



# THE DAILY GRIND

DRILLING DEEPER INTO DENTISTRY

## Harvest Your Dental Practice

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I've enjoyed maintaining a small home garden as a hobby for years. While harvesting some of my peppers this year, I realized the numerous similarities between maintaining a garden and a dental practice. Both share similar stages of development over time: prepare, plant, nourish and harvest. Each of these stages are essential to yield a bountiful crop for either your dental practice or your home garden.

### **Prepare**

A garden and dental practice both require tremendous preparation in order to achieve the best results. Just a few of the aspects a gardener must evaluate are the correct location of the plot, best time to plant, current soil quality, water sources, drainage patterns, distance between each individual plant, and potential for encroachment by other foliage or hazards from animals and insects. Poor planning can hinder any following steps and potentially decrease crop yield.

A dental practice follows the same path of thinking on both a macro and micro scale, with the macro side of the planning discussion involving the practice as a whole and the micro concerning the relationship with a single patient. Like the garden plot, the dental practice must involve proper planning to address location, timing, community, patient population, current and future strengths and weaknesses, and potential encroachment or hazards. These planning criteria are commonly considered when dentists are starting or buying their own dental practice, but they're equally important when looking for a non-owner position such as associate dentist, dental hygienist or dental staff member. Being at the right place at the right time to yield success is a common phrase for a reason: It's true.

In much the same way a gardener plans out each plant, a dentist must plan for each patient relationship. For me, the initial comprehensive exam offers the best opportunity to get to know the patient and gain insight for proper planning. While completion of radiographs and intra-exams are essential, I find that the most important planning tool is conversation. Speaking with the patient allows a practitioner to learn about the individual's history, current condition and, most importantly, what direction that patient wishes to proceed in the future.

Imagine the patient as a plant. How are you supposed to plan out your garden if you don't understand it? Will your plant run along the ground and spread like pumpkins, or will it grow down into the soil like carrots? Will your plant require a tremendous amount of water and attention, or will it require minimal care and maintenance? Questions like these directly apply to both individual plants and patients. Prepare for both macro and micro aspects.

### **Planting**

After preparation comes the planting phase. In gardening, this involves seeds or seedlings. Both require tender care within the right conditions to allow them to flourish. The same can be said about patients in a dental practice. How well do you and your staff plant and care for your seedlings? Be sure to take the time to communicate with your patients. Inquire, educate, discuss.

If patients don't know you offer a procedure, then they might never seek treatment, or worse, seek treatment elsewhere. Be sure to plant a variety of seeds. Plant some basic ones, but don't be afraid to plant some wild ones that might be slightly outside the box. This year, I planted ghost peppers in my garden for the first time. They were unbelievably spicy and not for everyone, but growing them was a lot of fun. Certain treatment suggestions are akin to the ghost pepper — not for all patients but attractive to some. Invisalign® and whitening treatment are just a few treatments that could fall in this category.

### **Nourish and Wait**

Much of gardening is maintenance and patience. Regular watering, weeding and occasional fertilizing are all examples of this important stage. Hard work day in and day out yields a

bountiful crop in the end.

The same can be said about the dental field. Both the clinical and non-clinical elements of a dental practice must be functioning at peak condition day in and day out. Effective communication with patients in the office and out is a must. This stage is all about patience and perseverance. Grow your crop and your office with constant hard work, and know that the next stage awaits.

## **Harvest**

Harvest time is the most physically and mentally rewarding stage of gardening because you get to see the fruits (or vegetables) of your labor. You're able to help provide for your family and gift to others what you have in excess. Dentistry is really no different. Your continued efforts will provide for both your personal family as well as your extended office family. Ideally, the practice has core concepts of volunteerism and community engagement deeply ingrained in your work. This way, any excess you reap can be gifted to enrich the lives of those in and around the office.

One of the largest differences between the two aspects of my analogy is that dentistry does not have a "winter." Every month is a growing month, so there's never a time to sit and rest on your laurels. Each month, every patient is growing and will need care and guidance through each of the stages. This autumn, take a bit of time for an introspective examination of both yourself as a practitioner and your practice as a whole. Do you or your practice need to focus on a bit of spring rejuvenation? There's no time like the present to prepare and plant in your professional life. Best of luck and happy harvest.

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