



5 STEPS FOR **GROWING YOUR HYGIENE DEPARTMENT**

A Practical Guide For Achieving Your Goals

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Introduction

Patient care is at the core of a dental practice, but it's your business acumen that allows you – a great dentist – to maintain and grow your practice. Without BALANCE between the two, both patient care and the business can suffer.

You can, however, effectively grow your practice *and* generate more revenue while maintaining exceptional patient care. In fact, becoming comfortable with the role of business owner can help you improve every aspect of patient care.

If you are frustrated with your dental hygiene department, look at your practice in a different light. The correlation between patient treatment and making money is much more complex than cause and effect. Overhead costs and departmental management largely affect growth, profit margins, and customer service. Dental offices work with insurance companies, which make streamlined management even more vital to success.

The entire practice, including the dental hygiene department, needs the right mindset and support to drive growth. When you stop to look at *why* your department is underperforming, and address logistical inconsistencies, you can more effectively balance business and dental care to see real return on investment.

Every dentist owner needs to accept a role as both dental provider and business executive. Some simple analysis, strategy, and measurement over time are all you need to take your dental hygiene department from stagnation to a thriving revenue-generating and patient-supporting machine.

Some of you may feel that your hygiene department is doing well. What would it take to make it even better? What do you compare the department's performance to? Where is the department now and where do you want it to go? How will you get it there?

Some of you may feel your hygiene department is underperforming. Where is it underperforming? How do you begin to fix it?

Some of you are in limbo. You have been told your hygiene department should be more productive, but you are not sure how.

Some of you may be financially stressed and have heard that the hygiene department, if maximized, could reduce the financial stress. But, how?

Growing your dental hygiene department can be very rewarding. But it's tough work. For years, the dental industry has thought of the hygiene department as an area of loss. It is a common misconception that in order to increase the hygiene department, dental professionals have to increase daily patient appointments and execute more procedures during those appointments to maintain and drive profits.

However, that does not have to be the case. Yes, some dental hygiene departments are more lucrative than others, but this has much more to do with *how* you grow your department than it does with simple quantity. With the appropriate system in place, you can grow your business without sacrificing quality and office morale.

In this e-book, we present five steps you need to take in order to grow your dental hygiene department and the five traps you need to avoid in order to succeed.



Step 1

- **Appreciate the Importance of Hygiene's Role**

Statistically, the hygiene department is supposed to be a key profit center in your dental office since this is the position that spends the most one-on-one time with the patient during visits. The dental hygienist is the frontline face of your practice and usually reviews the possibilities for risk and rewards of preventative and cosmetic dental care with your patients. The dental hygienist will also create both simple and intense treatment plans with your patients and will see these patients numerous times throughout a year, allowing them to cultivate relationships with your patients. This developed trust will make patients more likely to seek out the advice of your dental hygienists and improve rates of patient retention and loyalty.



Step 2

• Create an Office That Values Teamwork

All prosperous organizations start with a collaborative environment and cooperative team. Even the jargon used at the world's most successful organizations show the irreverence for teamwork. For example, employees at Wal-Mart are called associates and at the Ritz Carlton, the slogan for workers is *ladies and gentlemen, serving ladies and gentlemen*.

So, how can your hygiene department mimic this environment in a way that is natural and convenient? The first step is to create an atmosphere that values this approach and making sure that all members of the dental team are passionate about it.

One way to do this is to incorporate staff bonding and morale meetings like weekly, monthly, and annual retreats or check-ins. By using this time to get everyone on the same page about goals, collaboration, and processes, you can grow your department and improve the patient (and staff member) experience.



Step 3

• Make Time Your Most Valuable Asset

They say “time is our most valuable asset” but we don’t always treat it as such. How you choose to spend your time determines your results.

Most of us began our careers in the Time-and-Effort Economy, where we punched a clock and were rewarded for the hours we put in. Some of us get stuck in this mode, even though we’ve made the leap to working for ourselves. Long workdays and personal sacrifices somehow get tangled up.

How does this apply to a dental practice? Well, every day you go in and work on patients from dusk to dawn. You perform the same routine each day. Some days it seems like you worked a little harder or you put in more time; however, at the end of the month your production averages out to be similar to the previous months. The moral of this story is that time and effort does not necessarily equal results.

You gain incredible freedom, however, when you realize that all your rewards come from results that create value for your patients—and you can get results quickly, especially when you’re working in your Unique Ability.

