



# SUCCESS BY DESIGN COUNTDOWN TO 2012

## Dr. Clifford J. Ruddle offers strategies for success in the coming year

For the most part, success is a choice and can be intentionally designed with the caveat that building and sustaining success requires a clear vision, genuine desire, and ongoing effort. Success can seem elusive, given each one of us represents just 1 of more than 160,000 dentists delivering dental care in an incredibly massive and increasingly competitive dental machine. So what can you do in 2011 to be relevant, make yourself matter, and maximize your success? Blow the lid off the “business as usual” model and make inspiring, yet attainable goals—then you will have the roadmap to generate success by design.

Many years ago, the president of Harvard University addressed the graduating class and implored them to make meaningful goals. At the end of 10 years, Harvard conducted a follow-up survey and determined that 90% of that class made goals, 7% made goals and wrote them down, and 3% made goals, wrote them down, and posted them in a conspicuous place so they were confronted with them daily. At 10 years, the 3% produced more wealth than the other 97% combined. In the context of dentistry, to move your practice to new heights, I recommend that you and your staff make 3 to 5 realistic goals, write them down, and post this list in a conspicuous place where it is seen by all, daily. Game on!

It is strategic to completely understand and fully appreciate that how we communicate powerfully influences our reality. In general, if you think you can, you can! Alternatively, if you think you can't, you're right. Sports psychologists often talk about communication as it relates to the outer and inner game. The outer game is measured by the final score, whereas the inner game is comprised of the silent internal conversation that continuously goes on in your head during play. To improve your results, it is imperative to keep your internal conversation positive. As an example, rather than choosing a negative conversation of “this patient has an irritating personality, and treatment will be difficult,” modify your internal conversation to “I can happily manage this personality, and treatment will be successful.”

Enthusiastically embracing continuing education (CE) is essential to maximize success. Meaningful CE should improve confidence, elevate performance, and create opportunities. CE should help you rethink and refine your existing procedures in order to get to the next level. Improving your skill is crucial to staying confident; when you remove doubt, confidence shows up. At its best, CE should provide personal, relevant, and transferable instruction that will close the gap between where you are and what is possible. CE attracts dentists with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Staying connected and networking with like-minded dentists decreases the learning curve, accelerates growth, and provides the opportunity go through things *together* and *not alone*.

Utilizing the best, most relevant, and proven technologies is yet another critical factor that influences success. Don't buy technology for the sake of the technology itself; rather, acquire technology that will ultimately help you perform procedures better. Obviously, new technology poses challenges associated with cost, implementation, and performance. Initially, you may feel awkward and slower upon utilizing any given new technology. However, training, practice, and networking with others decreases the learning curve and serves to help get you to the next level.

Change will be inevitable during our pursuit to generate intentional success by design. Often, small changes create little upsets that are annoying, and big changes can lead to chaos. Change requires a willingness to make incremental adjustments in order to succeed. For example, a commercial airplane is off course more than 90% of the time, yet in virtually all instances, the plane lands at the desired destination safely. Leaders manage change, make the required *adjustments*, and guide the team toward the intended result. Even if we fall short of the goal, what I have noticed is we are usually further along the journey than we would have otherwise been with no goals, course direction, or willingness to measure. Appreciate the expression, “It's not the destination, it's the journey that makes us more than we were.”

The countdown to 2012 has begun. You have more than 300 days left in 2011 to make goals, improve your communication, embrace CE, and get up-to-date on the latest technology that can forward your vision. Who do you want to be, what do you need to do to be that person, and how do you get started? Keep these questions on your radar. “Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.” (Goethe couplet from the Scottish Himalayan Expedition) **EP**



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