



Prioritizing AI Implementation

This disruptive change warrants a weekend planning retreat.

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Companies in every industry need a way to address the periodic changes to which they must adapt. There comes a time when existing strategies must be “tweaked” in order to survive. Occasionally, one of these necessary changes is dramatic—one that might be likened to “a disturbance in the force.” Such “disturbances” compel companies, if they want to survive, to make major changes in their business models. Physician practices are no exception. They have had to adapt to many “recent” disruptive changes, including the advent of managed care, the accessibility of websites and the Internet, the availability of affordable information technology, the integration of electronic health records into practice management software, and social media. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is likely to be the next disruptor that will require major changes in office policies, job descriptions, and processes—ranging from appointment scheduling to third-party billing. It will have an impact on physician productivity and patient satisfaction.

Adapting to major change is difficult and will be especially so for long established, busy practices where staff are likely to be resistant to undergoing the disruption caused by en-

acting such change. The emotion that enters the picture when it becomes clear that some type of major change is necessary delays the decision-making process. If someone has invested a great deal of time or money—usually both, in building a practice, it is

1996 book, *Only the Paranoid Survive*, Andy Grove, former CEO of Intel, put forth the interesting strategy of “firing yourself.” He sets his strategy forth as a way of removing the emotional component from the undertaking of major change.

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especially difficult to “let go” of the existing business model and any processes that have made past success possible.

Doctors often know what in their practices needs to be changed but are bogged down in day-to-day management and the struggles of simply “getting through” the typical busy day, leaving them little time or energy to do much else. For strategy to deal with major issues, look to companies in other industries that have thrived under similar economic conditions. Intel can offer us some insight into “letting go” of emotion when facing difficult choices. In his

Grove tells the story of a time when Intel was losing its market share of the memory chip business to Asian competitors. At the time, memory chips were the foundation of Intel’s business, and the company was setting out to “beat the competition at their own game.” Their strategy was to make a better chip and sell it for less. It soon became clear that this strategy was not working and probably never would. Grove realized that he and his management team were carrying too much past baggage to think this situation through logically and unemotionally. He asked his

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colleague, Gordon Moore, “If we got kicked out and the board brought in a new CEO, what do you think he would do?” Moore’s answer was, “He would get us out of the memory chip business.” Grove responded by asking, “Why shouldn’t you and I walk out the door, come back and do that ourselves?”

This is precisely what they did, and Intel soon began focusing on a new strategy—the production of microprocessors. This decision re-ignited the company’s growth and led to even greater success. Since the publication of Grove’s book, many CEOs have adopted this approach. Doctors facing difficult change should consider doing the same.

The primary reason that we miss opportunities for positive change or do not accomplish as much as we could is that we seldom take the time to develop a “plan” for reaching our goals. Days pass quickly in a busy practice. Most decisions are directed at “putting out fires” and “getting

can be used to impact every process and job description within a practice in a positive way. Establishing a retreat to analyze and understand the interconnections among the processes in your practice will let you

side the box.” Once goals and process changes have been discussed and established at a retreat, a successful implementation is more likely upon return to the practice. This is because team members will have already

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know which steps in each of those processes would benefit from integration of AI.

Many businesses plan ahead by setting aside one weekend each year for this type of strategic planning. Few medical practitioners, however, take this type of “time out”. In spite of concerns regarding the costs of a retreat, or the worry that attendees will be “giving up a weekend,” this is a strategy worth adopting. A retreat differs from an office meeting, even a meeting that is off-site. It requires

“bought into” the plan before leaving the retreat, and will have been themselves instrumental in setting the goals and charged with their implementation.

Why not suggest the idea of scheduling a retreat for the purpose of addressing the long-term goals (AI implementation) of your practice at your next office meeting? Make this a high priority, pick a date when most everyone can attend, select a location, determine if you need assistance from an outside “subject expert,” and plan an event that everyone will look forward to. During the months leading up to the retreat, everyone should begin to think of ideas or issues s/he would like to discuss. It is okay to list these and have a structured agenda ahead of time, but leave much of the time open at the actual retreat for “brainstorming sessions” at which everyone will have a blank page in front of him/her with no preconceived point of view. “Think big” during your strategic planning retreat. This is the time to be outrageous and think the impossible—the key to achieving big accomplishments. I guarantee that if you regularly set aside time for this type of endeavor, you will find that the results in your practice will be “bigger and better” each year. PM

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through the day” rather than planning for the future. Frequently, much of our work is even incomplete at the end of the day—necessitating that we use any free time for playing “catch up” instead of planning for the future. In this type of environment, it is difficult to find time for setting long-term goals and developing a strategy for achieving them.

An effective way of addressing this dilemma is getting away from the routine office environment and devoting a few uninterrupted days to a *strategic planning retreat*. Such a venue offers a place to contemplate the “big issues.” Integration of artificial intelligence into a practice is one such “issue.” It warrants a strategic planning retreat because it

meticulous advance planning, and its significance is elevated when it is established as a priority, without overly skimping on cost. It sometimes makes sense for attendees to be “doctors only,” with the intent of setting this time aside for the purpose of establishing practice goals and priorities.

At other times—such as prior to the implementation of projects aimed at major change which will require full commitment from both doctors and staff—attendance should include the entire staff along with the doctors. There is no question that this type of “brainstorming” is best done in an atmosphere where no one will be distracted by daily routine and everyone is encouraged to “think out-