all three possible objections during your time with the patient.

Your office should have convenient hours for the patient. This does not mean you should be open 24-7, but if the majority of your patients require evening and Saturday hours, then you need to make sure your office is open during these times. Note I did not say *you* need to be there for all those extra hours, but a clinician should be available. The easier it is for a patient to continually receive your care, the more likely they will do so.

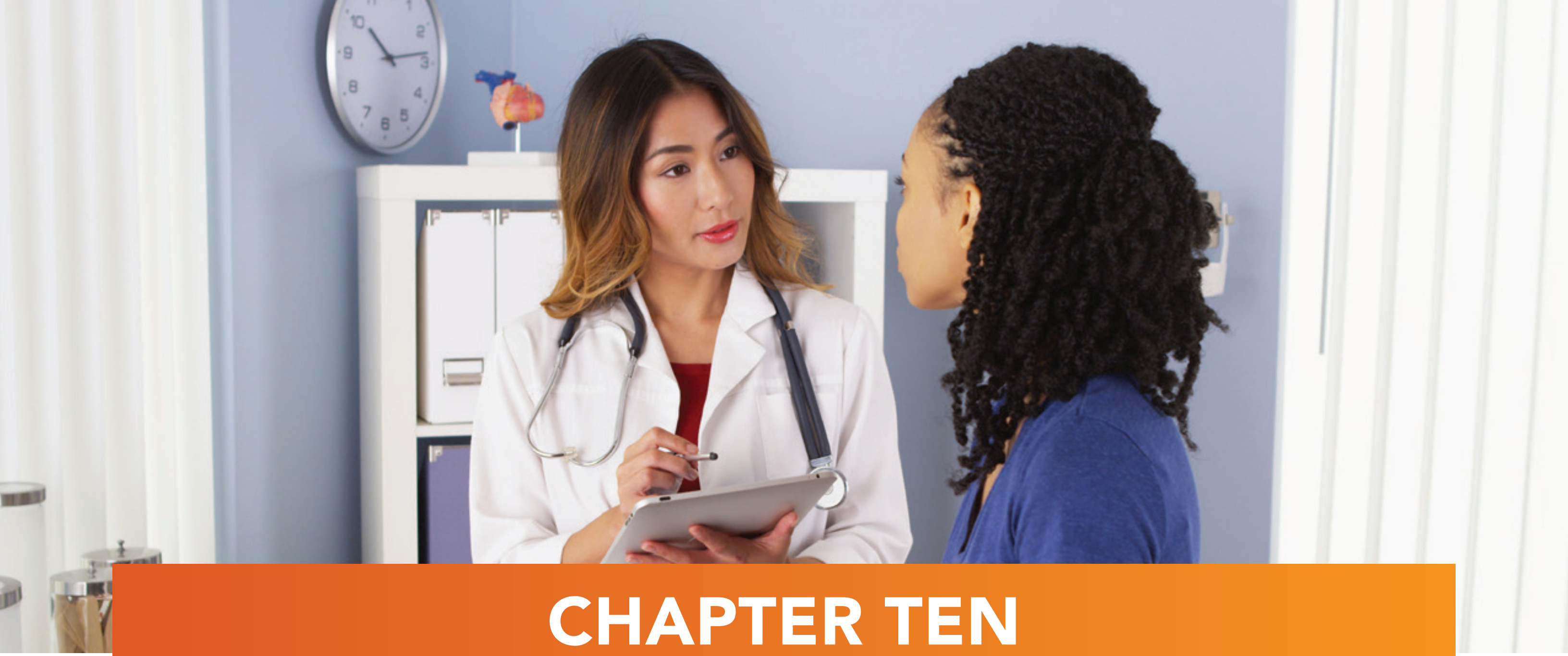
Fear could really be anything. Many people put off care they desperately need because they are afraid: afraid of the treatments being painful, afraid of how their body will look afterward, afraid of how much time they may be required to take off from their work or their hobbies, and so on. Many people are afraid that they'll still have problems, even after going through everything to try to fix their pain. It's up to you to discover what your patient is afraid of and assuage those concerns honestly.

> If the patient is afraid of pain, discuss how you are going to make them comfortable. If they are afraid of the outcomes, discuss the realistic risks and what you do to limit them. Maybe you have written or video testimonials from other patients who had a similar procedure you can show your nervous patient. Testimonials are a fantastic way to make the patient feel at ease.

Monetary concerns are particularly common complaints that keep people from following your recommendations for care. Many money issues can be handled by making sure the patient's benefits are verified prior to the appointment. If for some reason this cannot be done, then inform the patient that your financial team will handle this ASAP and then contact them back with the information. If the services you recommend cost a little extra or fall outside normal insurance, be honest about their options. Maybe you have payment plans that can help. Maybe there are cheaper alternatives you can try first. However, you should be honest about their outcomes, too. Even though it's more expensive, the best treatment typically produces the best outcomes and may even save them money in the long run.

Once you've addressed a patient's concerns that may be holding them back, you need to make them aware of the potential consequences of not following your recommendations. After all, you're suggesting something you do believe will benefit them. For example: "Mrs. Jones, I fear that if we do not correct your bunion soon, it will become worse. So, instead of a simple procedure that requires only a walking boot for four weeks, you might need a more complex one, in which you will be placed in a cast and use crutches for 6-8 weeks." Keep in mind though discussing the consequences will only work if you handle the time, fear, and money issues first.

