

Get What You Want in 2008: Five Steps to Success

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Whether you are a large, multi-practitioner operation, or a small, solo practice, the question is the same: What can you do now that will ensure greater success for you in 2008? There is so much to look at when strategizing for the future, that it's easy to overlook key areas that might need attention. Even the most organized, well-staffed practices often miss crucial areas where a small intervention would yield a significant increase in their success. In this article, you'll discover the five critical steps to take to move your medical practice from where you are to where you want to be.

Key words: Large or small practice; identify success barriers; self-assessment; change initiative; strategic planning; motivation.

In just a few weeks, people all over the world will begin their annual process of reflecting on the past and thinking forward to what they might do differently in the year ahead. "This coming year I'm going to the gym *every* day!" "This is the year I'm going to clean my closets!" "2008 is going to be *my* year!"

This is also the time of year when many medical practices do their year-end audits. They review their overall statistics, go through the results of patient satisfaction surveys, conduct staff reviews, and begin discussions about strategies for the coming year.

There is so *much* to look at when assessing your medical practice that it's easy to overlook key areas that might need attention. Even the most organized, well-staffed practices often miss crucial areas where a small intervention would yield a significant increase in their success.

Whether you are a large, multi-practitioner operation, or a small, solo practice, the question is the same: What can you do *now* that will assure greater success for you in 2008?

Ironically, the steps are the same whether you want to improve your business or your personal life. Here are five steps to help you get everything you want in 2008.

STEP ONE: DETERMINE PRECISELY WHAT YOU WANT

The first question to ask is "What do we want in 2008?" Be specific. The more detailed a picture you create, the more likely it is that you will achieve it. For example, you might say "We'd like to increase our number of patient-to-patient referrals." Instead, get microscopic: "We'd like every surgical patient to refer one surgical patient within one year of his or her surgery." The more specific you are, the more you can map out a precise strategy to make that happen.

STEP TWO: COMMIT TO CHANGE

Zig Ziglar, famous author and motivational speaker, is renowned for his statement, "If you keep on doing what you've always done, you'll keep on getting what you always got." The implication of that message is if you like what's happening in your practice, there's no reason to change anything. Unfortunately, in today's competitive health-care arena, that is not necessarily the case. Here's why:

If you have a successful practice, the odds are that you've worked hard to get it that way by applying a specific set of behaviors and attitudes. Logic would suggest that if you keep on doing that, you'll maintain your current level of success. Unfortunately, your competitors have been watching you, and if they want to catch up with you, there

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is a strong likelihood that they are now *copying* you. In other words, *they* are now doing what you've always done! Do the math: if two practices are now doing what one has always done, you are now vying for the same patient population. Is there plenty to go around? Or are you going to have to start sharing your piece of the pie with someone else?

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So even if you aren't looking to increase your revenues, you still have to tweak your practice to make sure that you sustain your current referral base and that your services are at least in line with what your competitors are offering, or you are likely to see a decrease in your numbers each year. The bottom line is simply this—if you want to maintain the status quo, you're going to have to keep changing.

STEP THREE: LOOK BACKWARDS

In any change initiative, the key is to determine the smallest possible intervention to bring you the greatest result. The only way to do that is to look backwards and assess objectively what has been working for you and what needs to change.

What have you been doing, and what did it get for you in 2007? While there are many areas of your practice that you can review for improvement, the biggest bang for the buck typically comes when we look at people factors. Take a few moments and rate your practice on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = never and 5 = always for the following 18 criteria:

1. **Staff:** Are staff members self-motivated, mission-driven, friendly professionals, who refrain from negativity and consistently strive for excellence? Do they serve as enthusiastic ambassadors for your practice, with outstanding customer service skills? Are they converting incoming calls to appointments, and appointments to procedures, regardless of insurance criteria? Are they effective communicators who comfortably shift their styles to accommodate others' needs? Are they team-players who pitch in for each other, keep positive attitudes, and readily take on tasks that aren't in their direct job descriptions? Do they stay with you for five or more years?
2. **Partners:** Do all partners communicate effectively with each other? Do they share the load equally with respect to practice management, call, and networking? Are they

on the same page regarding their vision and mission for the practice? Do they show excellence in leadership skills and staff communication? Do they have written goals and a step-by-step plan for their attainment?

3. **You:** Are you an effective communicator with staff, patients, and colleagues? If you're a physician or treatment coordinator, do your case presentations produce a high rate of acceptance and patient compliance? Are you a strong leader who is skilled at motivating others to action? Are you someone who welcomes change? Do you have a strategic plan outlined that comes directly from your personal vision for the practice? Do you hold regular, frequent meetings that are productive and leave everyone excited? Do you address conflicts effectively so that "unfinished business" doesn't build up and fester?

