

6 MUST-KNOW TIPS FOR PRACTICE SUCCESS

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Are You a SMARTE?

After reading one of these articles – how many of you have immediately jumped into changing something in your business because of what you read? After 3 days of sitting in continuing education sessions – how many of you had a game plan to implement some of the ideas you heard? How many of you were just dazed and confused by all the information, feeling as if there was no clear direction on how to implement all those great ideas?

The following 6 tips are your clues to be a SMARTE (no, not smarty-pants...just smart) and realize that success is obtainable if you don't forget to apply the knowledge you gain at this session, other seminars, industry publications and that colleague sitting next you at the conference who has advice to share!

S – Share the Vision

You cannot expect a work in a successful practice if no one has any idea what the mission or vision really is. A "SMARTE" knows that your team members need to work as a cohesive unit, a collective intelligence if you will, on everything from talking to clients on the phone, to exam room consultations, to discharge instructions. They cannot function collectively if they have no clue of the practice's strategic tenets – the vision – really is.

Employee behavior and performance, when connected to a shared core principle, enhances business performance. This link between behavior and core principles ranks higher than any other factor for business success (Zook and Allen). How does one get to this high level of shared principles? With leadership.

Leadership must focus on a few critical areas to spur business success (Sugars):

- Help employees understand the business strategy, mission and vision
- Help employees understand how THEY contribute to achieving goals
- Share information with employees relative to goals and strategy

Share the vision, share information, lead the way – after all, your employees cannot be helpful to your business success if they have no clue what your goals are or what the practice strategy is. Help make the team smarter by sharing the vision.

M – Manage your Systems

Running a business entails managing your business systems – financials, operations, human resources.... Business success hinges on being profitable. Profitability is enhanced when you watch the numbers. Increase the number of “SMARTEs” in your practice by managing some numbers.

Develop scorecards and track Key Performance Indicators (KPI) such as number of transactions, revenue per doctor, net income, cost of goods sold, payroll as a percentage of income, new client numbers, client retention, client satisfaction and net promoter scores, etc. Keeping information like this at your fingertips enables you to see how your practice measures up to published benchmarks of well management practices, as well as how your practice is performing compared to itself in previous quarters or years. Kick it up a notch and present information to your team using techniques from Open Book Management (OBM).

In addition to KPI Scorecards, having some form of documented processes will benefit the management of your operations and human resource management. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) can be as detailed as having scripted phrases for communicating to clients, or generalized listings of points to cover regarding a topic or procedures. Employee handbooks, training manuals and medical protocols are necessary for job performance clarity and even mitigating legal risks.

A – Adapt and Learn

Differentiation from competitors will give you a competitive advantage; however, rapid learning and adaptation will be necessary for continued success (Zook and Allen). A quick example of this idea can be seen in Kodak – great progress, profitability with their camera film...until digital cameras were developed and Kodak failed to adapt fast enough.

Change is inevitable, do you learn and adapt when circumstances present themselves? Do you view obstacles as opportunities? How do you monitor obstacles and opportunities? Most of us have conducted business SWOT analysis – Be a “SMARTe” and look outside your immediate walls for the opportunities and threats.

An easy way to keep your fingers on the pulse of change is to request feedback from your clients. Surveys such as the Net Promoter Score (Zook) are a great way to find out what your clients are thinking, saying and advocating. Remember to survey your team too as they are often the ones who hear praises and complaints from your clients.

Once you learn of changes in the air, determine if your services are meeting the needs of your clients, patients, team and business. Differentiate yourself from your competitors (both local and on the internet). Manage change initiatives with careful, organized planning, Do not ignore the power of the current culture and recognize when you need to have a cultural change before implementing strategic changes – because culture trumps strategy every time.

R – Relationships need Built

A “SMARTe” knows that delivering great client service means building relationships, connections and rapport. Building that relationship requires a strategic plan – listening to what your clients are saying, new, old and disengaged as well. Develop a plan to capture

“shoppers” and bring them in as new clients, then convert them to “regulars” and, finally, “advocators” of your practice. One business that is fanatical about relationship building is Zappos. Zappos feels that in order to meet business goals they must control every aspect of the customer experience by providing value at every client touch point and communicating value in their marketing.

You do need to realize that your clients are not only the ones who bring their pets through your front doors. It is also potential clients, local businesses, vendors and even your employees. Positive relationships in your community are an important factor for business success – affecting your brand recognition as a good community citizen and your employees’ loyalty and pride in being associated with such a great practice.

T – Teams for Greatness

Hire right, train right, and get the right people in the right seats on your practice “bus” – thereby building a great team. Zappos pays attention to the team by creating a powerful culture and painstaking hiring and training protocols (recall the manage your systems tip). The leadership at Zappos feels that you cannot expect great customer service from unhappy, poorly trained employees. Zappos is so sure of its team building that they have systems in place to actually pay a new hire to leave if the relationship isn’t working out.

“SMARTEs” know that creating a winning team starts before you even hire someone. It starts with job descriptions, identifying the talent needs of the practice and the culture you want to have. Once hired, the importance of training is paramount not only to the success of the individual, but also the business. Sharing the vision, teaching them the systems that are managed and how to adapt and learn is the SMARTE way to building a great team.

E – Every Client, Every Patient, Every Record, Every Time

Lack of consistency kills client service and patient care – worse case; it may result in the death of a pet. Do you see “every” when you perform a chart audit? What prevents the team from achieving “every”? When you achieve “every” you will demonstrate to clients that you are trustworthy thus building trust and client loyalty.

Some practices say they achieve “every” until they get busy or someone calls off. Some have team members who ignore “every” just because of their position in the practice (the owner, the longest employed person, the newest person). Should they be permitted to ignore “every”?

Consider a few helpful tips for achieving “every” in your practice:

- Identify your culture and if a change is needed to accept “every” as a goal
- Choose specific targets where you need to achieve “every” and create SOPs
- Designate a team member/s to monitor those certain targets and report to the team
- Develop a scorecard to monitor targets and if “every” is being achieved

Successfully changing the culture and behaviors to achieve “every” means that you are working with your team to identify values, beliefs and actions. It is not an easy change, but the rewards are huge for your Circle of Care. Perhaps it is time to adopt the mantra of “Every patient, Every Client, Every record, Every time by Every team member.”

Are You Ready to be a SMARTE?

It can be difficult to change old habits. Perhaps you never discussed your vision or mission with the team. Maybe you are paralyzed by all the data you feel you need to monitor so you fail to monitor any KPIs. Whatever the old habit, you can easily chose one of the tips and tackle it – instilling new habits can have dramatic effects on practice success. After all, only “SMARTE’s” are successful.

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