Patients buy from people they like and trust. This is how you get paid for all your different services. Most people will pay a little bit more if they perceive there is great value from the service or product they'll be receiving. Build up that trust with all your patients. Be friendly and compassionate from the moment they call you. If you do this, almost all of your patients will accept your recommendations and your bottom line will grow.



CHAPTER TEN
HOW TO ACHIEVE SOLVENCY IN YOUR COMPANY

In order to achieve solvency in your practice, you must first understand how you get money. Let's start with the obvious: money is exchanged for goods and services. For people to be willing to pay for specific goods and services, they have to believe those things are worth the cost. They must believe in their value. Sellers ought to believe in their value, too—buyers can usually sense when they do not. If you produce, promote, and distribute these valued services, you can exchange them for money. To turn a profit on those services, you must earn back more than the value you yourself spent to offer them.

Everyone is pretty familiar with these basic concepts. So, obviously, you need to earn more money back than what it costs you to run the practice in order to be solvent.

To reach this point, you need to bring in enough patients to more than cover all your costs. This involves promoting or marketing your practice, so people hear about you and decide to come to you with their problems. Then when the patients start coming in, your office needs to be efficient and well-run to be able to handle every aspect of patients' care. You need to be the expert in providing these services and have all updated equipment and products, as well as access to the latest care technologies so you can offer them. Ultimately, all of this allows you to solve your patients' problems and make them happy. Once you make these patients happy, they can help promote your practice to their friends and family. This continues the cycle: more people hear about your practice and come to you with their problems, then pay you for your services, then pass your name on to others when you've made them happy.

This enables solvency. Its basic parts are simple. For many doctors, however, actually achieving this feels like crawling up a mountain. It *is* possible, though. You need to understand a few crucial elements: maintaining a well-run practice, identifying and analyzing your costs, and investing in financial planning.

What Is a Well-Run Practice?

What does it mean to have a well-run practice, and why does it matter so much for your solvency? First, it means that your practice is able to handle all the daily tasks and challenges of caring for patients without always falling behind or into disorganized chaos. It means having a "cookbook" for success that features your written-out systems and protocols. It means you have efficient and sufficient staff that are well-trained on that manual. It means that every patient that calls for an appointment gets one and everything runs smoothly without a hitch all throughout your day.

> When this is your reality, your practice thrives. You, your patients, and your staff are all happy. And happy patients enable your solvency.

The opposite is also true: a practice that isn't well-run or able to keep up with the demands of the day will leave you, your staff, and especially your patients frustrated and dissatisfied. Patients won't want to come back to you for help, and they definitely won't recommend you to others. This costs you income.

So, a well-run practice is essential for your business to thrive. It's up to you and your team to put in the time and energy to make this a reality, so you can build on a promote-produce-deliver cycle to achieve solvency. Promoting your services and how you can solve patients' problems creates a demand. Every staff member is involved in creating this demand. The staff must then produce incredible, "wow" customer service by staying on time, educating patients, and comforting them. Once you have delivered on the needed care and the patients get better, then you can ask for referrals.

After you get the promote-produce-deliver sequence down, *then* you then can focus on the financial aspect of achieving solvency. You need a high-quality finance team to make sure you collect every dollar you earn. You need staff that are good at keeping up with the insurance companies. Medical coding must be done properly, and claims must be sent out promptly. Insurance companies and patients must be called. The account receivables must be reviewed monthly. Benefits must be verified prior to treating the patients.

If one step falls off, then all of the steps fall off. Running your office well is like playing Jenga. If you remove the wrong block, then the other blocks will fall, and your practice systems will be broken.

Handling the Cost of Practicing

However, to have a thriving practice takes more than just *collecting* money. You have to be able to keep your money, too, which requires planning. This can be the hard part. More often than not an organization or an individual will try to spend more than it makes. Look at the United States. We are in debt as a society. And how many individuals have substantial credit card debt? Creditors tell everyone it is ok to buy things on credit, even if you do not have the money now. For far too many people and even companies, this simply leads to a hole of debt that's hard to climb out of.

You need to put systems in place to prevent your business from spending more than it makes. These systems must be concrete. You cannot cave to cries from the masses. Your staff will come to you and tell you that you need new equipment or they need certain extra things in order to do their jobs well. You can listen, but you must make prudent decisions based on sound principles and real needs before you start throwing your money around. You don't want to spend money for things you don't need, or worse—spend money you don't have.

This starts with a good purchase-order system. Your products and equipment must not get bought willy-nilly. For products you use daily, like gauze, syringes, and DME products, you will need to keep immaculate purchasing records. A purchase order should have the name of the company you are ordering from, the date of the order, the exact product, the quantity of said product, the cost (including shipping), the amount you currently have in stock, and how long since the last time you ordered.

The last part is crucial for understanding how much of a product you really need. Let's say your medical assistant wants to request 12 medium-size cam walkers and you have four left in stock. She tells you the last time you ordered 12 medium-size cam walkers was two months ago. This means you used 8 cam walkers in that size over the last two months, or an average of four per month. You know you have four left. Really, you are good for this month. Maybe you don't want to deplete your whole stock, though, or only want to order once a month. You might decide to order 2-4 cam walkers in that size instead of the 12. Why would you need another 12 at this point, anyway? Staff will frequently try to order more than you need to avoid constantly checking on supplies. But guess what? If you don't check supplies weekly, no matter what, you will eventually run out of a supply or two—guaranteed. In addition, you do not want most of your money tied up in stock. You want your funds available for when you need them most.

