

THE MINDSET OF THE WINNING ORTHODONTIST

By Roger P. Levin, DDS



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Introduction

An interesting article in the Winter, 2011, issue of *Rotman Magazine* featured “win factors” for business leaders. I realized that most of these attributes could be adapted and applied to the management of orthodontic practices. I call them the Winner’s Mindset, and they are:

1. Self-Awareness
2. Motivation
3. Focus
4. Emotional Balance
5. Resilience
6. Adaptability

As we discuss these, you’ll see that they are also the attributes of an effective leader—and the keys to creating a highly successful ortho practice.

Self-Awareness

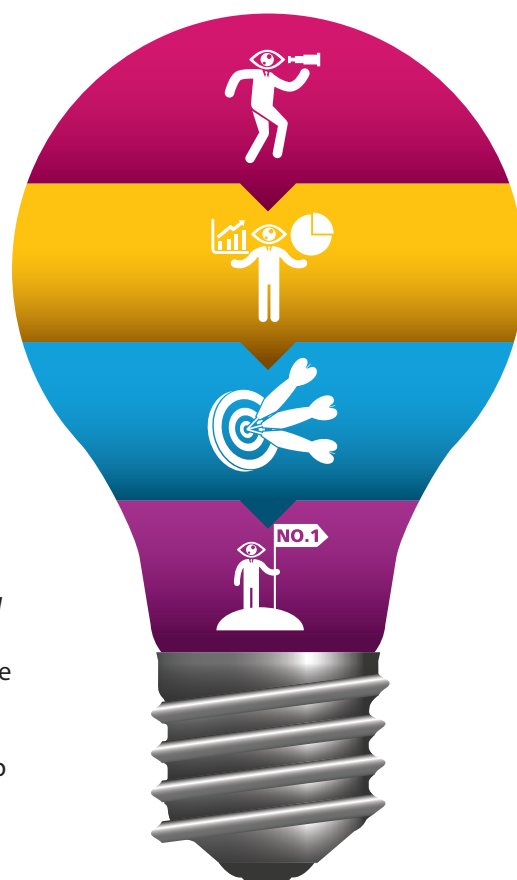
Self-awareness means understanding your own motivations, beliefs and desires. Ask orthodontists where they want to be in three years and you’ll get the typical “more money... less stress... more patients” answer. Then ask how they will get there, and most will not know.

To have the Winner’s Mindset, an orthodontist must have *specific* 3-year goals *and* an awareness of what he or she must do to reach them. Want to double doctor referrals? Invest the time and effort to maintain existing relationships and cultivate new ones. Want your staff to work in harmony? Take the lead and show them how focusing on process can minimize friction. Want more parents/patients to accept treatment, keep appointments and pay their bills? Implement step-by-step systems to make this happen.

In today’s economy, there are not enough patients accepting sufficient treatment for all orthodontists to automatically have the lifestyle they desire. Those with the Winner’s Mindset recognize that they must take action to motivate referring doctors, staff members and patients. They understand what’s going on in the world around them and respond to it with the proper strategies. Marketing is an absolute necessity, yet in a survey of 100 ortho practices, the Levin Group Data Center™ found that more than 80% had unsophisticated marketing programs which limited their ability to grow. We can advise orthodontists on exactly how to make a flat or declining practice grow, but only with self-awareness will an orthodontist recognize the need for outside help.

Motivation

Orthodontists with a Winning Mindset are highly motivated. They are not stopped by obstacles, challenges or lack of knowledge. They set challenging goals and strive to reach them. If one approach fails, they try another, and another, and another, until they get the desired results. They try new combinations, change advisors and experts as necessary, learn from each experience and refuse to accept obstacles.



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There are orthodontists who are producing \$2 million or even \$3 million per year. If these orthodontists were able to figure out a method to achieve higher production, why can't every orthodontist do this? Those who lack the Winning Mindset might say these doctors were lucky, worked in the right location, didn't have competition, had high numbers of children in the area, and so on. In Levin Group's experience with orthodontists since 1985, we have observed that every advantage comes with a disadvantage. For example, an orthodontist who opens in an area with a large number of children will sooner or later face increased competition. So what is it that makes one practice rise above the others? Is it better facilities, staff performance, financial options, treatment coordinator, marketing program? The answer is all of the above—plus the Winning Mindset. The highly successful orthodontist is motivated to continue overcoming obstacles, streamlining processes, building relationships, raising close rates and increasing production.

