

Five Game-Changing Strategies for 2020

Your professional life can be likened to playing a game.

In fact, many intentionally use the game analogy in their approach to their businesses. Consider the similarities between your dental business and a game:

1. You have to pay to play
2. Games have winners and losers
3. Games have rules
4. Winning has its rewards (financial and lifestyle freedom)—
Losing has its costs

I've been playing the dental game since graduating from dental school in 1983. More and more people are asking me when I plan to retire (stop playing the game). I often answer, "As soon as practicing dentistry isn't fun any more". Fact is I really enjoy playing the game—as long as I'm winning.

In order to win, you not only have to understand the rules of the game (which are constantly changing), but you have to know how to change the game, because whoever controls the rules, controls the game.

The New Rules

Dental Service Organizations (DSOs) now employ almost one out of every five dentists¹. The trend will continue to rise. DSOs and large groups provide longer and more convenient hours, accept many or all insurance programs and discounted plans, and typically operate a well-managed model that is highly streamlined and effective. Many are partially or fully owned by private equity firms with the financial wherewithal to invest in growth, which is certain to occur.

Insurance reimbursements continue to decline. Certain regions of the country are experiencing this more significantly than others, but the current trajectory will continue. It is very likely that all services delivered to insured patients will eventually be reimbursed at the PPO level. With the majority of dental practices now participating in one or more insurance plans, a reduction in reimbursements is leading to a reduction in practice production and profitability².

Most young dentists are burdened with significant debt from the very beginning of their careers. Student loan debt now slows down the speed at which young dentists seek or are able to invest in private practice, which in turn reduces the ability of older dentists to sell their practices at prices that support their retirement needs³.

Dentists are retiring much later than ever before, if at all. The most frequently selected retirement age for a recent survey performed by *Dental Economics* was 70, with more than two-thirds of dentists, 10% more than the previous

ABOUT US

*You Deserve to
Make More,
Keep More & Enjoy More*

At **Sunrise Dental Solutions**, we're certainly not a "one-size-fits-all" consulting company. Our team of accomplished specialists works with dental practices of all kinds, from solo operations to well-established multi-location offices to brand-new start-ups and much more! No matter what your personal circumstances are, you can trust us to go above and beyond to ensure that you're receiving second-to-none counsel on every important subject that will help your business thrive in ways you never even imagined.

We Practice What We Preach

Far too often, the people who run consulting companies are very removed from the work they're counseling others in, which can cause some of their guidance to feel off-base or outdated. This is never the case at Sunrise Dental Solutions. We are run by dentists who are still currently practicing themselves, which means there's no one better equipped to help you reach your personal goals – after all, they've already done it themselves!

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year, planning on retiring after age 66. Only 4% said they expected to retire before age 55. The impact of this trend is immense, as it will reduce the opportunity for younger dentists to advance as rapidly as they might desire in their careers⁴.

The cost of providing dentistry continues to increase, in large part because of new technology. Technology is expanding at an explosive rate, and new technology carries a large price tag. Investment in new technology increases overhead and reduces profit, unless and until the team is fully trained, the technology is fully implemented, and efficiencies are realized⁵.

Competition in dental practice is increasing. Seven states are now allowing midlevel providers, a trend that will expand nationally. It is little wonder that four out of five (80%) dentists surveyed reported moderate, high, or extremely high levels of stress related to their practices⁶.

Enough Is Enough

I recall last year attending the IDS in Cologne, Germany, and walking the massive exhibit halls, and seeing all the money that was being spent by dental suppliers to sell supplies, equipment, and technology to the end-users. I was informed by someone who used to be in upper level management of one of the big three companies in dentistry that a good salesperson made three times more than the average dentist.

The money no longer flows toward the provider of dental care in the dental marketplace. Instead it flows away from them, to DSOs, insurance companies, dental plans, and suppliers. Where once dentists were at the top of the dental marketplace pyramid, we now find ourselves near its base.

Somewhere along the line, we became factory workers, rather than factory owners, and I am reminded of the quote by Tony Gaskin – “If you don’t build your dreams, someone will hire you to help build theirs”.