A perfect score is 90. If you scored less than 90, look at the questions where you rated yourself less than a "5." The lowest numbers should be your top priorities for change in 2008.

STEP FOUR: ELIMINATE SUCCESS BARRIERS

Thousands of people end or begin each year by creating a list of goals for the coming year. If they've attended enough seminars (or listened to enough motivational tapes), they will list each one of their goals in an organized notebook, with a plan of action, affirmations, and even associated deadlines.

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Does this process work? Yes—and no. Goal setting works only insofar as you have three critical ingredients:

1. **Desire:** A clear sense of what you want;
2. **Resources:** The ability to do everything it will take to reach your goal; and
3. **Permission:** The willingness to do what it takes and live with the consequences of your actions.

If you are missing any one of these three components, you have a success barrier. A success barrier is anything that stands in the way between what you have and what you want. The shortest distance between what you have and what you want is to ensure that you have all three components clearly in place.

The three categories come together to create a formula that we call "The ACTION Formula." Each of the three components of the formula is critical to success, and no one component is more important than the others. The ACTION Formula forms the foundation for every action we take and is the lynchpin of success.

The first component of the formula is **DESIRE**. In order to take action on the things that will bring success, we have to have a burning **DESIRE** for what we will get once we have achieved the goal. For some people, it is the pride of achievement, whereas for others it is what that achievement will get for them. This sounds simple, but the truth is that **DESIRE** can actually be a success barrier in some very specific situations:

- **Status quo:** This situation occurs when everyone in a practice is satisfied with what they have. They don't *want* more patients or more procedures or more partners or multiple locations or retail sales or increased recognition in the community. Where there is no **DESIRE**, there is no drive for change.
- **Stalemate:** This is the most common situation. It occurs when there is one person (or a group of people) within a practice who *wants* more success, and one or more people in the practice who *don't* want more success. In this case, those who resist the change can block or even overtly sabotage an initiative.
- **Low simmer:** Often a practice will have **DESIRE**, but it just doesn't have enough energy underneath to fuel the fire enough to motivate action. For these practices, the success barrier is that they haven't found the real carrot that will drive them to want something so badly they can't stop themselves!

No matter how much you want something, **DESIRE** is useless unless you are able to do what it takes to get what you want. So the second component of the **ACTION** Formula is **RESOURCES**.

What's scary about becoming more successful?

RESOURCES are all of the things that a medical practice needs to do business and practice medicine (e.g., doctors, staff, patients, facilities, equipment, skills, capital, referral sources, marketing, etc.). There are many highly motivated practices that fall short of success because they haven't got the **RESOURCES** to follow through on their goals. In this case, **RESOURCES** can be a huge success barrier for a practice. Make certain that you have all of your ducks in a row, or you will continually find yourself falling just short of your goals.

The third component of the **ACTION** Formula is **PERMISSION**—the degree to which you're *willing* to let yourself be successful. Ask yourself an important question,

“What's scary about becoming more successful?” or *“What's scary about failing in your efforts?”* Once you discover how you are stopping yourself, you can then conquer the voices in your head that serve as your success barriers and give yourself **PERMISSION** to go for what you truly want.

The idea is to find the Gordian Knot—the one simple intervention that you can make that will cause a ripple effect and allow all of the other barriers to dissipate.

Without **ACTION**, there is no change, so remember to look for all three components of The **ACTION** Formula when you are eliminating success barriers:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{DESIRE} + \text{RESOURCES} + \text{PERMISSION} \\ = \text{ACTION} \end{aligned}$$

STEP FIVE: SLICE THE KNOT

All practices have areas where they can tweak their results for more success. The idea is to find the Gordian Knot—the one simple intervention that you can make that will cause a ripple effect and allow all of the other barriers to dissipate.

More often than not, we find the critical intervention spot (**CIS**) is not in processes, procedures, records, or protocols. The **CIS** is typically found among the people who work within a practice—the staff; the administrators; and, of course, the doctors. The secret is to analyze the degree to which the people within a practice are lacking in any or all of the three components of The **ACTION** Formula.

Once you have found the **CIS**, set your goal for 2008 to work that part of your practice until it is everything you want it to be.

YOUR TURN

Your practice is thriving, your staff members are singing your praises, your phone is ringing off the hook with referrals, and your patients are sending all their friends. Now it's time to look at the rest of your life. With so many people depending upon you, it is very important that you remember to take care of yourself! Repeat steps 1 through 5, applying the strategies to the things you want in your personal life. Make your own lists, work The **ACTION** Formula for yourself, and make sure that you get what *you* truly want in 2008! ■