The 10 Characteristics of Top Dentists
Who Thrive in Practicing Fee-For-Service Dentistry.
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Kirk Behrendt is the Director of ACT Dental Practice Coaching.

He has lectured all over the United States to major meetings and study clubs. He has extensive experience on practice profitability, team building, leadership and dental practice marketing/branding. Kirk and his team are primarily focused to positively impact the future of dentistry one practice at a time.

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While traveling the world and observing how thousands of dental practices operate, I’ve noticed some clear trends developing. Basically, there are two distinct groups in dentistry: Those who thrive, and those who starve.

Years ago, you could be successful in dentistry without understanding how to run a business. That is simply not the case any more. The playing field has leveled. Dentists are now fully exposed to the exact same challenges every entrepreneur faces while growing a business. Dentists who recognize this trend have embraced it to thrive in dentistry. Those who resist it tend to struggle for the oxygen to keep their practice breathing. This article examines the 10 common characteristics of the thriving dentist:
They Have Purpose, Conviction & Clarity of Vision

Thriving dentists can tell you without hesitation where they are planning to go and what they plan to do once they get there. You almost never see them waffle when they talk about their vision of dentistry.

Finding this purpose, conviction & vision has developed them into dentistry’s biggest deficiency... great leaders.
The thriving dentist has an intense appetite for learning. Continuing Education is considered a great value rather than a burdensome expense, and a learning opportunity for the entire team. Pete Dawson said to me the first time we met, “Be very careful of the dentist who has it all figured out. Even at my age and experience I have never thought that I had it all figured out. I learn something new all the time from my students. It is very exciting.”
They Learn Best By Doing

While being hungry in learning, they know the best way to learn to swim is to jump right in. To learn is to DO. Adult learning is most effective experientially.
Ken Blanchard said that the “biggest gap in the world is between knowledge and application.”

Starving dentists see this gap in application with pessimistic achievability while the thriving dentist sees it with optimistic achievability. It is a necessary passageway to fulfilling their purpose. They know there are no shortcuts to becoming the best, and the journey may include some great failures along the way.
They Have Great “Touchable” Mentors or Coaches

These are relationships typically developed over long periods of time. The “touchable” aspect refers to the critical feedback these mentors and coaches provide. The result is a more intimate working relationship that goes far beyond friendship and an occasion dinner together.
They Surround Themselves with the Right People

They have surrounded themselves with great team members. Mark Collins addresses this in his book *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don’t*: “Contrary to popular belief, people are NOT our greatest asset...only the RIGHT PEOPLE are our greatest asset.” Their success in dentistry has been an evolutionary process that has attracted great team members and nurtured their talent. The result is significant growth...personally & professionally.
Their Practice is Structured for Success

They have very clear goals and monitor them constantly. The entire operation is well structured with systems that reflect the purpose being served. Ambiguity is an enemy to their practice.

Whey you ask members of a thriving practice how they succeed, they’ll never answer, “I’m not sure.” Predictability in daily business operations and performance of technical dentistry becomes the critical component to their level of fulfillment.
They Understand that 
"Dentistry is 51% Business & 49% Technical"

This is a great quote given to me by my friend Dr. Gary DeWood of the Pankey Institute. Knowing how to do the dentistry is not nearly enough to run a successful practice. The thriving dentist knows that cash is to their business what oxygen is to their life.

Surplus cash is not their primary goal, but a byproduct of running an extraordinary business. The thriving dentist has developed a hungry awareness of how successful businesses (or practices) work, and would therefore succeed in nearly any other profession.
Thriving dentists have embraced a lifelong journey for significant relationships. They have done this not only in practice, in life as a whole. They understand that truly effective communication only partially involves talking. It has more to do with non-verbal messaging and intense listening.

Some of the highest producing dentists that we coach actually do very little talking (in comparison to their patients) in their new patient experience. They have an incredible ability to get patients talking in a way that they feel excited about themselves. Patients most often end up being the driving force in treatment plans rather than the dentist and teams. The thriving dentist has a confident posture, reflected with great sincerity that procures higher levels of trust and likability.
They Look the Part

Thriving dentists have taken the steps to make sure the image and brand they project is indicative of the great care their patients experience. The way they dress, act and the appearance of their office reflect what patients would expect to see. Their practice is usually in a great location.

People create an image of you based on how others describe you. How well you live up to that image will greatly determine how successfully you live out your vision. We like to think people don’t judge a book by its cover, but they do!

“Looking the part” is becoming more challenging as consumers’ expectations are growing exponentially. Like the high end restaurants and coffee shops popping up all around us, your practice must strive for every competitive edge in your market. It is important that you reflect the image of being with or ahead of the curve.
They Do a Ton of Marketing

Thriving dentists understand that marketing is not just an external effort, but is part of EVERYTHING THEY DO. Their internal operations and how they train patients to refer are very well choreographed. They are willing to take great risks when it comes to projecting their brand.

Their website is top notch. Their image pieces (logo, stationary, etc.) are very sharp. Their staff clearly reflects their brand. Their ads support everything the patient truly experiences in their practice. The lab they use is the best. They are involved with organized dentistry and are most often respected by their peers. Marketing for them is doing everything they possibly can to increase the “top of mind” awareness for anyone who is considering their kind of services.
Where you are in dentistry is a choice. It may be conscious or unconscious, but it is a choice nonetheless. If you are thriving in dentistry, these 10 characteristics are probably evident in your work.

You have chosen to thrive.

On the other hand, if you find yourself struggling, you may have simply discounted a few of these characteristics as “things I should have done” or “things I can’t do.” In that case, I strongly suggest that you find some comfort in the current state of your practice, and begin building on the strengths. Choosing to thrive need only be a slight variation of what you do now.

Making the choice to thrive is something very few people do. We were given this great gift of choice. My hope is that you use it wisely and let it work its magic in your life.
Access the resources you need to quickly grow your dental practice & better your life!

- Proven techniques & expert advice.
- Connect with hundreds of dentists just like you.
- Discounts to save big on events & services.
- Everything you need to improve quickly.

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