When you do purchase equipment, to ensure the best quality and cut down on waste, have your staff member write up a worksheet that explains the reason she needs this piece of equipment and how it will help the office. Then have the staff member include a comparison of three different models and explain which model she believes is best for the office and why. This worksheet can then be attached to a purchase order. This will eliminate the need for you or your administrator to take the time to do the research, as well as allow your staff member to take some pride in being a part of the decision-making.

The key to avoid spending money you don't have on these orders is having a surplus, or a "building fund," that you use for these situations. That way you actually have the money on hand if you really do need new equipment or tools. Then you won't be forced to buy these things on unnecessary credit. These monies cannot come from your operating account. The surplus must be calculated into your budget. So, this surplus is a part of what an organization thinks it needs to have on hand in order to survive.

If having a surplus sounds impossible or unreasonable for your practice, know that you *can* create it. Finance is a mindset. If you believe you need to have this fund to pay your bills, then you will make what you need available. This building fund will never happen unless you consider it a necessity, not a luxury or extra.

This building fund will also help you maintain a good credit rating. Your credit rating is related on how you pay your bills. Of course, the idea is to pay all of your bills on time. This, however, does not always happen, even if your intention is to do so. You can fall behind for several reasons, including delays in insurance reimbursements, poor use of funds, and unexpected expenses, just to name a few. If this is the case, the best way to pay your back bills is through dateline paying.

Go back to a certain date and ask, "Ok, it is June—can I pay off all of my bills up to the month of April?" If the answer is no, then go back to the previous month. Find a month where you can pay all the past bills up to that date. Never pay a portion of a bill. If you pay just parts of each bill, it looks to your vendors like you cannot pay. This also creates difficulties for accounting purposes, since only portions of bills are being paid.

Let's talk about accounting for a moment. Your records must be impeccable. All funds must be disbursed by check, even petty cash. You need a receipt for everything. You must account for every dollar that comes in and goes out of your office. All bills and statements must be filed accurately in order to easily obtain them upon request. This prevents embezzlement and wasting time. It also makes understanding your costs much easier.

The next step is to figure out how much it truly costs you to run your practice. Look at every vendor you paid in the previous year and divide those total bills for each vendor by 12 months. This gives you an average for how much it will cost you to run your practice in the next year. Now, look at your back bills. Add them up. Figure out how long it may take to pay these bills completely—for example, say you think they will take four months to pay off. Divide the total back bills into four, or however long it will take to pay them. Add this number to your total budget. This is your new monthly budget. Now all you have to do is to start making money.

Get your systems in order. Look at what you are actually spending compared to your budget and see where you can cut back. Focus on consistently covering all of your expenses. Then you can take any extra that is left after your back bills are paid down and put it into your surplus or building fund, so you can start building that up. This is a time where you cannot give raises or hire additional staff or buy equipment, even if you think a piece of equipment can make you lots of money in the long run. You're focusing on getting your costs under control and building up that necessary surplus. You can't buy equipment unless you have money in that building fund.

Tell your vendors about your plan. This is how you maintain a good credit rating. Always communicate with your vendors. You get into trouble when you ignore them. Constant communication and keeping your promises is how you maintain a good relationship with them. Your vendors want your business, especially if you have been dealing with them for a long time. They *want* to keep you around. If you do come across a vendor that gives you a hard time, you can just tell them (politely) that you understand, but you can easily take your business elsewhere.

Tackling Your Financial Planning

The next step in solvency is strict financial planning.

In financial planning, you want to keep funds available to retain solvency. This starts with figuring out your costs—again, how much money you need to pay all your bills—and how you can increase your income. You then need to establish a strict plan to manage your costs, avoid spending money you don't have, increase your income, and build up your surplus funds.

To maximize your financial planning, you need to understand your three types of expenditures: your permanent and monthly expenses, your non-expendable valuables, and your expendable or consumable goods. The first type of expenditures include your permanent expenses, like your building and repair costs, as well as the ones that get paid off every month, like rent, gas and electric, and taxes. The second type is your valuable and non-expendable expenditures, which involves things like your office equipment and furniture. These are essential items that you buy infrequently but do eventually need to be replaced. The third type are your expendables or goods that end up being used regularly and must be replaced frequently—your office and medical supplies. All three of these expenditures must be accounted for in your costs and budgeting.

This enables you to make smart, and sometimes tough, decisions about purchase orders, company bonuses, and even what you charge insurances and patients.

All purchase orders must be approved first by the doctor/owner, then by the financial administrator or bookkeeper to make sure they don't exceed your costs/financial plan. No large orders can be approved if the business is in debt and if money was not allocated for these purchases. Bonuses are only paid if your company is solvent. Don't forget to look at your fees, too. Are some of your fees too low? Are the insurance companies paying you 100% of what you billed? Might they pay more if you charged more? What about cash-based procedures? Are you promoting them and actually using them to increase your bottom line? If yes, are your fees reasonable or do you keep them low in order to boost the volume of these procedures? Simple volume is not necessarily better. Figure the cost to offer the procedure plus your overhead while performing this service. Also, do you know what your competitors are charging? How is your ability to sell your services? Do you back off a little when people ask you the cost? All of these things impact your income and financial planning, and thus your solvency.

