



Between the Carrot and the Stick

Find new ways to motivate your staff, your patients and yourself.

By Nataliya V. Schetchikova, PhD

For many doctors of chiropractic, the road to success is paved with obstacles. A variety of factors, from insurance claim denials and dealing with staff issues to patient non-compliance and the unstable economic situation, can cause frustration, depression or burnout. Even in the difficult economy, though, it is in your power to change your outlook and resurrect your ability to motivate yourself, your staff and your patients, say several successful doctors and business consultants *ACA News* spoke with.

“Look at the trying times as a challenge to rise to the occasion—to have a much clearer focus and understanding of the mission of your office,” says Richard Vincent, DC, a veteran practice management expert and president of Integrative Health Care Practice Resources (IHCRP), a practice consulting group (www.ihcpr.com). “People are under greater stress, the human mechanism breaks down easier—there are more people out there in need of our services,” he adds.

Get Out of a Rut

First, if you are personally going through a down state, find a way to change your mood, at least for the moment. “If you feel burned out or troubled, you can’t effectively manage from that level. You shouldn’t make important decisions in a down state,” says Brian Justice, DABCO, vice president of IHCRP, who practices in Rochester, N.Y. To change your outlook, he recommends “exercise; laughter; good counsel with a friend, life coach, mentor or counselor; or going outside for a walk. Take a couple of deep breaths and refocus on the present moment.”

Then, take a good look at yourself and your life. “It’s best if you can do that with someone you trust or respect, so you don’t self-rationalize what’s going on,” says Dr. Justice. “Motivate yourself by identifying what gives you the most pleasure or insulates you from pain, and set measurable goals to attain that. Also, step back and try to point out potential roadblocks that may prevent you from being successful.”

In plain terms, motivation can be viewed in terms of a carrot and a stick, adds Dr. Justice. “Slow down and figure out what is meaningful to you at a deep level. What ‘carrot’ do you want to

go toward—what drives you, what brings you alive? Also, what's really troubling you, your patients, your relationships, your finances or your staff? What don't you like? Be clear and break it down," he says.

"Whether you like it or not, as a doctor, you set the tone for what's happening in the office," says Dr. Vincent. "If you come into the office in a negative state of mind, within two hours, everyone will be in that same state."

Stay Positive

The reason it's important to stay positive is the law of attraction. "It's impossible to focus on the good and the bad simultaneously," says Wayne Whalen, DC, DACAN, FIACN, FICC, past president of California Chiropractic Association and past chairman of the Council on Chiropractic Guidelines and Practice Parameters (CCGPP), who practices in Santee, Calif. "Focus on the good, and you will draw more of it into your life. Focus on the abundance you do have, to enjoy more abundance."

If you think that positive thinking is only a cliché, think again. "Try an experiment," Dr. Whalen suggests. "Spend one day focusing on all the things that annoy you, and make sure your staff gets to hear all about it: traffic on the way in, the weather, so-and-so is late or cancelled, the reports you have to do, your bank balance, your problems at home. At the end of the day, see how many more patients cancelled, no-showed or rescheduled. Be careful, though, because this tactic has effects that reach far into the future.

"The next day, look only for the good stuff. Compliment your spouse and kids and your staff. Thank your regular patients for always being on time and for following your advice. Find something nice to say about everyone you come in contact with that day. Envision a full schedule and a bunch of new patients," he continues. "At the end of the day, see how many patients show up. If you compare these two days, you'll realize the power of your attitude."

For those finding it hard to stay positive, cultivating gratitude may help. "Every morning, think of three things you are grateful for—and at the end of the day, come up with three things that happened that day that you are grateful for," says John Ventura, DC, DABCO, who practices in Rochester, N.Y., is clinical instructor in family medicine at the University of Rochester School of Medicine, assistant professor at New York Chiropractic College and co-owner of IHCP. R.

Dr. Whalen agrees: "Give thanks every chance you have. Look for the good news everywhere, and share it. When a patient makes progress, announce it by saying, 'Good news! Mrs. Smith's headaches are 50-percent improved.' Get staff involved: 'Good news! Mr. Smith, who hasn't been in to see us since 2007, made an appointment!'"

Set the Right Tone in the Office

A system of sharing good news—and reinforcing your staff's contribution to the success of the office—will also help boost their morale. "Too often we get caught up in letting money be our primary motivator, but there isn't a good correlation between money and happiness, once you get above the baseline of poverty," says Dr. Justice.

Explain to staff that they are a part of an important process, Dr. Justice continues. "When they greet patients with a smile, make them feel accepted and put them in a better mood, the patient will be more participatory in the treatment, and the chance of a successful outcome is enhanced. Build a culture in the office where everyone reinforces each other by being positive in their words and questions."

When critiquing is necessary, "do it in a more positive and self-esteem-preserving way," says Dr. Justice. And make it a point to "catch your staff doing something right and praise them for it. If you are only addressing bad behavior, it affects their self-esteem and motivation."