Mindset plays a critical role. Ask yourself:

- 🌱 Is your mindset that the practice rises and falls on your production?
- 🌱 Do you feel that the harder you work and the more hours you put in, the more income you will make?
- 🌱 Are you reluctant to take too much time off because it will affect your income?

If you answered yes to any of these, your mindset is that of a Time/Effort Economy. The harder you work and/or more hours you put in, the more income you will make.

What would be a better alternative? Well, let's look at how a Results Economy works. Think of a Results Economy like this: if you bought a stock that was worth \$5 a share and it yields you an 8% return in 5 months, you did not put much effort into it and yet it yielded results. This is a Results Economy.

In a dental practice with a single practitioner, the hygiene department and associate staff members are examples of a Results Economy. The dentist/owner does not have to be present when services are rendered, and the practice is capable of generating more in revenue without imposing more patients onto the dentist/owner's schedule or increasing their work hours. The case study below showcases some context.

Case Study

Dr. Robertson contacted SPS in June of 2012. He was frustrated with his practice and felt as if the entire practice fell on his shoulders. He looked tired and shared his fears of getting older and not being able to keep up the pace, not being able to take a vacation because most of the revenue generated was from his schedule and concerns of his retirement. As you can see, this already sounds like the practice is running on time/effort economy.

When asked why he was feeling this way, he was not able to validate it with concrete facts. This is something we find a lot with dental practice owners. Each owner gauges how the practice is doing by a specific item they are watching; such as collections as it compares to the previous year, openings in the schedule, or monthly production. While this can prove helpful, it does not help the dentist/owner identify why they are not growing each year and often places the practice in a vulnerable state if negative trends are not identified early and turned around.

SPS conducted a free practice analysis to identify the pulse of the practice. Within a few weeks, we were able to quickly validate his feelings. In addition, we provided him with the reasons and solutions to quickly turn things around. In our evaluation, the practice had quite a few hidden potentials posted below; placing focus on these areas would generate substantial amount of revenue without any additional marketing efforts or work hours from Dr. Robertson. Helping the practice move from a time/effort economy towards a results economy:

- 🎯 Dr. Robertson's hygiene department was underperforming and just breaking even.*
- 🎯 The practice was growing; however, this was masked by the fact the dental facility could not accommodate additional hygiene appointments.*
- 🎯 The schedule was full and Dr. Robertson did not realize he had a ton of patients in the recall system that could not get appointments.*
- 🎯 The practice's business team was understaffed.*
- 🎯 Case acceptance was below 25%, we usually like to see case acceptance for small cases at 80%, medium size cases at 65%, and large size cases at 40%.*

Dr. Robertson decided to try and work on these areas with the assistance of his office manager. At that time he viewed Strategic Practice Solution's Hygiene Training/Coaching program as a cost and not as an investment. It was not until October of 2013 that SPS was contacted by Dr. Robertson to engage in their Hygiene Training/Coaching program. His wishes were to approach this slowly so that he could adjust as the practice changes. With a conservative approach the practice went from an annual production of \$800,000 to \$1,200,000 within one year. Well over 400% return on investment.

If you want to grow your practice, you need to build it based on the Result Economy concept rather than the Time/Effort Economy.

Step 4

- **Focus on the Rewards of a Continuing Care Model**

You do not need to try and pack in a high volume of patients each day in order to drive your profits or grow your department. Instead, you need to focus on a continuing care model with a focus on your hygiene department. By making recurring patient care a priority, you increase patient retention and cut down on costs associated with trying to acquire new patients. In fact, it is much easier and affordable to keep the patients you have than to continually recruit new ones.

A key to this is to pre-schedule future appointments before the patient leaves from his or her current one. How this works is quite simple; before the patient exits the room, the hygienist arranges the patient's next appointment. This works perfectly since the hygiene department personally understands the patient's dental needs or wishes and what is the required procedure to schedule. Also, this helps you know any obstacles or objections the patient may have ahead of time so you can plan accordingly.

Step 5

• Track and Analyze Metrics

Visualizing your success through metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs) is vital to your continued success and department expansion. By knowing exactly what your metrics are and how your numbers have improved during a specific timeline can help you to know where there are other weaknesses or opportunities.

So, how do you track your progress? First of all, in order to grow your practice you need to know your practice's current situation and with a little bit of energy, identify the following numbers:

- The number of patients that have seen your hygiene department in the last 18 months.
- The average number of new patients seen by the hygiene department per month.
- The efficiency of the practice's recall system.
- The number of "open time" in the schedule.
- The number of patients that have had periodontal related procedures.
- Case acceptance percentage.

