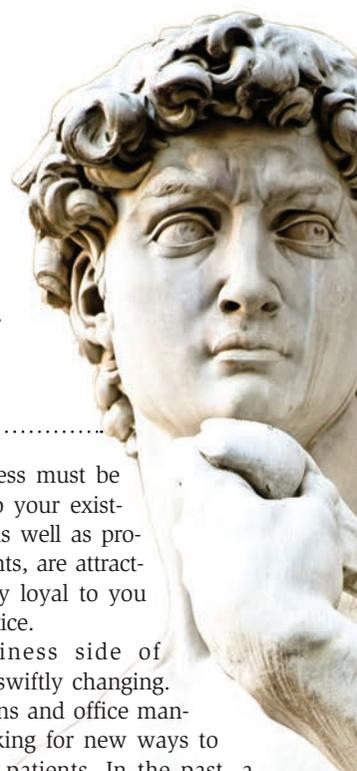




Finding the Marvel in the Marble: Part 1

Here's how to find the hidden opportunities in healthcare.

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This article is the first of three parts.

When Michelangelo was commissioned to create a sculpture of a hero who represented the virtues of the young Florentine Republic—strength, fortitude, and vigilance, he decided to use the David of the Bible. Many famous artists had sculpted hundreds of Davids in bronze or stone before, but all had created a small, weak, and effeminate David dressed as a prince.

Michelangelo's sponsors surely did not want one of those Davids standing at the entrance to the great city of Florence. Michelangelo had read Bible passages and envisioned a different David. He asked himself, "Could those Davids have protected Florence from her enemies?" He thought about David's reply to King Saul when Saul warned him against fighting the giant, Goliath: "I used to feed my father's flock; and if a lion or bear came and carried off one of my rams, I would go in pursuit, and snatch the prey from their jaws. Lion or bear, if they threatened me, I'd catch them by the throat and slay them." Michelangelo knew that none of the Davids created by the artists before him could have strangled a lion or a bear. He envisioned a unique David—one that was strong and powerful.¹

Michelangelo further asked himself, "Is that the measure of a man—to portray him after his successes?" as the other artists before him had done? "Or is the measure of a man's greatness his courage to step up and face his giants?" He was not interested in creating a David who was confidently showing off after severing Goliath's head. He wanted a David who was tense and taut as a spring about to be released, yet also calm and determined just before facing the murderous giant. Michelangelo did not want to portray a prince who reigned in a palace, but a rugged shep-

your uniqueness must be envisioned, so your existing patients, as well as prospective patients, are attracted to and stay loyal to you and your practice.

The business side of healthcare is swiftly changing. Both physicians and office managers are looking for new ways to connect with patients. In the past, a physician would place an announcement in the paper and a listing in the *Yellow Pages* of the local phone book and then consider him- or herself

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herd who vigilantly defended his sheep from lions and bears. Michelangelo envisioned producing something with a unique value to the world.¹

How to Differentiate Your Practice from Others

To differentiate your medical practice from all other practices in the community, you must first see, just as Michelangelo did in his piece of marble, a unique vision that can be carved into the stone of your practice. Differentiating yourself and your practice takes into account the "look and feel" of your office, your staff, and your materials. Every detail gives your patients clues as to who you are and what you value. The strategies that go into promoting

ready to practice the art of medicine. Physicians would promote themselves by meeting colleagues, going to emergency departments, and waiting for patients to arrive. Today, with managed care plans, healthcare reform, the Internet, social media, and the Affordable Care Act, it is much more difficult to build a practice using these antiquated techniques. Now it is necessary to build a brand for your practice.

Is your medical practice unique and special? Everyone believes that he or she is a member of a truly unique practice or organization, but how do we convey that to our existing patients and to potential new patients? The objective is to create a name, a term, a symbol, or

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design that identifies and defines your practice and will differentiate your practice from other practices. A well-differentiated practice results in patients who will want to use you and your practice to solve their medical problem.