Simple words of gratitude or little signs of appreciation—a gift card to a restaurant or a store or half a day off for going an extra mile—go a long way, agrees Dr. Whalen. "It doesn't cost you much, but it does a lot for staff morale."

Build a Support Network

Just as your staff needs reinforcement, encouragement and support, so do you—and nothing beats networking with colleagues. "Seek out a mentor," advises Dr. Ventura. "No matter how much you know, there is someone who does things a little better or more efficiently."

For seasoned practitioners, mentoring younger colleagues can also help bring the spark back in their own practices, says Dr. Ventura. "If you have to teach someone else, you fine-tune your own skills and find additional motivation—you remem-

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ber what drove you to become a DC and what you enjoy about it,” he adds.

The role of a mentor is to serve as a sounding board and a source of inspiration, says Dr. Vincent—and it’s never too early to look for one. For students,

greatly improve the odds of making it a lifestyle change,” he says. (Editor’s Note: For more on patient motivation, turn to page 24.)

And don’t let economic difficulties discourage you. “No matter what hap-

sure you have excellent systems in place. Then go back to focusing on what you are doing right and what you have to be grateful for. Don’t let small, irritating issues sidetrack you from accomplishing what moves you toward your real goals,” says Dr. Whalen.

Resist avoiding unpleasant tasks, such as paying bills, checking your bank account balance, firing an employee, or making an unpleasant call, says Dr. Whalen. “Make sure these are on your ‘to do’ list, and do them first. There are few things more satisfying and empowering than accomplishing something difficult or unpleasant. It’s a great way to start your day. If you can get that done, what else can you accomplish?”

Keep reminding yourself of the reasons you chose your profession. “As DCs, we are largely in charge of our destinies. Very few health care providers get to see immediate changes in patients, but we do—and that’s a pretty big motivator,” says Dr. Whalen.

Ultimately, positive attitude and persistence do pay off. “If real success were that easy, everyone would achieve it. I think God puts roadblocks in front of you to see if you are serious about what you want. Too many of us give up at the first rejection or hurdle. Most salespeople realize that you need to knock on 10 doors to get one sale. Good salesmen see the first nine rejections as the necessary steps to get to the door that will open,” Dr. Whalen concludes. ■

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**Wayne Whalen, DC, DACAN, FIACN, FICC
Santee, Calif.**

he recommends touching base with DCs they know through family or personal experience—or with those DCs they interviewed before deciding on a career in chiropractic. “These DCs can become a rich resource to provide support and guidance for you.”

Of course, membership in national and state associations can provide a great resource for networking and problem-solving via electronic listservs, publications and face-to-face educational events. For example, says Dr. Ventura, 15 DCs in the Rochester, N.Y., area formed a networking group, which meets once a month at different doctors’ homes to socialize, discuss the new literature or the latest approaches for treating conditions, and share strategies for dealing with business challenges. “We’ve been doing this for a year and a half, and it’s been wonderful,” he adds.

pens with the economy, there will always be work injuries, car accidents, aging populations and low-back pain,” says Ronald Farabaugh, DC, the founder of the Medical Referral System, who practices in Columbus, Ohio. “People will always need what we have, and no one else can provide it nearly as effectively as us.”

In his office, Dr. Farabaugh has made it a rule to discuss research with patients. “Research has built a solid foundation for what we do in daily practice—and when patients know that the doctor is up on literature, they are much more compliant, and you start to get referrals. Money is simply a reward for doing it right,” he says.

Keep the Momentum

When implementing changes, take it one step at a time and stay focused. “Prioritize to take care of problems. Make

Motivate Patients

Networking, which brings new ideas, may be especially helpful in a difficult economy. “The old ways don’t work anymore, but there are new, better and more profitable ways of doing what we do. Innovate. Find out what people want, and give it to them,” says Dr. Whalen.

Remember that all patients are different—don’t assume that you know what’s best for them; ask them, says Dr. Justice. “Get to know your patients on a deeper level and understand what motivates them. What are their goals of treatment? Why are they reluctant to do what you are suggesting? What do they relate to? Patient education plus some inspirational concept that the patient resonates with

Cultivate the Leader Within

With the news often emphasizing negative events, consider replacing reading and watching news and negative TV programs with reading good books, suggests Ron Farabaugh, DC. “Readers are leaders. Turn to motivational books, books about Lincoln or Roosevelt, to help develop a leader within you or gain self-confidence back.”

Richard Vincent, DC, recommends Napoleon Hill’s *The Law of Success*. “This book was given to me in 1963 as a gift, and I’ve read it 10 times over the years,” he says.

Wayne Whalen, DC, agrees. “I read good books, books that motivate me to see the bright side. I particularly enjoy *The Success Principles* by Jack Canfield. I also read motivational quotes of the day and spend time in quiet reflection and prayer, giving thanks and asking for guidance, patience and wisdom.”

