



You've Got to Slow Down So That You Can Speed Up

It sounds counter-intuitive but it works.



BY REM JACKSON

Practice Management Pearls is a regular feature that focuses on practice management issues presented by successful DPM's who are members of the American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management (www.aappm.org).

had to learn the fundamentals of basketball. You can have all the physical ability in the world, but you still have to know the fundamentals.”

It's always so easy to use sports examples when speaking about how essential having fundamental skills

Slowing Down to Speed Up

Slowing down so that you can speed up is a difficult concept to accept, because most of us are working above capacity already and “slowing down” seems impossible and counter-intuitive. “Shouldn't I go faster

The first step is accepting the fact that nothing will change until you do.

“Gentleman, this is a football”—Vince Lombardi. In the summer of 1961, when coach Lombardi uttered those now famous words, he was speaking to a team that had almost won the championship in the previous season. They knew what a football was. They had more skill with a pigskin than any other group of people on the planet. Why then did their coach start here, so far back? Because fundamentals matter.

Michael Jordan, arguably the greatest player in his sport (or any sport) said, “When I was young, I

are to being successful. They just make sense to all of us. Why then can't we easily see the corollary in managing and marketing a business like a private medical practice?

It's because very few doctors were taught these essential coaching, business, and leadership skills. It's just not part of the history, culture, or curriculum in medicine as it is for sports and coaches.

and catch up?” In fact, most of us continue to think that if we could just get organized and get EVERYTHING caught up we could then keep it that way. But accomplishing this is an illusion. It's always “just around the corner.” Something is always stopping us and we keep drifting farther and farther behind. And this is very stressful. Because of this,

Continued on page 64

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Speed Up (from page 63)

we live with low-level anxiety and feelings of guilt for not being as supportive of our staff as we should be, not seeing our friends enough (or even calling them from time to time), and always giving our family less time than they deserve. It's no fun and it seems like it will never end.

Slowing Down

So, how does a doctor or an office administrator slow down when everything has to be done now? The first step is accepting the fact that nothing will change until you do.

The second step is to stop lying to yourself about when you are going to get caught up. It sounds like this: "I'll take care of that tonight when I get home," or "I'll do this on the weekend,"—the two biggest lies we tell ourselves. We never do this because our families have very different opinions about how our nights and weekends are going to go, and you often do work at nights and weekends, but that is just catching up on work that should have been done in the day, but couldn't because you were so busy.

The third step is to block time out during the work-week. Three hours a week is a good start. Block them out when you are at your best, not Friday afternoon. Usually a morning works well—like Wednesday morning from 8AM-

11AM. This is the time you use to organize your plans and think deeply about what needs to be done to fix your management problems. You will not sacrifice patient visits by doing this. You and your staff will simply fit more people into the available slots. Production never suffers from incorporating good quality planning time into your weeks.

The next step on this journey is to add meetings

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with your staff back into your schedule. Most practices that do this well start with a morning 15-minute stand-up "huddle," which is a quick review of the day, the goals, and what needs to be done. Adding a weekly or bi-weekly staff meeting to your schedule during which staff members report on key practice metrics that they are responsible for and the projects they are working on will transform your practice over time.

Speeding Up

Blocking your time and protecting it from cancellations is the mechanism for slowing down, even while the work continues to barrel along. By committing to this and following through, you will begin to experience the payoff, which is speeding up.

Speeding up means having a staff that is better trained and happier doing their work. It means having more capacity because things don't always need to be fixed. It means a team that is less stressed and can provide a higher level of service to happier patients experiencing better outcomes. It means enjoying your chosen career more and being able to enjoy the fruits of your labors and building a solid financial life.

Will slowing down to speed up work? Consider this: six months after Coach Lombardi uttered those famous words, his Green Bay Packers beat the New York Giants 37-0 to win the NFL Championship. That 1961 season was the beginning of Vince Lombardi's reign as one of the greatest foot-

ball coaches of all time. He would never lose in the playoffs again. In total, Lombardi won five NFL Championships in a span of seven years, including three in a row. He never coached a team with a losing record. **PM**



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