



Start Off the New Year with New Systems

Seize opportunities to organize and systematize your practice

The new year is a great time for practice owners to pause and reflect on the previous year's missed opportunities. It's easy to fall into patterns of doing things the same way because you have always done them that way. But those missed opportunities create stress and cause the practice to lose patients and income.

The majority of the time, practice owners have not created workable systems and put them in writing for the team to learn and follow. The only way for a practice to produce predictable results and avoid missed opportunities is to have the team create consistent actions that align with proven systems.

Here are five of the most common missed opportunities in dental practices, along with how you can expose them and take control.



Sandy Pardue is an internationally recognized lecturer, author and practice management consultant. She has more than 25 years of experience in helping doctors with practice expansion and staff development. Pardue is known for her comprehensive and interesting approach to dental office systems, and offers a refreshing point of view on how to make a practice more efficient and productive.

Patient retention

Patient retention is averaging 55 percent or less, and this is a tremendous missed opportunity. Practices are focusing on getting new patients in the front door with little attention on the best patients—the ones that have benefited from their services in the past. Work on adding value to visits and building stronger relationships. It doesn't matter how many new patients your practice gets if you can't keep them. Patients are falling through the cracks in most practices.

Experience has shown the longer a

patient stays away, the less likely he or she will return to the practice. Many are already embarrassed about their mouths. The more time goes by, the more ashamed they become about putting it off, so they go somewhere else.

One of the most important things you can do to build a practice is to put your attention on your current patient base. I recommend that you do a reactivation project at the beginning of every year.

Action steps for a reactivation project

An office generally starts a reactivation project when it's desperate for patients, but in reality, the reactivation attempts should be ongoing. Patients get left behind because no one goes back and works the past due recall list and they stop sending recall cards, texts and emails.

Step 1. Generate and print a list of patients who have not been in for at least six months and go back at least three to five years.

Step 2. Choose a recall card that will be mailed. You may also consider combining this with emails to the patients. The recall cards and emails should look different than what you have been sending in the past. Here's an example of what the message could include:

Dear Jane,

We miss seeing you in our office. As you know, when dental decay, gingivitis, periodontal disease or other complications are discovered in early stages, treatment is not complicated and costs are less. Please phone the office at (insert your phone number including area code) for a convenient appointment.

Step 3. Communicate the same card and email to the same group of patients two or three months in a row.

This work to implement a patient retention system will help close the back door and keep more patients. Focusing on patient retention will not only fill schedules; it will also provide a steady flow of patients for a much healthier practice.

Lack of telephone skills

There are many missed opportunities due to poorly handled calls. It's important for practices to look at their telephone skills through their patients' eyes. If incoming calls are not handled correctly, patients will not schedule, or they will schedule with no intention of showing up. Patients hear a voice over the phone and start to envision the practice and quality of care the office will provide. Here are some key tips for having a good phone system in place:

- Answer the phone by the third ring.
- Avoid a long greeting. Keep it short.

"Dr. Goodtooth's office, this is Sandy, how may I help you?"

- Tone and inflection should be upbeat, natural, courteous and attentive.
- Speak clearly; don't have food, candy or gum in your mouth if you're answering the call.
- Invite the patient to schedule an appointment.
- Listen and acknowledge patients; don't interrupt them.
- Prepare a "cheat sheet" for the front office team with key information

about the doctor and practice.

Include answers to the most commonly asked questions.

- Repeat names and phone numbers when taking messages.
- Let callers know they made a good choice by calling your office. "I'm so glad you found us."

What would your practice be like right now if you had front office team members who were absolute experts at handling calls?

Learn the top reasons for broken appointments

- No concrete financial arrangements. They are given an appointment in the future without a signed treatment plan.
- Patients don't fully comprehend the importance of the service. They are not told what's going on in their mouth and what'll happen if they don't come in and get the situation taken care of. They are unaware of why they need to return.
- Appointment not properly confirmed. The appointment isn't properly confirmed with the right verbal skill or apprehension about the appointment is not detected. Perhaps it is not confirmed at all.
- Patient objections and considerations are not detected and handled. Patients have unanswered questions.
- Patient is past due on his or her account and will typically stay away from the practice.

Open time on the schedule

Time left open on the schedule is a tremendous missed opportunity in practices. Most of the free time is due to broken appointments. Broken appointments are the most prominent sources of lost revenue for dental practices and they add a lot of stress. A dental office schedule translates to revenues only if patients make it to the practice. When a provider is not busy, he or she is temporarily unemployed. Other reasons for open time on the schedule:

- No one appointed to actively work on the schedule and make sure it is full and productive.
- No production goals named and communicated to the person responsible for filling the schedule.
- Lack of proactive calls going out to patients about unscheduled treatment or overdue recall.
- Low treatment acceptance.
- Lack of staff training.



See this speaker live at Townie Meeting 2018!

Sandy Pardue will present her practice management course "Front Office Mastery" on Wednesday, April 11, as part of Townie Meeting 2018 in Orlando, Florida. Pardue's course teaches participants how to organize front office systems, increasing productivity and reducing stress. For more information, visit towniemeeting.com/schedule.

Same-day dentistry

In today's world, people are busy. Most will take advantage of being in the office and getting the newly diagnosed treatment done that day because of convenience. Once the dental team learns the benefits of doing the treatment while the patient is in the office, acceptance by the patients will increase. Some of the advantages are:

- It cuts down on broken appointments.
- Patients won't go home and change their mind.
- It's less processing to do by the administrative staff.
- It will increase collections and lower overhead.
- Chairs will be fully utilized and practices are more likely to exceed production goals.

The best way to implement same-day dentistry in your practice is to have the capacity to handle the unexpected flow of

patients. This includes treatment rooms and staff. Having an extra chair and an additional assistant allows you to see more patients.

If you want to do more same-day dentistry, get with your team and go over the advantages. Work out a system that you can implement in your practice. Communicate a goal to your team members and get their agreement. The office and the patients will benefit.

Do you have a plan for avoiding past missed opportunities and making 2018 your best year in practice? There's no better time than right now to turn these missed opportunities around in your practice. Start with uncovering each one and then creating systems to establish them and keep them in place.

Usually, an organization with strong systems also has a great leader. It is rare to see a prominent organization with exceptional systems and a poor leader.