As you establish your financial plan and work on your budget, there are a number of things that you need to make a priority, even if it's tempting to put them more on a back burner. Like your grandmother always said, save your pennies for a rainy day. You need to plan to put money away for your building fund and taxes. The goal is to eventually put 10% of your collections away for the building fund. Your surplus is essential and must be treated as such. Don't forget your salary, either. In fact, you should be the first person getting paid.

Make sure you do not neglect other necessities, either. A necessity is anything that brings in money. In times of financial crises, most businesses will look to eliminate costs and start by cutting their marketing department. Never, ever do this. Your marketing *is* a necessity. Factor it into your financial planning, even if you are in a "crisis time." In fact, that is a time to promote your practice more than ever—using smart, proven methods, of course. Skip spending on billboards or magazine advertising; instead promote within your practice and by spending time and dollars on your referral resources.

> Never blame your problems on the lack of funds. Your financial problems are usually due to lack of planning, which is fixable. It takes time and effort, but you can completely turn your finances around with discipline and a solid plan.

This brings up an important point about your financial mindset. Even in tough times, *never* say you are broke. Claiming you are broke will lead to poor morale. Staff will flee faster than you can yell "fire." Vendors will be very concerned and cut you off. What you want to say instead is that you are restructuring the office finances and putting in tight budget controls.

A Brief Recap

This is a dense chapter and a tough subject. The good news, though, is that financial solvency is absolutely possible. To recap, in order to have a solvent business, you must:

1. Maintain a well-run practice

2. Promote your business, produce results, and deliver on referrals

3. Practice key financial habits by:
    a. Collecting all money due at time of service
    b. Reviewing all accounts receivables and getting the money in

4. Have a reserve/surplus/"building fund" account

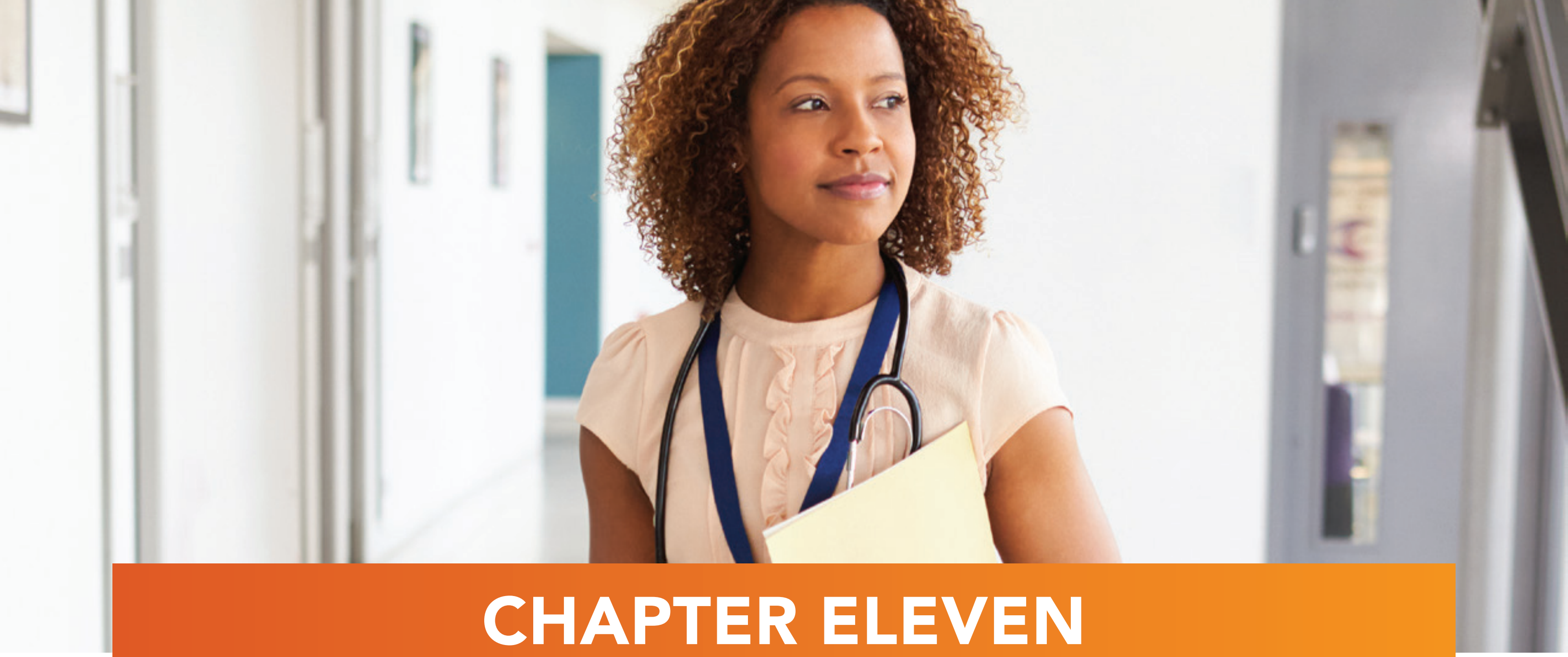
5. Avoid spending more than you make

6. Look at all purchase orders and make sure key promotional items are approved.

7. Know the return on investment for each marketing strategy

8. Increase your ability to sell your services

9. Properly financially plan for all types of expenditures



CHAPTER ELEVEN
SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PHYSICIANS

How do you become an effective and successful doctor with a private practice? It involves more than just being a good physician. You have to be an excellent leader, compassionate listener, and determined business person as well. The good news for you is that, just like you learned the skills necessary to practice medicine, you can learn everything you need to know to be highly successful in business and general life, too.