Focus

In recent years, we've seen many businesses selling off divisions so they could become "relentlessly focused" on their core business. There's a lesson in this for orthodontists. An orthodontist with a Winning Mindset does not become distracted. Unfortunately, distractions are common. Many orthodontists begin paying too much attention to such things as real estate ventures and other get-rich-quick schemes, when they should be focused heavily on the day-to-day work of the ortho practice—and ways to grow it.

I have met few orthodontists who were able to create more income for themselves *outside* the practice than *within* it. It's better to hire expert business consultants and delegate tasks to staff so you can concentrate on orthodontics and grow your practice to its full potential.

Emotional Balance

Orthodontists, like everyone else, have good days and bad days. Nevertheless, emotional balance is part of the orthodontist's Winning Mindset. It may not be possible to truly set aside emotions in the course of the workday, but it is essential to not let strong feelings—whether positive or negative—interfere with performance.

There are some basic techniques an orthodontist can use to help preserve emotional balance:

1. Avoid bringing "home" emotions into the office (and vice versa).
2. Spend time addressing core values and working toward important goals, which will make it easier to cope with the most difficult or unpleasant tasks.
3. Keep in mind that nobody's perfect, and that the best way to react to others' mistakes is to turn them into opportunities for improvement—not occasions for anger.
4. Don't make any significant decisions while distracted by emotions.
5. Count to 10. When hit with a rush of emotion, give it enough time to dissipate before acting or reacting.

It may not be possible to avoid getting upset from time to time, but it should always be possible to work to regain balance.

Resilience

Orthodontists with a Winning Mindset learn from mistakes and failures. Whether it is a financial setback, a patient rejecting treatment, a doctor shifting referrals to a competitor or a problematic case—it's all a normal part of being an orthodontist.

Some orthodontists who experience failure tend to stop trying. These are the ones who become paralyzed early in their career, stop growing, and fail to reach financial independence at a reasonable age. They often struggle throughout their careers with high levels of dissatisfaction and resentment.



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Conversely, orthodontists with a Winning Mindset are resilient. They bounce back, over and over again. People learn much more from their failures than their successes, so resilient orthodontists come back smarter and more determined than ever. They're mentally tough. They know they can either figure out an answer or find an expert who can.

Adaptability

Science now points to the reality that our brains, like the rest of our body, will change over time. What we put into it will directly affect what we get out of it. According to Marilyn Dyer Blair, a PhD in psychology, mental input is critical to mental output. The brain apparently forms new neural connections and pathways over time, so people who continue learning are, based on this scientific description, adaptable.

There will always be challenges, but the orthodontist with the Winning Mindset will have the adaptability needed to overcome them, finding ways to guide change and achieve growth.

Conclusion

Orthodontists who build highly successful practices approach their careers with a distinct set of attributes that are part of the Winning Mindset. These characteristics position the orthodontist for success throughout an entire career—managing any practice changes, meeting any challenges and overcoming any frustrations in a way that's as satisfying as it is effective. It's no coincidence that the factors that make for a Winning Mindset are also the signs of excellent leadership. Show me a strong leader who has taken an ortho practice to the top and I'll show you an orthodontist with the Winning Mindset.

Dr. Roger P. Levin

Dr. Roger P. Levin is a third-generation general dentist and the Chairman and CEO of Levin Group, Inc., the largest dental practice consulting firm in North America. A keynote speaker for major dental conferences, Dr. Levin presents more than 100 seminars per year. He has authored 68 books and more than 4,000 articles. In 2014, he received the Dental Excellence Award for Best Practice Management Consultant from *DrBicuspid.com*. For the past 12 years, he has been named one of the "Leaders in Dental Consulting" by *Dentistry Today* magazine.



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