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**Think Big:**  
– Raising Practice Expectations –

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Donald Trump understood one thing that has the power to immediately transform your life and practice:

**“If you're going to be thinking anything,  
you might as well think big.”**

-- Donald Trump

For Dentists, thinking bigger means raising your practice expectations. I have learned in over twenty years of working one-on-one with dentists that the single greatest determining factor in a practice's success or failure is the expectation of the Dentist. Practices who think small and expect to net \$500,000 a year, generally reach that goal. At the same time, practices that think big and expect to gross \$2 million a year also tend to reach their goal.

Dentists who expect great things from their lives and practices tend to see those expectations realized. Dentists who live everyday expecting tragedy and trouble tend to see those expectations realized. This is not some pie-in-the-sky theory about the law of attraction or compelling special unseen forces to work on your behalf. This is what I have witnessed first-hand over and over again.

Donald Trump is right. His principle of thinking big continually lifts his expectations, leading him to become the king of high-end real estate. In our consulting firm, we are very clear about expectations. We continually choose to think big and fully expect to make more money this year than we made last year and more money next year than we made this year. We actually have a framed statement of expectations that says, “Paragon does

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not participate in recessions.” We expect to thrive and grow regardless of the circumstances.

So, what are your expectations for your practice? Are you thinking big or small? Do you expect to grow significantly every year or do you expect to just barely survive and somehow pay the bills? Do you expect to have continual staff turnover or long-term committed team members? Do you expect to have a fun, friendly practice that loves its patients or do you expect a grim, boring practice experience for your patients? Do you expect to complete accepted cases with full collection or do you expect that many will drop out and never pay anyway? Do you expect to have the best practice in your area or do you expect to just do okay?

Practices tend to always rise to the level of their expectations. Think big. Your level of expectations for your practice will determine your level of practice success.

So, what can you do about it? Here are some proven steps.

### **1. Raise YOUR expectations for your practice**

The most effective action you can take right now to grow your practice is to raise the level of expectations for yourself and your team. As always, it begins with the leader of the practice. You must think big first, raising your own expectations and following those expectations with action. In the words of John Quincy Adams,

**"If YOUR actions inspire others to dream  
more, learn more, do more and  
become more, you are a leader."  
-- John Quincy Adams, 6<sup>th</sup> U.S. President**

The standards, or expectations, of the leader for himself or herself determine the expectations of the followers, the rest of the team. The scary part of this reality is that if underperforming team members are present, in most cases, it can be traced back to the leader's personal example and level of expectations.

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Lead by example. Set expectations high for yourself with your personal production numbers, your efforts in the office, the way you treat your staff and others, and the quality and integrity of your professional habits and expertise.

Take a few moments right now and think big - write down three to five expectations for yourself and/or your practice. For example, "I fully expect to treat everyone I meet every day with respect, seeking to bring out their best." Or, "I fully expect to produce \$7,000 per day in dentistry."

**Don't lower your expectations to meet your performance. Raise your level of performance to meet your expectations. Expect the best of yourself, and then do what is necessary to make it a reality."**

-- Ralph Marston

## **2. Make your expectations clear and well known**

Unclear expectations lead to unmet expectations. Have you ever found yourself wondering what in the world you did wrong in a relationship? Maybe your spouse is sitting across the table from you seething from something you did or didn't do and you have no clue what is going on. There was an expectation that was not made clear.

Staff members love to know what is expected of them so they can meet those expectations. It is absolutely unfair to your staff to expect things from them that you have not made clear. If you expect them to smile continuously, be very clear about that expectation. If you expect them to follow-up with patients, be very clear about that expectation. If you expect them to keep their schedules full, be very clear about whose responsibility that is and how it should happen.

There is a direct correlation between clear expectations and efficient results.

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The best way to make your expectations known is to turn expectations into written goals for everyone to see. For example, let's assume that one expectation you have is for each hygienist to produce X amount of dollars per day.

Write that expectation out clearly. "I fully expect that each hygienist will produce X amount of dollars per day." Share it in a staff meeting and post it on the wall in the staff area where it will be seen everyday. Have it pop-up as a reminder in your practice software. Post it near the team member who does scheduling to involve them in the process of reaching that expected goal.

If your practice expectation is to collect \$1 million this year, post it in staff only areas throughout the office as a continual reminder. "I fully expect to collect \$1 million in 2008". Talk about it during your morning huddle. Make a game of it, but whatever you do, make it a priority to keep it in front of the entire team all the time. Every team member should be able to answer quickly and clearly what the expectations of the practice are.

If you have an expectation of treating others the way they would love to be treated, post it on the wall in every treatment room. "We fully expect that every team member will treat each patient with the love and respect due a family member." Let patients know your expectations of your team and encourage them to keep all team members accountable. You can measure this expectation by regularly asking patients, "Do you feel like we treat you like family when you come here?"

High expectations mean nothing if they are buried and hidden. You'll just be thinking big all by yourself. You must make expectations known, continuously and repeatedly. There is also great power in writing out and sharing your expectations. It is a great motivator for all.

### **3. Reward yourself and your team when expectations are met or exceeded**

Finish lines are really important to a race. Runners run to finish, they run to complete the race, they run to get the prize. We love trophies and awards and recognition. They are tangible signs of our achievements that we can

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look back upon and use as motivation and encouragement for present and future challenges.

You and your team must know that there is a reward to having met or exceeded the established expectations of the practice.

Maybe the reward is a special staff trip for meeting production numbers. Maybe, if you conclude that your staff is the friendliest staff in the world of dentistry, each team member will get a brand new Mercedes-Benz. Okay, maybe that is over the top. But one thing I have noticed that great practices do very effectively is continually reward employees, whether they be very small raises or benefits or other perks.

One caution here is to fully consider the reward's long-term financial impact before you decide what those rewards might be. For example, a small raise has long-term financial consequences. A trip or shopping spree has short term financial consequences.

The bottom line is that the Law of the Carrot (rewards drive performance) is in full effect in every human being. We thrive on rewards for our achievements.

The best way to immediately raise the level of your practice is to start thinking big by raising your expectations for yourself, your team, and practice performance and profit. Your expectations will determine your results. Raise your expectations, make them crystal clear, and reward yourself and your staff when expectations are met. And....then....do it all over again with even higher expectations.

Studies show that 79% of dentists are frustrated with the amount of money they are making. Don't be counted among them. Think big! Raise your expectations and your practice will follow.

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