We've spent many chapters discussing specific issues that many doctors face with their practice management, ranging from establishing systems and protocols to dealing with staff to handling money and finances. Now it's time to look directly at you, doctor, and how your own development can help with your practice management. A lot of what makes a doctor successful has to do with mindset and fostering the right habits and behaviors. Here are seven habits that successful doctors follow that you can, and should, implement in your own life:

1. **Develop a mindset of success.** Failure is not an option. No matter what life hands you, you need to plow through it and develop a no-excuses attitude. Get rid of the pity-party attitude. No one wants to hang out with negative and depressed people. Stay positive about your future. Find a good book that you can rely on to lift you up. Stop watching negative TV. Focus on your vision for your life.

2. **Find a mentor.** You cannot do everything yourself. You need to surround yourself with smart and successful people with their own perspectives and life experiences that can give you insight into whatever you're going through. Trust me, if you have a problem, I guarantee another person has faced the same issue at some point. This person can help you. Find a mentor, or better yet, a group of like-minded, goal-oriented people that you can meet with monthly to share ideas. This is called a mastermind group.

3. **Schedule successful and efficient weekly staff meetings.** Use these meetings to praise your staff as well as to go over areas that need improvement. This is also a time to ask your staff for their opinions on certain aspects of the practice. You should also have separate meetings with your office manager and your partner/associate doctors. The key for all of the meetings is to make sure every staff member is on task in order to achieve their specific goals as well as the practice's goals.

4. **Write and refine your systems and protocols.** You can refer back to chapter five to go over why these are so essential for efficient practice management and a well-run practice. Take time to write out and regularly review your systems and protocols for efficiency and training purposes.

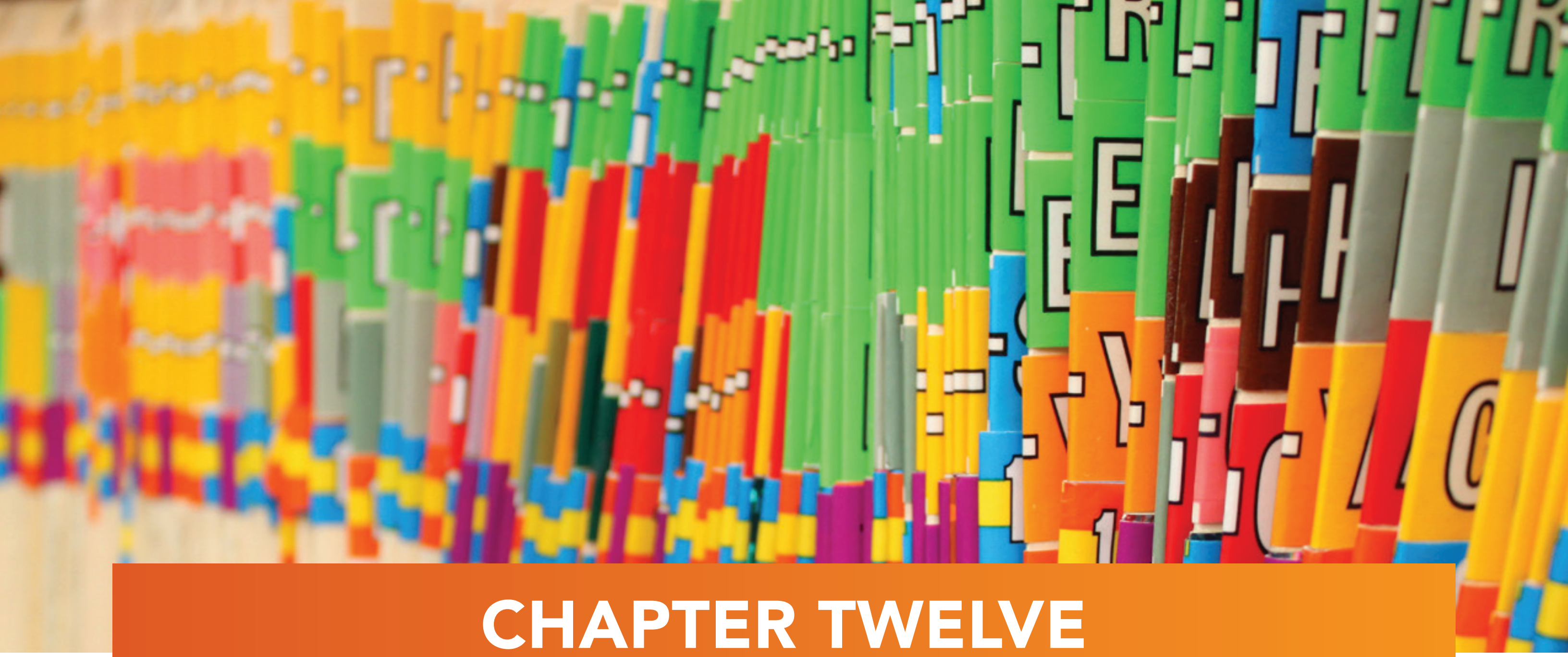
5. **Set your goals and review them regularly.** You can jump back to chapter three to review goals and goal-setting more in depth. You absolutely must have goals in order to grow and be successful. Otherwise, how do you know what you're aiming for or working toward? Goals give you your reason for getting up and going to work. Don't take them for granted!