Marie Curie, who discovered two radioactive elements—plutonium and radium—was intent on obtaining a PhD, but in Europe prior to 1903 no woman had ever received that degree. Madame Curie differentiated herself by selecting physics, a discipline in which she was superior to others in the field. She and her collaborator and husband, Pierre, were awarded the Nobel Prize

for Physics in 1903, and Madame Curie received a second

Nobel Prize, for Chemistry, in 1911. Madame

Curie knew how to identify an area of expertise in which she would differentiate herself from all other women, as well as men.¹

Another example is Abbott Laboratories, which was in competition with Merck, the leading manufacturer in the world at creating new drugs. Abbott knew it couldn't compete with Merck in developing new drugs, so Abbott decided to compete by developing products that were less expensive, making Abbott's medications attractive to patients, physicians, and insurers. Abbott focused on post-operative drugs and medications used for diagnosis of various medical conditions. Abbott became successful because of its ability to differentiate itself from a world leader in the pharmaceutical industry.¹

Nearly every physician is trained to diagnose and treat diseases. These two skills make up a basic level of proficiency for all physicians. But merely being able to identify medical diseases and recommend treatment will not dif-

ferentiate your practice from others in the community. Only a handful of doctors can claim to be the best surgeon or the best diagnostician in the community. However, everyone can find a niche where they can excel. One example of differentiation could be offering early morning, evening, or weekend hours to provide services when other offices are closed. Another area of differentiation might be to provide the opportunity for a patient to make an appoint-

woman asked how much she owed the great painter and he said 5000 francs. The woman was aghast and said, "But you did that in thirty seconds." Picasso responded, "No, it took me forty years!"¹ Of course he was referring to his previous training and practice.

The take-home message is that we are valued by our knowledge and skills. The skills that you learned as a medical student and resident probably were on the cutting edge when

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ment, see the doctor, obtain imaging studies and lab work, and also obtain medications on the same visit. This would make the practice user-friendly and certainly would differentiate itself from most other practices in the area.

What area can you find that will make you unique and special in the eyes of your patients? Every practice has this opportunity and potential. We, like Michelangelo, need to see the David in the stone and remove the excesses. Differentiation is about finding and seizing great opportunities. In today's healthcare environment, we've seen doctors and practices rise out of simple ideas executed well. Don't ever forget that opportunities are all around us; it's just a matter of us finding and seizing them.

Rekindle Your Passion to Learn

Always be a student. If you want to differentiate yourself from others, it is imperative to be a lifelong student. Medicine is a lifelong commitment to learning. Doctors can't be on top of their game if they are still using only the knowledge and skills that they received when they completed their education or training. A medical career is a journey and not a destination. You should always make time to be a student for your entire career.

The great artist Pablo Picasso while walking on a street in Paris was recognized by a woman who asked him to draw her portrait. In a matter of minutes, Picasso gave her a portrait drawing, as she had requested. The

you transitioned from your training program to practice. However, if that's the extent of your knowledge and skills 10 or more years after you became a practicing physician, you will probably find yourself behind, or even antiquated. You must continue to learn and update your knowledge and skills to be an effective physician.

Carpe Diem (Seize the Day) or Carpe Potestatem (Seize The Opportunity)

There are multiple opportunities available to all doctors and all practices. All we need to do is find unmet needs in the marketplace, become an expert in those areas, and fill those unmet needs.

Michelangelo applied for a position in a commercial studio and was told that he must carve only what the patron requested. Michelangelo asked, "What if the sculptor thinks of something new or an idea that has not been carved before?" The owner of the studio told Michelangelo, "We carve here what others have carved before us." The art world is a better place because Michelangelo didn't take that job. How many times do we practice just the way it has been done by others or in a way that does not deviate from what has been told to us or what is written in the textbooks? We need to think the seemingly impossible and seize the opportunity.¹

Two Examples of Medical Opportunities

Before the Salk vaccine became

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