



PRACTICE PRODUCTION WHITEPAPER SERIES

By Roger P. Levin, DDS 

DENTIST AS CEO SERIES:

• CEOS MANAGE THEIR ENERGY


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DENTIST AS CEO: CEOs MANAGE THEIR ENERGY

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Introduction

I have always loved reading about CEOs. Whether it is biographies or features in magazines, such as *Forbes*, *Fortune*, *Business Week*, *Harvard Business Review* and others, I cannot get enough information about how top leaders become and stay successful. One fact that used to continually surprise me was how many CEOs actually found time to do interesting things outside of work, including sailing, flying planes, hunting, charitable activities, to name a few. I used to wonder where these high-powered business people got the time to exercise, pursue hobbies and spend time with their families.

Over time, it became obvious to me that these leaders were experts at prioritizing and time management. While they do work long hours, they also take breaks, go on vacations and pursue outside interests. Successful CEOs strive to find the right balance between work, family and other activities.

Fatigue, Stress and Inefficiency

Like CEOs, dentists and specialists are committed to making their practices financially successful. While they work fewer hours per week on average than most Americans, dentists are very focused in the office. Working with patients requires both physical and mental energy. In the seminars that I present each year, I often ask dentists and specialists to raise their hands if they feel that they are tired by 3:30 in the afternoon. Naturally, a preponderance of hands goes up. I then explain that this may be the first sign that something is wrong with the practice's systems and operations. I point out that there really is no reason doctors should be fatigued or exhausted by mid-afternoon. While dentistry is a physical activity, it is actually much more of a mental one.

The truth is that most fatigue comes from stress related to inefficient management and marketing systems. Inefficiency forces the doctor to shift focus, answer questions, micromanage or be involved in administrative duties. All these non-clinical activities drain energy, leaving doctors spent before the end of the day.

Of course, it does not have to be that way. Many dentists and specialists leave the office with the same amount of energy they had when they arrived that morning, thanks to the power of high-performance systems. In fact, as one client put it, "I now have more energy at the end of the day than when I started. This is probably because I spend the day doing what I love, which is an energizing experience."

Case Study

When Dr. Z came to Levin Group, he was exhausted. Even though he had just turned 40, Dr. Z told me that he didn't know how much longer he could practice dentistry. He was considering hiring an associate to reduce his hours. After a practice analysis, his consultant pointed out that Dr. Z was in no position to hire an associate unless he was willing to accept a 25–30% reduction in his income. Dr. Z had mistaken his exhaustion for "busyness." Our analysis showed he had a growth potential of 35%.

Dr. Z was deep in debt. He had a mortgage on his primary home, two car payments, a mortgage on a second home and three children in private school. He equated his ability to pay his bills on a monthly basis with his practice performing at the right level. Clearly, this is not how practice performance should be judged. Dr. Z was so exhausted when he came home he had little interaction with his wife and children, often falling asleep in his chair after dinner.

He viewed his days off as renewal time, but he was spending his weekends catching up on the crises that had been created in the office. Fatigued and unhappy, Dr. Z received little enjoyment being a dentist. He was working to pay bills and had come to believe this was the way life was supposed to be.

After meeting Dr. Z and evaluating his situation, the following steps took place:

1. Within six months, all major business systems were replaced with documented step-by-step systems, including Power Cell Scheduling™, Greenlight Case Presentation™, the Four Financial Options™, practice financial management, and insurance protocols. As new systems were implemented, the staff were fully trained to operate them.
2. A Levin Group consultant worked with Dr. Z to give away all non-clinical activities to his team. As the systems were rebuilt, new protocols were established to increase team involvement in day-to-day business operations.
3. Front desk staff members were trained not to distract Dr. Z with minor operational issues or questions during clinical hours. He was to spend 98% of his day strictly focused on dentistry and nothing else.

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4. Dr. Z arrived at the office at least 20 minutes before the first patient. This gave him time to organize his desk and attend a 10-minute morning meeting, which was run by the front desk coordinator. The focus was on that day's schedule, including production targets, emergencies, open slots in the schedule and pertinent patient information.
5. With new systems in place and Dr. Z delegating all non-clinical activities, he had time to occasionally take a break between patients. When he had a few minutes in his private office, we encouraged him to take 10 deep breaths and focus on something that had nothing to do with dentistry. Dr. Z loved to read travel magazines. His consultant recommended always having several travel magazines on his desk at all times. When he had a five-minute break, he would go back to his office and read. When an assistant informed him that it was time to report to a certain treatment room, he would put the magazine down and go back to providing quality patient care.
6. Dr. Z was encouraged to take a 45-minute lunch break outside the office. This was something he used to do earlier in his career, but as the practice got busier, he ended up skipping lunch or eating at his desk. We also recommended that once a month he take a staff member to lunch with him for an informal chat. At first, staff members were skeptical and wondered what his ulterior motive was, but quickly learned that it was merely to have lunch, talk about the office and share any ideas for improvement. There was a deli two blocks from the office. Dr. Z made it a point to walk, which gave him a chance to get in some physical exercise, clear his head and generally feel refreshed before he returned for the afternoon.
7. Due to the new Power Cell Schedule™, Dr. Z now saw his most complex cases in the morning. By the time he hit mid-afternoon, he was dealing with smaller and easier cases, allowing him to maintain his physical and mental energy level throughout the day. Within a few weeks after the new protocols went into place, Dr. Z was amazed. He reported that the day flew by, and 4:30 was here before he knew it. When he got home, he had plenty of energy for his family, children and friends. Dr. Z had also begun exercising every other day, which increased his energy level. After losing 10 pounds, he eventually upped his workout regimen to five days a week. His wife reported that he was much more involved at home, more fun to be around and more energetic than she had seen him in years.

After one year, Dr. Z's practice had grown by 30%, which represented an increase of several hundred thousand dollars. Dr. Z went from a dentist who literally hated practicing dentistry to a doctor who loved what he was doing and who now had more money than he had ever expected to earn.

The last time I talked to Dr. Z he was taking courses in an advanced area of dentistry so that he could continue growing his practice.

Conclusion

The best CEOs manage their energy by taking care of themselves—getting yearly physicals, exercising regularly, spending time with their families and taking time off throughout the year. Most importantly, these leaders know how to renew each day. In Dr. Z's case, he planned his family vacations looking at travel magazines when he had a few minutes between patients. Whether it is exercise, reading, hobbies or time spent with family and friends, CEOs are experts at renewal, and dentists should be too. This allows you to do an even better job as a CEO of your practice and enjoy what you do even more.



Dr. Roger P. Levin is Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Levin Group, Inc., the leading dental practice management and marketing firm in the United States. Levin Group delivers premier comprehensive consulting solutions that result in Total Practice Success™ for dentists and specialists in the U.S. and around the world.

A third-generation dentist, Dr. Levin is one of the profession's most sought-after speakers, bringing his Total Practice Success™ seminars to thousands of dentists, specialists and dental professionals each year. Since founding Levin Group in 1985, Dr. Levin has been a pioneer in developing the practice management and marketing systems that lead dentists and specialists toward creating the ideal practice—A Levin Practice™. Under Dr. Levin's leadership, Levin Group consultants provide clients with strategies that work and with results that last.

Since 1985, Dr. Levin and Levin Group have shown thousands of dentists, specialists and their teams how to build a Levin Practice™ and continually increase practice production and profit, create a low-stress environment, develop high professional satisfaction and build the pathway to financial independence.

Levin Group is headquartered in Baltimore, Maryland, and has a second location in Phoenix, Arizona. For more information on Levin Group's programs and services, visit www.levingroup.com.