6. **Perform periodic SWOT analyses of your practice.** SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Periodically take time to evaluate what each of these are for your practice, then make a complete list. You can then use the list with your goals as well as your systems and protocols to work on strengthening your strengths and not just covering your weaknesses, but transforming them into new strengths, too.

7. **Invest in your personal health and growth.** You are a leader, doctor, and your whole practice takes its cues from you. Don't neglect yourself or your own needs. Sharpen your skills. Take care of your body and your mind. Take time off to rejuvenate. Schedule a spa day if you are stressed and shut off your phone for a while. Read good books. Workout and drink plenty of water. The better you care for yourself, the better equipped you are to take care of others and succeed in your practice.

Habits don't change over night. It's going to take time for all of these things to become a natural part of your professional and personal life. Just because it takes time to see results doesn't mean these habits and skills don't work, however. If you truly want to see an improvement in your practice management so you can reach your goals, make the effort. It is worth your time.

There is far too much negativity surrounding the medical profession. Too many doctors buy into the depressing narratives around private practice and success. You *can* change that. It is past time to get rid of all that negative press about how bad being a doctor is today. Medicine is a great profession and you *can* make a great living doing what you love to do. Start with your habits and what needs to change around your office. You'll be amazed at what can happen when you truly dive in and commit to creating the practice you've always wanted.



CHAPTER TWELVE
RECOGNIZING WHAT PRACTICE AREA YOU NEED TO FOCUS ON THE MOST

Let's face it; there are so many things a practice owner needs to do to run his practice smoothly and efficiently. All of these aspects can be overwhelming. You can't handle them on your own. You have to be able to delegate tasks to your top staff members. However, it's important for you to be actively involved in improving the difficult or "problem" areas of your practice management.

The purpose of the practice owner is to be a coach. The coach needs to tell the staff what you want them to concentrate on. The best way to get what you want out of your practice is to focus on the main need at any given time.

But how can you tell what the "main need" is so you can address it? This need can change weekly or monthly, depending on a variety of factors. Identifying it can help you make critical decisions about the effectiveness of both your practice management and your marketing efforts. The best way to spot this need is by graphing your key numbers. There are many statistics you can graph, but the easiest and fastest way to identify your real needs is by graphing the numbers that offer critical insights into your practice. These are:

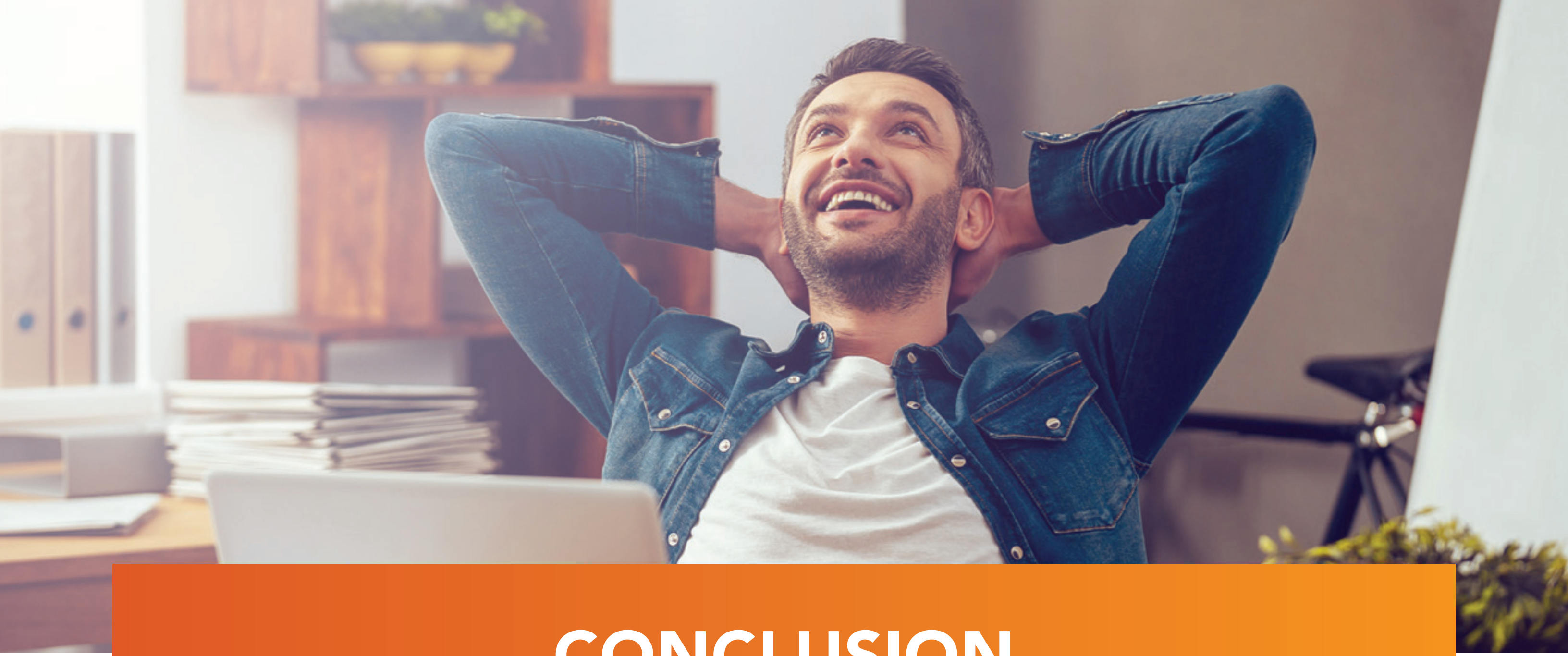
1. Weekly Charges – The charges sent out in an individual week
2. Weekly Collections – How much was actually collected in a week
3. Weekly New Patients – The number of new patients you saw in an individual week
4. Weekly Office Visits – The total number of visits for an individual week

