



The essentials of setting up, building and running your practice.

Episode 8:

Creating a Happy Fulfilling Practice

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Hi, I am your host Matthew Holmes and this is Episode 8 of PracticeDNA, the podcast that helps setup and run your own practice. In this episode we are going to look at how to ensure that your patients get a consistent customer experience while at the same time ensuring you are going to create your ideal business and if you stick around to the end of the episode I will share with you the best business podcast of 2012 and 2013 combined apart from this one of course. So let us get to it, first of all the main reason that most people want to create their own business is that they want freedom. They want freedom from a boss telling them what to do and they want freedom to do things the way that they want to do. Some people want to create a business that gives them more freedom, so they want to be able to do things like freedom to play golf when you want, you want to be able to go on holiday when you want and obviously to do this your business has to be a success and probably more importantly it has to be able to run without you. Now many people end up creating a business that falls apart when they are not there, they make themselves a lynchpin around which everything revolves and when they are not there to direct things the business doesn't run. Now people in this situation often end up working long hours, risking burnout, relationship breakups etc, which to me is the very antithesis of freedom. So to avoid getting in this situation you have to create structures and that is what we are going to discuss in today's episode, how you go about creating a business that can run without you.

Now you may still decide that you want to be involved in the running of your practice on a day to day basis but I would suggest that you have to make that a choice not a necessity and if you end up creating a business which falls apart when you are not there then it becomes a necessity, you have to be involved in your business. Whereas if you create one that runs without you, you can very nicely end up in a situation where you can choose whether or not you want to be in the practice at any given time.

Another perspective is that to be successful and to make enough money for you to survive and to thrive on you have to deliver good service to your patients on a consistent basis. Now the key words in that sentence were good service and consistent, it is not enough to deliver a good service one day and poor or mediocre service the next. To create a really exceptional business and one that people really feel is worth telling their friends about you really have to exceed expectations, you have to be remarkable. Now, being really bad can be remarkable as well but that is obviously not conducive to being a prosperous business. You need to create being exceptional or remarkable in a very good way. The last thing you want is to create an exception or be remarkable in a bad way, so just be aware of that. Once you have exceeded expectations then you have to work hard to maintain those high level expectations as well. Some people tell you that you have to continually exceed the expectations in your patient experience, I really think that is unrealistic because there is only so far that you can go without killing yourself and your staff because every time you exceed the previous expectation that new experience

becomes the expectation for next time. In my opinion setting high levels of customer service and maintaining those high levels is enough but maintaining it really is the challenge though.

The way that you maintain your customer experience is really through thorough standardisation of your procedures. Now this really doesn't need as tedious as it sounds, you may think look I have just escaped from my job why would I want to restrain myself with procedures, I want to be free as the air whatever. So the reality is that you and your staff will develop procedures in your practice. Either you will do it or in the absence of guidance from you your staff will work them out for themselves. For example, assume you are starting your practice and it is just you working there, when you take a telephone call to make a new patient consultation, you are going to do it in a certain way, you will say certain things, you will do it in a certain order into certain details into a computer system. Hopefully you will have some reasons for doing it that way, you know, it may just be the way that they did it in the last clinic that you worked at or hopefully you put a little more thought into it and that is the way you have developed it based on customer service training and experience.

So therefore you have already worked out a procedure around how you book a new patient consultation, I am suggesting that what you need to do then is just document and formalize that procedure in a step by step process. Now when you are starting out you may think well, what is the point, I already know how to do it but the point is hopefully that you will grow your business to the point where you are employing staff to do the things that you are currently doing. When you do that you have three options, you can give them no training at all and let them work it out for themselves, in which case you are going to lose all control over how your front desk runs, you will lose all control over what sort of customer experience your patients have or you can spend hours training your staff how to do it your way and hope that they remember or you can give them induction training and provide them with a processes manual that tells them exactly how to do their job to which they can refer to on an ongoing basis. And I would obviously suggest that doing the last is the best of that. So basically you really want to be able to give them some sort of induction training and provide that processes manual because if you don't give them that basis to work from, they are really just going to work it out for themselves and even if you do give them induction training without any of the documentation they are going to forget how to do things and unless you are there looking over their shoulder all the time, people aren't going to remember how to do it, they are going to make it up for themselves and again you are going to lose control of how your front desk works.

So when you are starting up, think about how you want your business to run both now and in a few years from now. What sort of experience do you want your patients to have, what is going to build loyalty and make them want to refer patients to you? I would start developing ways of doing ways in your practice that would support that aim and document them using a step by step written process. It is time consuming but if you really want to create a business that not only doesn't fall apart from the moment you walk out the door but continues to provide excellent customer service to your patients in your absence then this is a vital step and trust me if you think you are busy when you are starting up it is a lot harder to implement when you are busy in your practice managing staff, fighting metaphorical fires in your practice because you don't have any structures or systems in place.

So even though we have given you two good reasons why you need systems in your practice, there is a third reason, staff happiness and satisfaction. Studies have found that believe it or not pay is not often one of the biggest factors that influences your staff to stay with you. One of the biggest factors is clear expectations of what is required of them and the knowledge of how to do their job. So if you hire a receptionist and you ask them to work it out for themselves and then even worse criticise them when they don't do it right, you are going to create stress and anxiety in that staff member, they will then not in a positive frame of mind to welcome your patients and provide them with remarkable happy experience. So you really need to do your staff a favour, create standardised procedures so that they know exactly what is required of them and how to do it. You are going to benefit, they are going to be happier and your patients are going to benefit as well. And this process not only extends into your customer phasing areas, anytime you do something in your business which you are going to have to do more than once then you should create a procedure document for it, things such as doing the banking, doing follow up phone calls to patients sort of dropped out of care, all these type of thing. That is stuff you want to be standardising as well as your day to day front desk type of things. It is going to make your life easier and it will expand your business.

So in summary, creating standardised procedures that will help create a consistent customer experience will help create a business that can run without if necessary and lastly your staff are going to be happier and they are likely to stay with you longer.

So we have given some pretty high level advice here, so what are some action steps that you can take? Firstly I would pick five processes that you do the most in your practice such as booking new patients, taking payments etc and write down a step by step process for those tasks. Save the documents in a common in folder on your front desk computer or your server or whatever you have got access to them. Secondly, I would do some further reading, the granddaddy on all books on procedures is one called The E-Myth, by Michael Gerber, it was written a while ago now but it is still an extremely relevant book and if you only read one book, make it that one. Otherwise there are two other books, one is called Building the Happiness Centred Business by Paddi Lund. Paddi is an Australian dentist who transformed his practice, it can be a little bit tricky to get the book but it is well worth a read and we will put a link in the show to his website so that you can track that book down. And lastly there is a free book that you can get by a gentleman by the name of Sam Carpenter and it is called Work the System. It is also available as an audio book so you can listen to it as you are driving along in your car. It does tend to be a little bit repetitive I would say but there are some real gold in its pages. The website for that is called workthesystem.com and again we will put a link to that in our show notes.

Now, let us move on to our quick tip, if you like podcasts which I assume you do if you are listening to this one and I would check out Seth Godin's Startup School, this is an excellent podcast on creating a new business, it goes through all the different processes that you need to be considering, how to brainstorm your business, how to make it exceptional, how to deliver great customer experiences etc. So I will pop a link to this Seth Godin's Startup School I in this show notes as well. So be sure to check that out, I am sure you won't regret it.

So thank again for listening, be sure to pop on over to iTunes and leave us a review or submit a comment on Facebook or our blog. Thanks again and we will see you again soon.

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