

# TR OJAN

T O D A Y

## 80/20 RULES YOUR PRACTICE

By Ginny Hegarty

The conventional wisdom of Pareto's Principle tells us that 80% of your success comes from 20% of your efforts...just 20% of your efforts. This is very powerful information if we interpret it correctly and act upon it. One effect of this is that 80% of your time is spent in areas that are not advancing your success. Consider what a difference it could make if you were able to identify your "Tremendous 20%" and focus your efforts there.

Before you get too excited, don't be thinking that you could work 20% of hours you are working now and still achieve 80% of your current production. An eight-hour workweek is probably not in your future. Pareto isn't that powerful; but resetting your priorities and restructuring your business can make a huge difference in your effectiveness and your results. Therefore, it is critical to identify the things you do that are vital to your practice growth and concentrate your efforts on that 20%. Everything else you were spending your time on needs to be reexamined.

No, this isn't another article on time management. However, each of us possesses different talents and skills; time is the great equalizer. We all have all the time there is. Each of us gets 24 hours a day; no more, no less. So, how can some people accomplish so more than others? Oddly enough, the most successful people and companies don't focus on managing time; they manage their focus and their priorities. In his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People*, Stephen R. Covey discusses his version of this theory in Chapter 3, *Put First Things First*. Dr. Covey explains that all of our activities fall into one of four categories; they are either important or not important to the mission of the practice, and they are either urgent or not urgent. Most of us immediately agree that unimportant issues should be minimized whether they are urgent or not urgent. It's the important activities that demand a closer look if you want to really make a difference in your results

On the surface it would seem that all important issues should be a priority. After all, important means significant, of value and noteworthy. Would it surprise you to learn that you should intentionally avoid spending too much time on urgent, important issues? Yes, you read it right. You will be most effective in living your practice mission if you minimize the time you spend on urgent, important issues. Let me explain.

Urgent issues demand our attention; they usually represent a crisis. Each department in the practice experiences the urgent, important issues in their own way. For example, the administrative staff may have a patient who cancels a two-hour appointment at the last minute or a patient who forgot their checkbook after completing major treatment. The clinical assistants may find themselves without a final restoration for the patient seated in their chair or running behind schedule because the treatment plan they based the appointment on was incomplete. A new patient in the hygienist's schedule may be very unhappy when they are told that they won't be having their teeth cleaned today because of an "office policy" or a patient just diagnosed with periodontal disease may be unhappy that they can't be seen again for initial therapy for over six weeks since the schedule is so tight. These issues and many more just like them prove to be frustrating for patients, staff and doctors and they lead to high-stress and burnout, yet they are all important issues.

The key to creating great success and enjoying the process is to spend the majority of your time in Quadrant 2, the **important** and **not urgent** quadrant. With this mindset, you will be focusing on making your vision for your practice a reality. You will recognize that you are in Quad 2 when you determine that your efforts are proactive rather than reactive.

How much time you spend with your staff discussing your vision for the practice? Do you hold regular staff meetings with proactive agendas or are your staff meetings counterproductive and stress inducing? Or, have you stopped having staff meetings altogether? Do you encourage each other to brainstorm and share ideas for improving the level of service you provide to patients? Can you stop playing the blame game and come together as a team to solve problems and prevent them from reoccurring?

This is a lot harder than it first appears. Many of us are conditioned to function well in Quadrant 1. We have gotten very good at putting out fires and still maintaining good relationships with our patients. Quadrant 1 behavior will be a hard habit to break; it will require great determination and tenacity. But the rewards will also be great. This new focus will improve the quality of your relationships with each other and with your patients. Stress levels will go down and patient satisfaction will rise. Everyone on staff will feel the difference when the stress bubble is popped and the tension subsides in the practice. You can't realistically eliminate crisis from the practice, but you can certainly minimize it by focusing on prevention and preparation.

A Quad 2 focus will help you define the future, communicate your vision to your staff, define success in each position and establish accountability. Together you will turn your talents into performance. This is where things get exciting, rewarding careers are born and lives can be changed forever. Your staff meetings will be a time for sharing successes, examining challenges and refocusing efforts to improve performance.

If you're ready to get started, schedule a staff meeting. The only rules for the meeting should be #1. Everyone is a genius #2. Everyone's opinion holds the same weight. Then pose the challenge that Dr. Covey presents in his book "What one thing could you do (that you aren't doing now) that if you did on a regular basis, would make a tremendous positive difference in your business or professional life?" The answers will be the Quad 2 activities you need to acknowledge, incorporate and live.

With each member of the team focusing on their own "Tremendous 20%" and committed to a common vision of the future, you will have a synergistic team that will propel you to realize your potential both professionally and personally.

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