5. Per Visit Value – How much each patient visit is worth to the practice on average. (To get this figure, take your yearly collections and divide that figure by the total number of patient visits you have seen in that given year. You can also use your monthly collections and patient visits to get a smaller-scale look at this statistic.)

These numbers should be evaluated by month as well. So, when you look at these numbers, one stat should stand out as "needing improvement." Remember, all of these vital statistics are inter-related. In order for collections to increase, you need more overall office visits and/or new patients. You also cannot collect money if you don't have adequate charges.

So, let's say your charges are down. You have to dig into things to find out the underlying causes. Are visits down? If so, are you calling and working on reactivating old patients? How is your internal and referral (visiting other referral sources) marketing? Do you need to make adjustments? Maybe most of these numbers are just fine, but your per visit value is down. If this is so, you might have to rethink your protocols to ensure nothing is getting missed that can improve the value of a single appointment. It could be as simple as following through the protocols you already have, too.

> Whatever your numbers tell you, dig into the causes and tackle one problem area at a time. This helps you find the areas of your practice management or even marketing that need the most tweaking—or major overhauling, as the case may be. From there you can take action immediately to improve things. Wherever you put your focus is where you'll see the change.



CONCLUSION

Thank you again for ordering this book and going on this journey with me to dive into challenging issues for private practices—and the solutions that can help improve them. I hope everything in this book has been helpful for you and given you some insight into ways you can succeed through excellent, efficient practice management.

While this book is a great starting place for growing your practice, keep in mind that it's just that: a starting place. You have to take the next steps yourself. If you're feeling overwhelmed or aren't sure where to start or just want more guidance in your practice management, though, know you're not alone. The Top Practices Virtual Practice Management Institute is here to help.

Our goal at the Virtual Practice Management Institute is truly to help doctors of all experience levels and all kinds of practices get their nights and weekends back. Our program covers everything mentioned in this book and much, much more. Our coaching team works directly with you to help you address the needs specific to your unique practice. We also provide you with access to a large resource library packed full of tools designed to help you on your journey.

As a coach for doctors going through the program, it has been my incredible privilege to see just what a difference learning leadership skills and investing in practice management overall can make for a business' success. As an experienced practitioner with over 28 years in my own private practice, I can say first-hand that everything I and my co-mentor counsel really does work.

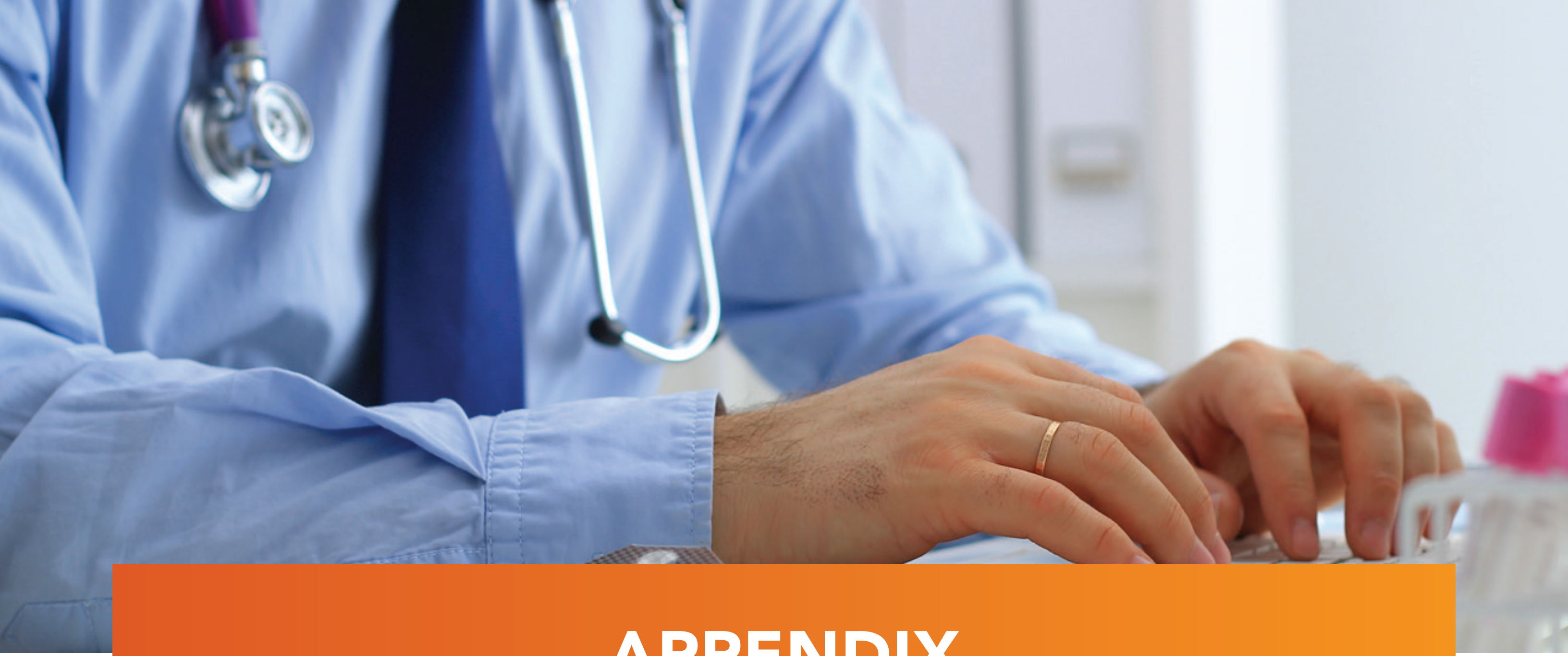
I mentioned this in my introduction, but I'll mention it again here: because you ordered this book, you are invited to a free, 30-minute consultation with either myself, my co-coach Tina Del Buono, or the founder and CEO of Top Practices, Rem Jackson. Our goal is to help you fall back in love with practicing medicine and live the kind of life you want to live. This is an incredible opportunity to get some insight into your practice and how management and marketing help may benefit you.

