



## I'M DOING EVERYTHING RIGHT AND I'M NOT GROWING

### Dysfunctional Perfection:

By Greg Stanley

Almost every day I have a conversation with one of my consulting clients that will go something like this:

"Greg, I've been to almost every practice management program out there. I've had consultants in my office who gave a clean bill of health to our systems and our staff. I've done every type of marketing. I've expanded my hours and softened my case presentation. In short, I've done it all. And in spite of the fact that I'm doing everything right, we're just not growing."

When I hear this sad story I'm reminded of my first experience with boat ownership. I bought a brand new boat almost 10 years ago. Near perfect condition used boats are abundant, and usually sell for a fraction of what a new one costs. But because of my limited time available for the great "American boating experience" I didn't want spend my free time dragging a boat back and forth to the repair center, so I chose to pay the higher price for a new model. This being my first experience with boat ownership, I didn't realize that there is no boating equivalent of the Honda Accord. In other words, money cannot buy boating reliability.

My father was a mechanic and a boating enthusiast. I was later to learn that these two components are actually inseparable if a successful lake trip is your goal. In those days there were only outboard motors available to our socioeconomic group. I can't remember a single lake outing

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## THE DEFINITION OF SERVICE

By Patrick Wahl, DMD, MBA and  
Lorraine Hollett, officemagic.com

Five-star service is not about hot towels, muffins, or coffee bars. All of these things can be helpful, but service is really all about how your patients are spoken to and treated by you and your staff. Patients can be treated like royalty without any amenities, and they can be treated like chattel no matter how grand the buffet in the reception area.

Compare a real welcome, "Welcome to our office. We're glad you're here," with a mere, "May I help you?" Most importantly, ask every patient the defining question of your practice:

"Is there anything that I can do to make your visit more comfortable today?"

The words you don't use are just as important as those you do. Have you ever requested something of a store's employee, only to be told something about "store policy?" You probably didn't like the rest of the sentence, whatever it was. You probably felt treated like a child, like the times your parents told you, "Because I said so!"

If there is a good reason for a policy, explain the reason in terms of the benefit to the patient. If there is no reason for a policy, eliminate the policy. Phrase everything in terms of the benefit to the patient, and you'll never need to use the word "policy."

I once went to a very nice restaurant. I didn't know that dinner jackets were required. Luckily, the maitre d' knew something about good service, and he did

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### What if I can't find the pulp chamber?

Stop and consider anatomy. If there is a single canal, the pulp chamber will be in the exact center of the root. Look at the CEJ encircling the tooth. Aim your bur for the center.

Use a periodontal probe around the entire tooth to get a better idea of root location and contour.

If you're looking for the mesial-buccal canal, it is usually directly beneath the mesial-buccal cusp. It may be necessary to remove this cusp.

If you're looking for the distal-buccal canal, it is most often in the center of the tooth. Pre-curve the tip of a stainless steel file to help enter it.

Transilluminate the chamber with an Oralite (available from EndoSolutions). Hold the light on the side of the tooth rather than shining it directly in the access. Orifices will appear as dark spots if they have already been uncovered.

### What are my options if I can't negotiate the canal?

Pre-curve the tip (and only the very tip) of a small stainless steel K-file. Number 10 files are usually best, but in rare cases, an 8 or even a 6 may be necessary.

Some rotary files can negotiate certain canals even better than hand files. The #1 EndoMagic! file is a good orifice opener, but the #2 can be even more useful in negotiating difficult canals. Although the #2 is equivalent in size to a standard #15 hand file, its cutting tip can negotiate some canals that cannot be negotiated by hand.

### What do I do when I've ledged and I can't get around it?

The only way to bypass a ledge is to pre-curve the tip of a small stainless steel file and "watch wind" it back and forth until it finds a place to go. Once you bypass the ledge, do not remove the file, but use it for several minutes to smooth the ledge. You can then proceed with larger files or a sonic, and eventually to rotary files.

### What do I do if I'm short of working length, and I've blocked myself out?

Hand-filing techniques tend to pack debris in the apical area. When filing by hand, it is important to recapitulate (go to length

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not tell me, "I'm sorry, sir, but dinner jackets are required here." I wouldn't have liked hearing that. Instead, he offered to loan me a dinner jacket, and explained, "You'll be more comfortable."

When a patient tells you to "submit this claim to my insurance company, and then bill me for the difference," let's not respond, "I'm sorry, Mr. Smith, but our policy is to collect the fee at the time of service." Whatever that means, it sure sounds negative.

Instead, explain to the patient that you have several different payment options available to help him. "Let me briefly describe them so you can choose which one is most convenient for you."

A client of ours once told us that there were no payment options in his practice. To give a patient options, he explained, would be to tell the patient that there is a choice. "There should be no choice. They have to pay." We explained to our client that people who buy like to have choices. The key thing is to make sure that none of the

choices represent any risk to your practice. When you purchase something, you want to see all the styles, all the colors, and all the choices. Your patients are just like you and me. And the good news is that people who participate in the decision-making process are much more likely to comply with any agreement.

Five-star service means greeting patients by standing up and meeting them at eye level. Five-star service means shaking hands with every patient, even children. Five-star service means greeting new patients with a tour of your fabulous office (it only takes minutes), and not with forms!

It's not the hot towel; it's how it's delivered. Compare the experience of an assistant shouting, "Here you go!" as she throws you a towel and runs out of the room with another who says, "Please take this towel to freshen your face. Indulge." Similarly, a coffee bar won't help if it's less than pristine.

If you're not offering towels consistently to your patients, it may be because your

team has found the process of keeping them ready to be a hassle. We've been impressed by the ComfortSpa™ from Sharper Practice (800-392-1171, "TLC" Introductory Special). It delivers a perfect towel every time with the mere touch of a button. You'll want to give one to and "wow" every patient.

Most of all, five-star service means delivering a great product on-time and with pleasure. As Dr. Paul Homoly says, "Every appointment is a case presentation appointment!"

Every dentist says he or she gives great service. Few do. Call a few offices. See how you're treated. See how soon you can be seen. See if you feel cared about. It's easy to compete on service because so few others even try. ♦

*Dr. Patrick Wahl will be presenting "Make Your Practice Twice as Good Monday Morning" at the Bellagio in February. Sign up for his free newsletter at [officemagic.com](http://officemagic.com) or call Office Magic at (800) 750-8779.*

## How Many Problems in Your Practice Would a Bunch of New Patients Solve?

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