Winning More

How do we win more? We change the game. We change the game so we have a better competitive position in the marketplace.

In order to change the game we have to do two things:

1. We have to use game changing strategies, but first—
2. We have to have a game changer mindset because the strategies are meaningless unless they are implemented.

The Game Changer Mindset

Dave Anderson wrote an article three years ago that I read and kept, because it explained very well who I was dealing with as a coach of dentists. He put business people (i.e. dentists) into three categories, Caretakers, Playmakers, and Game Changers.

Caretakers are steady baseliners who do dependable work, but not much more than is required. Because of this, their growth is minimal, and they are most susceptible to external influences. They don’t win very often, and when they do the victories are small.

Playmakers have more drive than caretakers. They will occasionally do exceptional things. The playmaker’s biggest enemy is their own success, which can create complacency. They grow until they reach a certain level, become comfortable, and stay there. They don’t win as often as they used to, and they’ve changed their definition of winning to match their comfort level.

Game changers may have the same or even less talent than a playmaker, but their mindset is unyielding, incessant, and oppressively constant in their daily approach to preparation and execution. They relentlessly attack and continually strive to be the best, so they can win more. And when they don’t win, they crave winning so intensely that setbacks, critics, rejection, and obstacles become largely irrelevant.

While most people are a blend of the three styles both at work and in life, there is normally one mindset that will dominate and most heavily influence their behaviors. None of the mindsets is a permanent verdict though. A one-time game changer who loses focus and becomes inconsistent can regress, just as a caretaker can get a wakeup call that causes a mindset shift to higher levels. One thing is for sure – game-changing strategies must be accompanied by a game-changing mindset.

Game Changing Strategies

A *Game Changer* is any strategy that changes an existing situation in a significant way, allowing for a more competitive position in the marketplace. Since the marketplace is constantly evolving, here are five game changers for today’s (and the foreseeable future) marketplace:



Increase Your Capacity—Which Increases Your Production Potential. If you play poker, or watch poker on television, you know that

players with the most poker chips have a distinct advantage. When they play a hand, there is less relative downside to the consequences of playing that hand. This analogy works for dentistry as well. The best investment any dental practice owner can make is increasing capacity (as long as they can maximize the potential of that capacity). This results in more leverage, and more leverage creates more opportunities to win.

Increasing capacity to produce more can take many forms but most often means adding providers and/or adding treatment rooms, both of which can be accomplished through acquiring another practice, or forming/joining a group practice. This has already become a trend with the average number of dentists per private practice rising from 1.6 to 1.9 in the last 2 years, an increase of almost 20%⁷.

Growth will require a change in practice infrastructure. The team will become even more important. The practice owner will no longer be able to manage a larger enterprise (but must still lead), and will delegate management to highly qualified, highly trained team leaders who are passionate about the owner's vision.

Becoming a better leader and delegating management through the growth process will result in more focused, productive efforts on part of the owner, and the resulting increase in profitability. Profitability is one of the chief methods of keeping score in the game of dentistry.

2 Market Your Business Online—The Marketing Cheese⁸ Has Moved. If you're going to increase your capacity, you have to increase your patient base. As critically important as internal marketing is, it's becoming exceedingly rare these days that doing that alone can accomplish your new patient flow needs.

That leaves external marketing. The problem is that what used to work no longer works. Why? - Because the marketing cheese moved. People no longer are influenced by your direct mail, your print ad, or your television commercial. They get their information from their smart phones, tablets, and laptops, and their choices are influenced by what they see and they read in their searches as well as the online social groups they participate in. Because of this, more and more dentists are embracing online marketing to attract new patients, using online marketing services and social media platforms⁹.

The dental patient of 2020 is not the same new dental patient of just two years ago, and savvy, aggressive online marketing is a game changer that will lead to more winning in the game of dentistry.

3 Become a Super GP—And Do Bigger Cases. The marketing message cheese has also moved. While quality of care still matters, it isn't enough by itself to influence today's consumer. Dentists are figuring out that the three most important things that motivate the modern marketplace are services offered, convenience, and value added service (i.e. getting more for less). The general practitioner providing more dental services, including those that traditionally were within the realm of the specialist, can accomplish all three. Last year's survey of dentists by *Dental Economics* revealed that the number of general dentists who indicated their referrals to specialists had increased was cut in half compared to the previous year¹⁰.