If you'd like to take advantage of this free consultation, have questions about practice management, or are interested in the Virtual Practice Management Institute, don't hesitate to contact us. You can visit our website, www.TopPractices.com, for more reading materials or to use our contact form. You can also e-mail us directly at Answers@TopPractices.com or call us at (717) 626-2025. We look forward to hearing from you!

Whether you're a brand-new practitioner looking to get off on the right foot, or a doctor with decades of experience looking to improve your practice, investing in your practice will always be beneficial. Your practice is your greatest asset. You want it to succeed. Be encouraged—it *is* possible for you to reach your goals. Take the next step, whatever that looks like for you. The sooner you start, the sooner you can succeed.

Sincerely,

Dr. Peter A. Wishnie
peter@toppractices.com



APPENDIX

Here you will find additional resources to help you as you pursue excellent, efficient practice management in your medical practice. It includes the goal-setting worksheets referenced in Chapter 3, as well as the hiring list and interview questions referenced in Chapter 6. If you have any questions about how to use these resources, or you'd just like extra guidance for your practice, contact Top Practices for more information! You can reach us through our website, www.TopPractices.com; e-mail us directly at Answers@TopPractices.com; or call us at 717.725.2679.

Goal Setting Worksheets

Where To Find Staff Hiring List

Hiring Interview Questions

WHERE TO FIND STAFF HIRING LIST

1. Hire only A players
2. Define the qualities you want in the new hire
3. Communicate your hiring goals with your team
4. Do not compromise
5. Evaluate perspective resumes; how long did they stay at each job.
6. Phone interview with your office manager
7. Ask the perspective employee to write an essay on why they want to work for you and what they would do in the first 90 days.
8. Bring the perspective employee in for an interview with the office manager.
9. If the office manager likes him/her then set up an interview with the doctor.
10. If the doctor likes the person, then have him/her come in again to spend a few hours with the department he/she is applying for.
11. Do not hire this person if at any time this person was late for the interview.
12. Check at least three references.
13. Perform a proficiency test. Go to hiredirect.com

HIRING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- On the interview look for proper attire. Nothing fancy, just well-kept and clean.
- Tell me about yourself. This is just to start the flow of conversation.
- Where do you see yourself in five years? ...
- Why should we hire you? ...
- Why do you want to work here? ...
- What do you know about us? ...
- How do people describe you? ...
- What is your greatest strength/ greatest weakness? ...
- When can you start?
- Why did you leave your planning to leave your current job?
- Why did you leave each job?
- Explain any gap in employment.
- How do you deal with stressful situations?
- Describe a time that you were successful in doing a task that at first you thought was difficult? How did that make you feel?
- How would you handle a conflict with a colleague?
- What is your definition of a leader and who do you consider to be a great leader and why?
- What is your greatest professional achievement?
- What is your ideal job that you are looking for?
- Give them scenarios, like collecting money and answering the phone. For example, if this is your practice, how would have the staff answer the phone? What kind of questions would you ask when a NP calls? How would you ask the patient to pay for his copay?
- How do you define wow customer service and how can you provide it at this office?
- When and where did you actually see amazing customer service?

TOP PRACTICES

VIRTUAL PRACTICE MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

This is a publication of the Top Practices Virtual Practice Management Institute.

The Top Practices Virtual Practice Management Institute is designed to end your practice management frustrations and transform you and your staff into a highly functioning medical practice team that enables you to earn the income you deserve while taking back your nights and your weekends.

Members of the Virtual Practice Management Institute enjoy the practice of medicine, enjoy serving their patients, and enjoy the time they have through excellent management skills to have rich personal lives.

Joining is Easy, Find Out More Here

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