



# You Can Do Better Than Alice

First, define where you want your practice to go; then, take the steps to get there.

BY LYNN HOMISAK, PRT

**To Our Readers:** There are no foolish questions. Chances are that if you have a question or concern in your practice, others are experiencing a similar situation. We're here to help. PM [doctor and staff] readers are encouraged to submit questions to [soslynn@gmail.com](mailto:soslynn@gmail.com) which will be printed and answered in this column anonymously.

## Topic: You Can Do Better Than Alice

Dear Lynn,

Our practice is at a proverbial fork in the road. We want to be more successful but don't know how to go about doing so. Everyone realizes we're spinning our wheels and getting nowhere. There must be some steps we can take to move in the right direction.

### Response:

When I think of direction, the story of Alice in Wonderland comes to mind.

If you recall, when Alice arrives at a fork in the road during her trav-

els, she stops and looks around but doesn't know which way to go. Lost.

"What road do I take?" She asks Cheshire Cat, who happens to be sitting in a nearby tree.

"Well," replies the Cat, "That all

down some goals on paper to outline where you hope to be in a year? And five years? And ten? There is certainly something to be said for taking that initial step. Even better would be a verbal commitment, as saying it

## What is important to you?

## What is your definition of success?

depends. Where is it that you want to go?"

"I don't know" replied Alice, to which the Cat mockingly responds, "Then it really doesn't matter, does it?"

### The Where and the How

Anyone who's ever stopped to think about what direction they must take in their practice must first think about where it is they want to end up. After that, how to get there.

Does it matter if you've jotted

out load has an even greater impact on achieving these targets. Have you shared these goals with your staff? Your partner? Can you count on all of them participating to the extent they need to? Their involvement is crucial to the outcome, so first and foremost, you need to get them on board.

### Identify Your Meaning of Success

After nailing down those few concerns, the next challenge is to

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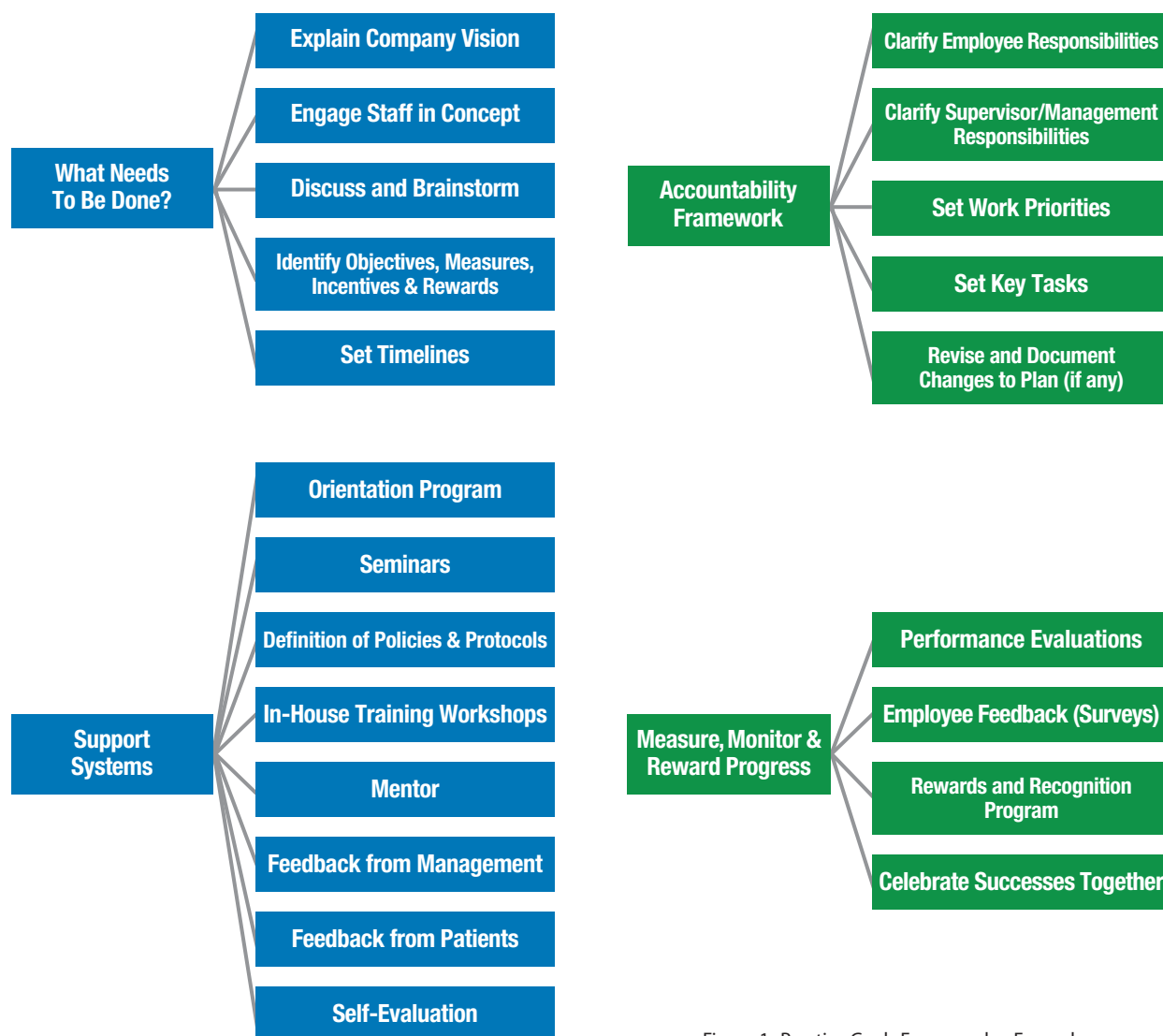