Some additional questions you should know answers to are as follows:

- Do your hygienists have excellent communication skills in presenting treatment to the patient?
- Does your hygienist follow a system where they are the advocates and the patients are part of the diagnosing process?
- Are your hygienists skilled in the selling cycle – handling stalls and objections?
- Are you providing preventative services to your patients? If so, what is the patient's acceptance rate?

In following these 5 major steps, you are in a better position to assist your hygiene department grow allowing you to follow the results economy model.

Case Study

Dr. Anez knew that his hygiene department was always underperforming. He never really gave it a second thought because he was content with the revenue the practice was bringing in. That is, until his personal financial needs increased. Now there was a motivating force that made Dr. Anez revisit the practice's hygiene department; the only problem he had was knowing how to approach the problem.

The first thing Strategic Practice Solutions did was conduct a free hygiene assessment to identify the hygiene department's current situation. As we stated earlier, it is important to analyze the current situation of the hygiene department so we could identify its TRUE potential and how much the underperformance was costing the practice. Second, we projected the results the practice would experience by addressing the areas in which the hygiene department fell short. In the case of Dr. Anez's hygiene department, we identified the following variables:

Recall was running at 72% efficiency instead of the industry standard of 85%. The hygienists were not diagnosing periodontal disease properly; only 5% of the patient base received periodontal related services. Case acceptance on the few periodontal therapy treatment plans was low.

By increasing the recall department efficiency from 72% to 85%, and increasing the percentage of periodontal related procedures from 5% to 35%. The practice has the potential of producing \$334,000 more annually. We can conclude that living with the underperformance is costing the practice \$334,000.

5 Traps to Avoid as Your Hygiene Department Grows

Now that you know what to do to succeed in growing your department, here are five common traps you need to avoid and/or overcome on your path to expansion.

Trap #1: Not Keeping Up with Evolving Technology

No dental practice is always at the top of the technology game since medical technology is constantly changing and growing. If you think your hygiene department is immune to this and constantly at 100% of its capabilities, then you have fallen into the first hygiene trap. With the advancement in science and technology, the dental field is forever changing and a dental practice needs to change and morph accordingly.

Trap #2: Leaving It to the Hygienist Alone to Grow the Department

It is the responsibility of every member of your practice to expand the reputation and patient base of the office. If you leave grow of the hygiene department in the hands of only the hygienist (or another team member), you have fallen into another trap. When you entrust the growth of your practice to someone who is not knowledgeable on what metrics to monitor or has never achieved practice growth before, you run the risk of missing opportunities since there is no working knowledge of:

- How many of the treatments they present are actually scheduled by their patients.
- How you present treatment in a manner that has the highest acceptance rate.
- What percentage of their day should be from periodontal related procedures.
- Understanding the factors associated with increase in cancellations and no shows.
- If the practice needs to add additional hygiene days.

Once the chief dentist and/or owner become engaged with growing the dental hygiene department and increasing the practice base, this will filter down to the rest of the staff, including the hygienist. It is foolish to start with the dental staff though.

Trap #3: Assuming Knowledge That Is Not There

Individuals simply do not know what they don't know. Similar to the second trap about leaving the growth of the department to those who do not understand the process, it is dangerous to make assumptions about anyone's knowledge base without proper evidence since he or she can only perform to the level of knowledge he or she holds. Only by increasing one's knowledge will growth occur at a substantial rate. The case study below provides some context for this.

Case Study

When conducting a free hygiene assessment for a practice located in Norfolk, Virginia, we found that the recall system was only 50% effective, the Hygiene procedures performed were 80% prophylaxis and 20% perio, which were way underperforming, and the hygiene department's production should have been triple to what it was doing. The reason this was going undetected was that the team and the doctor/owner both had no clue that the practice outgrew the facility. All they saw was that the schedule was full and life was good. After utilizing Strategic Practice Solutions, the practice relocated to a larger facility, added new associates, and increased the staff with more hygienists. Oddly enough, not only did the hygiene production triple, but the associate's production as well.

By learning more about what variables impact the hygiene department and what the standards are in the dental industry, you can begin to understand how efficient your hygiene department really is and identify areas of focus. Your hygiene department *can* grow when you place the necessary focus on communication training that increases case acceptance and establishing perio protocol to ensure consistency among your hygiene providers. Remaining laser focused on the variables that impact the success rate of your dental practice is critical.