Providing more services not only attracts more patients, it allows for more production per patient – doing bigger cases. Two services especially lend themselves to high production appointments:

- 1. IV Sedation** – Sedation is ideally suited for the long, productive appointment, providing less stress and discomfort for patient and doctor alike. While most dentists perform some level of sedation, the percentage of general dentists performing IV moderate sedation is small, but growing. One reason is that dentists who sedate their patients are looking for a way to distinguish themselves in this area. Another reason is that IV sedation gives the dentist more control over the depth and length of sedation, as well as dealing with challenges that oral or nitrous oxide sedation cannot address. Finally, the legal and regulatory climate is changing to make IV sedation a must for any dentist wanting to achieve a level of sedation greater than minimal sedation.
- 2. Accelerated Implant-Prosthetics Dentistry** – As with sedation dentistry, many general dentists are placing dental implants. Fewer still are placing implants and restoring those implants at the same appointment. This is not only the future, but it matches the present mindset of the modern-day consumer, who no longer accepts a long, drawn-out process from beginning of implant site preparation to final prosthesis.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Tony Feck owns a multi-doctor practice in Lexington, KY. He is the co-founder of DOCS Education, and is a well-known educator and author on the subject of conscious sedation in dentistry. In 2005 he founded Sunrise Dental Solutions, a comprehensive practice management and coaching company operated by highly successful, practicing dentists who have achieved an extraordinary level of success by different paths. Sunrise Dental Solutions is ideally positioned to assist the dentist with all five of the game-changing strategies described in this article. Dr. Feck can be reached at Tony@TonyFeck.com. You can learn more about Sunrise Dental Solutions at sunrisedentalsolutions.com.



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The Super GP that embraces highly productive procedures like IV sedation and Accelerated Implant-Prosthetics Dentistry, will be more productive through performing bigger cases—a game changer for 2020.

4 Develop A Transition Strategy That Allows You To Not Only Win More, But Win Like You Want, As Often As You Want, For As Long As You Want —Retire In Practice. Traditionally, transition strategies have been all about the dental practice owner transitioning out of dentistry. New transition strategies can help the dental practice owner transition into a new role within the practice, while maintaining or even increasing cash flow and equity for as long as the dental practice owner wants. This is often referred to as “retiring in practice”.

Briefly, this transition involves setting up a new, separate entity that is responsible for management of the practice, separate from the clinical entity, that performs human resources functions, as well as advertising and promotion of the practice. This management portion is paid a percentage of revenue from the clinical portion. The senior owner(s) participate in the management entity, hiring additional providers to grow the clinical portion.

This is similar to the way Dental Service Organizations are set up, without the outside corporate and private equity involvement, and is well-suited to the modern-day need to increase capacity – another game winning strategy.

5 Utilize Coaching From A Practicing Dentist Who Has Successfully Accomplished What You Want to Accomplish — Don't Go It Alone. Years ago, as a practicing dentist with a game changing mindset, I noticed a void in the consulting area of dentistry. I knew I needed guidance – everyone does – why figure it out on your own? The problem was that the agents providing these consulting services were either non-dentists, dentists who were no longer practicing dentistry, or dentists that weren't as successful as I was and/or had never accomplished what I wanted to accomplish. That's when I formed Sunrise Dental Solutions¹¹, to provide consulting as well as coaching (two separate and distinct functions) to dentists who wanted to transform their practices from good to great.

Having someone in your corner to guide, direct, and support you along the path that leads to your vision is a game-winning strategy. Accomplishing all five game-winning strategies allows the owner to win more often and in bigger ways by controlling the rules of the game.

Sources

^{1,2,3,4,5,6,7,9,10}DentalEconomics.com

⁸*Who Moved My Cheese?*, Spencer Johnson, M.D., Putnam Adult, 9-7-1998.

¹¹Sunrise Dental Solutions. 1795 Alysheba Way, Suite 2202, Lexington, KY 40509. 800.750.0737. www.SunriseDentalSolutions.com.

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