Figure 1: Practice Goals Framework—Example

Alice (from page 31)

identify your work philosophy. What is important to you? What is your definition of success? For example, is your goal to see more patients (regardless of what that may cost you in time or how it might disrupt your patient flow)? Develop your practice around a particular niche (e.g., sports medicine, pediatric)? Do more surgery? Make piles of money? Build your reputation as a technologically advanced practice? Establish a more educated, productive staff? Spend more time with your family? Have more downtime to enjoy your hobbies? Retire at an early age? (I know... all of the above, right?) Granted, that's a lot of 'stuff' to

think about, but a necessary preliminary piece to move forward. Remember, if you are not going forward, you're standing still or going backward. Every step forward is a step in the right direction.

## Realistic Goals Need Metaphorical "Legs"

*"Let your legs tell the story of your effort"*

The key to achieving your goal lies in the all-important "legs". No, not those things attached to your

## Goals without legs are just wishes in disguise.

feet. Not *everything* is about feet!! The reference to legs is a metaphor. Read on.

Goals without legs are just wishes in disguise. Typically, goals don't just happen because you wish them to be true. If that was the case, we'd all be our ideal weight and able to achieve world peace. Goal achievement requires some SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely) planning.

For the purpose of understanding  
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Alice (from page 32)

the “leg” concept, let’s submit that our goal is to create a more professional office by launching a program that results in a more educated, productive staff.

Enter, the Action Plan; the “legs”. Attaching an Action Plan to the goal will help to organize exactly what needs to happen to make it come to life. In other words, our effort. These action verb steps are things that need to be done in order to reach achievement. Think of it as an accountability framework.

Figure 1 (see page 32) is an abstract model that describes how such



plan, you’ve communicated to and engaged your team, put it into writing, and have a concrete means of following up with all related activities. Only, don’t shut the door quite yet.

cellent!” Acknowledging good behavior encourages repeat good behavior.

*Fourth.* Help staff see their own potential and significance to the goal by explaining how their specific contributions and talents will make a difference. Taking the time to define their strengths, their functions, and how they fit in may reinforce their participation.

*Fifth.* Celebrate your successes together when progress is realized and when goals have been reached. Ask for their input regarding a preferred celebratory event and be sure to follow through.

## End of Story

The legend of Alice in Wonderland will live on for ages. It tells of the lovable, yet apprehensive, story-book character lacking in confidence and direction.

You can do better than Alice, simply by defining where you want your practice to go, then committing to your prearranged action steps and accountability framework to take it there.

With a well-designed plan, collaborative energy, necessary skills, posi-

## Explain to staff how their specific contributions and talents will make a difference.

a framework might be laid out to align with our stated goal, in this case to elevate the staff value. To get things off the ground, it would help to brainstorm ideas with team members, modifying each section according to their level of participation and their individual skills and ability. Their suggestions are worthwhile.

### Plan of Execution

Once steps are outlined, it’s a question of:

- 1) Assigning tasks (who will be responsible for each particular task? Take one at a time, or you--and your team--will become overwhelmed and lose momentum).
- 2) Setting a date for completion of each task, and also
- 3) Acknowledging the status of each one. (In progress? Completed?)

Understand that nothing is ever written in stone. It’s almost certain that things will occasionally go sideways requiring an alternate plan. That’s okay. As the Accountability Framework indicates, simply revise and document changes (if any, or as necessary) and continue forward.

At this point, your goal is no longer just a wish and more of a SMART goal. You’ve committed to a realistic

### Final Steps

In the process, there may come a time when you find that group participation is sinking. Refer to the section in your framework labeled “Support Systems” for some worth-

while ways to counteract potential abandonment. Also, consider the following measures:

*First.* Realign them to your goal and reiterate why their participation is important. Answer their question, “What’s in it for me?” even before they feel compelled to ask it.

*Second.* Explain your idea beyond mere conception—beyond the “Why don’t we?” and into “Here’s what we will do.”

*Third.* Along the way, be sure to recognize and support when staff have upped their game in order to accomplish the goal and praise them for it. For example, “Beth, I heard you explain to Mrs. Brown what DPM stands for and the formal education that podiatrists go through to get their license. That was ex-

## Acknowledging good behavior encourages repeat good behavior.

tive attitudes, and realistic, reachable objectives—your future can have the direction of your choosing. And if, by chance, you happen to get to that fork in the road again, deciding on the right path will be a no-brainer! **PM**



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