

## **Leading Your Ortho Practice through Tough Times**

*By Roger P. Levin, DDS*

By now, you're certainly tired of hearing about the economy. You would much rather see more starts, more referrals and less stress in your ortho practice... and you absolutely could be. But, it depends heavily on one critical factor... your leadership.

Those who are good leaders will survive this economy and continue to make a steady living... while those who are great leaders will achieve continually increasing production and profit not just after the economy improves, but *right now*.

Many orthodontists today are seeing outstanding growth, more starts and increasing referrals, all because they accelerated their leadership skills. But what does that mean exactly?

After 24 years of working with orthodontists, Levin Group has identified the following leadership stages... which one are you?

1. Level I—The New Leader
2. Level II—The Competent Leader
3. Level III—The Overworked Leader
4. Level IV—The Levin Leader™

### **Level I—The New Leader:**

Every orthodontist starts as a new leader. This doctor has excellent clinical skills and motivation to build a strong practice... but is not experienced in practice management. Therefore, usually this orthodontist has few or no systems in place and is “winging it” as far as running the practice is concerned. This phase typically lasts for one to three years.

### **Level II—The Competent Leader:**

The competent leader has been in practice for a few years and has settled into a routine. A doctor reaches this level by virtue of working and learning through experience. This is the stage where the doctor begins building the practice, setting the stage for future success.

### **Level III—The Overworked Leader:**

The overworked leader is “maxed out” and usually finds that the business side of the practice—not the clinical aspects—is creating the stress and frustration. In addition to working too hard, the orthodontist is usually earning below his or her potential. Level III

often begins around the fourth or fifth year of practice and can continue until retirement. In fact, many orthodontists never make it past Level III, which is very unfortunate.

#### **Level IV—The Levin Leader™:**

Levin Leaders lead much less stressful lives and run consistently profitable, growing practices. In Level IV, the doctor becomes less involved in administrative areas of the practice and focuses more on productive clinical care and referral management.

However, to reach this level, expert advisors are often necessary to implement updated systems and train the team to effectively use those systems. Doctors at this level often seek the assistance of advisors with other aspects of their lives, including financial and retirement planning.

#### **Reaching the Level IV Transformation™**

Most orthodontists proceed rapidly through Levels I and II, but the majority of doctors get stuck at Level III for a large part of their careers. Reaching Level III means that your practice is busy and that you are making a reasonable living—both good things. However, this level can be a highly inefficient way to practice orthodontics... especially in today's economy. Underproduction, fatigue, frustration, boredom, dissatisfaction with the team, and dislike of referring doctors are all symptoms of an overworked leader. If you do not move beyond this level, your practice will encounter decreased profitability, reduced production and increased stress.

**Level III leaders usually take 8-10 years longer to reach financial independence than Level IV leaders.**

The Level IV Transformation™ is a process that allows the practice to increase production and profitability, while significantly decreasing stress. As seen with our orthodontic clients, Level IV leadership means the doctor is moving toward spending 98% of his or her time in direct patient care or working with referring doctors. By doing so, the practice experiences maximum productivity, production and profitability.

Level IV leaders discover how to work through others. Some may mistake working through others as delegation. When you delegate, you tell team members what to do and make sure that they understand it... you give them a deadline... and you assess how they accomplished the task. This, of course, is better than doing it yourself, but it can still be a lot of work. Working through others is *permanent*. Your staff members are empowered, not micromanaged. They are given the total job and are trusted to perform it competently. This allows them to accomplish their tasks and frees you to do what you do best—orthodontics.

Levin Group evaluates and updates practice systems, while working with orthodontists to overcome the road blocks impeding the practice from consistent growth. This process allows orthodontists and their teams to identify how those systems can be improved.

Once the systems are redesigned, the team must be trained on the new processes and protocols, with responsibilities assigned to the appropriate team member. Strong leadership, in combination with redesigned systems and a motivated team, allows the practice to function at its highest potential.

## **Conclusion**

Practice growth starts with leadership. Only those orthodontists willing to invest in maximizing their leadership skills will become Level IV leaders and achieve growth throughout their entire careers... through good times and bad.

*Ortho Cyber Journal readers are entitled to receive a 50% courtesy on a Total Success Practice Potential Analysis™, an in-office analysis and report of your unique situation conducted by a Levin Practice Development Specialist. To schedule the next available appointment, call 888-973-0000 and mention "Ortho Cyber Journal" or email [customerservice@levingroup.com](mailto:customerservice@levingroup.com) with "Ortho Cyber Journal" in the subject line. For more information, go to: [www.levingrouportho.com](http://www.levingrouportho.com).*