



ORTHO2

From Good to Great

by **Ken Alexander**

The practice of orthodontics has inherently within it the ability to be a great business. We get to deal in the highest of American values by delivering beautiful teeth that will give a lifetime of joy and satisfaction. There are few better gifts a parent can give their child than a beautifully aligned set of pearly whites that can unlock the key to a better bite. A beautiful, healthy smile helps create a lifetime of confidence and well-being; and that is why our profession is so valued, and so valuable.

Unfortunately, the inherent benefits of orthodontics can easily lead to settling for a good practice without ever trying to make it great. Being good often becomes the enemy of greatness, just as being satisfied destroys many dreams and ambitions. Good is the enemy of getting better, and being better is often the excuse for not striving to be the best.

In his excellent book, "Good to Great", Jim Collins scoured the top of the top companies to see what set them apart from the rest. He quickly discovered that it was no quick fix, no single idea, no dramatic process, no new technology, and no miracle moment. To be great a practice must commit to steadfast discipline over the quick fix. My 30 years of consulting exclusively to orthodontists has taught me a few things about what it takes to be a great practice.

A great practice begins with a leader who has a virus for contagious success. Leaders exemplify what they want their company to become. If they want to be on time, then they show their commitment to timeliness by scooting around the operatory and getting to assistants' chairs within two minutes of their request. If leaders want great attitudes and joy in their practice, they model a constant smile and happiness – not only with their patients, but also with their team. Leadership by example demands that when things go wrong – and they always do – the leader fixes things without blaming so that the team can expend its energies on the positives of change and improvement,

rather than dwell on the negatives.

To be great requires a super team. Perhaps the most difficult part of the leader's job is to surround themselves with positive people who can balance out their weaknesses while producing consistent results. Great practices must hire the right people who share common values for serving others, doing more than their fair share of work, and naturally treating others the way they would want to be treated. We recommend hiring "dog personalities" in the orthodontic practice who are constantly looking for ways to please others, as opposed to "cats" who tend to be more aloof and self-centered. Most importantly, when creating a great team, recognize that one bad apple will spoil the bunch. Quickly exercise discipline to keep the team productive and happy.

For a great practice it is all about the customers. Who doesn't love walking into a Nordstrom or a Marriott where the service seems like they all just came back from a Disneyland customer service retreat? Everyone is smiling and calling you by name.

"Is there anything else I can do for you today Mr. Alexander... And how was your stay?"

"Would you like an apple or a cookie? How can we make your stay here more pleasant?"

Greatness often demands a cultural revolution within the practice where every team member is focused on the patients and parents before their own individual needs. When brackets are off, or patients come in late, there is no scolding; just a can-do attitude with gentle reminders as to what will correct the situation for next time. Every team member knows that marketing begins with "me," not "them." They understand the importance of a smile

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and a “hello” to each and every patient or parent they see, even if they are just walking to the lab, or down the hall. We are not in the teeth business, but in the people business. We must do whatever it takes to make people feel great about choosing us to be their orthodontic practice.

A great practice produces sustainable results. To be considered the best practice in your area is a tremendous feat, but now you have to stay there. Staying at the very top means having your systems humming so that you can handle your growth without sacrificing service or quality. Too often practices tend to grow beyond their level of competence and then decline right back down to what others, including staff, believe is doable. If you have a doctor with a half-decent personality, and a half-decent facility, the practice will generally grow to a decent size. But getting to the top means making sure that you stay one step ahead of the curve to insure that you can indeed deliver beautiful smiles consistently on time. Only a great computer management program like Ortho2’s, with customized scheduling templates, a strong new patient enrollment program, and a myriad of other well-thought-out systems can keep the flywheel churning faster and faster with superior patient satisfaction.

Being a great practice does not mean that you have to be the biggest, it just means that you are one of the best. Setting your sights on being better is a noble thing. But for those who truly want to be great there are lots of super resources, including the Ortho2 Users Group Meeting, that will help hone your systems, your team, and take you to the next level of greatness. I hope to see you soon in San Antonio where we can explore more of what it means to go From Good to Great in the wonderful profession of orthodontics. ☺

About the Author



Ken Alexander has been the director of Millenium Management Services for the past 30 years, and has been a consultant to well over 500 orthodontic practices. He is presenting a class at the 2014 Users Group Meeting in San Antonio.