Trap #4: Letting Fear Dictate Your Steps

Fear is a powerful motivator; the fear of going it alone, of not being able to see things through, or of losing your team members. There is the fear of what your patients will do and the cost in getting help from an outside source. There is the fear of going outside your comfort zone and of failure.

Fear is the greatest barrier to success, but it is one you have the power to overcome. By facing your fear and investing your energy into positive thinking, you can grow not only your practice, but also the success of all areas of your life.

Trap #5: Not Understanding the Relationship between Cost and Investment

What's the difference between a cost and an investment? A cost is simply an expenditure of money, time, or resources. An investment is an expenditure that has a strong possibility of a return. As you journey through the decision making process on whether to attend a training course, hire a coach or consultant, or purchase that new equipment, ask yourself:

- 🎯 Is it a cost or an investment?
- 🎯 Will the additional revenue obtained from the investment exceed the time and money spent?
- 🎯 Will you receive increased patient acceptance?
- 🎯 Will you gain new skills that will eventually bring in the required new revenue?
- 🎯 How long will it take to bring in the required new revenue?

If the answer is “yes” then the money and time spent should be considered an investment. Usually, investments that offer some sort of guarantee make the decision process easier. A company willing to stand behind their products or services means they have experienced great success. By understanding the difference between costs and investments and the relationship they have with each other, you can better decide how to spend your money, time, and resources.

Final Thoughts

So, you have read everything in the eBook and, assuming that you haven't fallen victim to any of the traps, you're probably finding yourself asking: **what's the next step?**

If you are interested, you can take advantage of our complimentary Hygiene Assessment, which will allow you to identify any traps or missing steps on your journey to dental hygiene department growth. If there is an underperforming area, we can tell you what those areas are and what you need to work on. If there is an open opportunity, we can expose it.

Getting started is easy.

Visit <http://strategicpracticesolution-1.hs-sites.com/free-hygiene-assessment>
or call **888.421.1808** to request your free Hygiene Assessment today!

We wish you the best of luck on your hygiene department's continued growth and success.





About Strategic Practice Solutions

Based in Michigan, Strategic Practice Solutions (SPS) is a leading provider of dental practice management consulting, coaching and training in the Midwest. Since 2009, SPS has been providing dental practices with knowledge, skills and personal coaching to improve revenue, leadership, staff communication and client satisfaction. SPS offers a variety of training, seminars, certifications and workshops including, Everything DiSC: a Wiley Brand, for new and existing dental practices in Metro Detroit, Troy, St. Clair Shores, Ann Arbor, Howell, and surrounding areas including Ohio and Virginia. Learn more at www.strategicpracticesolution.com.

What Clients Are Saying

We've been working with Strategic Practice Solutions (SPS) for more than 8 years now. Sure, I've used other dental practice management consultants before, but SPS is different.

Other dental consultants we've used were not local, so they would fly in from where they were located, stay for two or three days and leave. I noticed when they weren't in the office we would revert back to old habits and have to start over again the next time they were in town. This also put a lot of extra work on my plate to manage and motivate my staff.

SPS takes great concern and pride in making sure we succeed. The difference between SPS and others boils down to this; other consultants give you the cook book and say, 'Go cook.' SPS not only provides the cook book, but helps you cook; they teach you how measure the ingredients and how to stir the pot. Because they are local, they are more embedded in our office on a weekly and monthly basis and provide the coaching and accountability we need to reach our goals.

After working with SPS, my staff is more accountable and I can objectively evaluate performance and performance improvement versus just guessing. We are also much more systemized so many of the management and administrative responsibilities have been taken off my plate, which is great for me because I don't like doing most of them.

— Dr. Goldstein, DDS

[Read Dr. Goldstein's full story](#)

Even before I purchased my own dental practice, I knew from working in other dental offices, that I was going to need help. I realized that if I tried to do it all myself and tried to do dentistry, my practice would fail, so I called on Tricia and Strategic Practice Solutions right from the beginning.

I spent 10 years working with other consultants and found them to be very arrogant and cookie-cutter in their approach. Many of them have a 'Do it my way or your business will fail' attitude and Tricia wasn't like that. She is warm, listens and truly wants to know what my vision is.

Before I started working with Tricia, after work I would go to a park by my house before I went home to my husband and kids. I was so stressed out with numbers and making payroll. Tricia came in, helped me see the big picture and got some things in order. I owe Tricia the world. Now, when I go to that park by my house it's to have fun with my family.

— Dr. Kelly M. Giera, DDS, PC

