



Unearth the hidden treasures in your dental practice: The parable of acres of diamonds



By Julie Parker

In the heart of Africa, there lived a farmer who dreamt of becoming an overnight millionaire. Tales of fellow farmers striking it rich by discovering diamond mines had ignited a spark of hope within him. With visions of wealth and success, he sold his cherished farm, filled with fertile soil and endless potential, to embark on a quest for diamonds.

However, destiny had other plans for him. The farmer's relentless pursuit of these elusive diamonds led him on a lifelong journey across the vast African continent, only to end in despair and tragedy.

Consumed by frustration and sorrow, he tragically drowned himself in a river.

Unbeknownst to him, the new owner of his farm stumbled upon a radiant glimmer at the bottom of a stream on the property. He retrieved a dazzling stone that he placed on his mantel as an ornament. Little did he know that he held in his hands one of the largest diamonds ever discovered.

This story beautifully illustrates a profound lesson—often, we overlook the incredible riches that lie hidden right beneath our feet. As dental practice owners and team members, you possess “Acres of Diamonds” within your reach. Instead of ceaselessly searching for new patients and pouring resources into advertising, take a moment to reflect on your OWN “acres of diamonds”.

I consider there are three main layers of these “diamonds”.

The patient in the chair

The patient in the chair represents your most valuable asset. Are you conducting comprehensive examinations and offering personalised care to help patients understand and be aware of their oral health, or are you unintentionally observing a decline in their oral well-being during their visits? Review the following checklist for a comprehensive dental examination and assess if there are any additional elements that could be included in the assessment of your patients:

1. Medical and dental history;
2. Chief complaint;
3. Visual inspection;
4. Intraoral examination;
5. Periodontal assessment;
6. Dental charting;
7. X-rays;
8. Occlusion;
9. Oral cancer screening;
10. TMJ and jaw function;
11. Salivary gland evaluation;
12. Soft tissue examination;
13. Functional analysis;
14. Comprehensive treatment plan;
15. Oral hygiene and home care;
16. Airway assessment;
17. Evaluation for sleep-related issues;
18. Cosmetic/aesthetic assessment;
19. Assessment of the condition of existing dental restorations; and
20. Diet considerations.

Existing active patient base

Your active patients are the foundation upon which your practice can prosper. Are you nurturing this group effectively? Ensure that recalls and incomplete treatments are managed well.

By doing so, you can maximise the value of your existing patients and maintain their loyalty. Here are elements of proper management for existing active patients:

1. Recall strategy

Assess the current recall strategy's success rate in bringing patients back for check-ups. As a team, brainstorm ideas that can help you achieve stronger results.

2. Treatment plan acceptance

Identify each practitioner's treatment plan acceptance rate. Analyse if there are areas for improvement in patient engagement and communication. Consider role-playing exercises with team members to practice presenting treatment plans effectively and addressing patient concerns.

3. Managing incomplete treatment

Explore ways to improve patient communication and follow-up, ensuring patients understand the importance of completing recommended treatment.

4. Patient nurturing

Create a patient nurturing program to maintain a strong patient-practice relationship. Consider sending regular newsletters with dental tips, practice updates and educational content. Send anniversary cards to celebrate patient loyalty and acknowledge milestones. Send birthday cards to show appreciation and personalise the patient experience. Patient surveys are also a powerful way to ensure patients realise that their satisfaction is important.

5. Education

Teach patients how to describe your practice within their own connections, to increase the chances of referrals. Most patients have little idea on how to uniquely share what is special about your practice.

Inactive patient base

Often forgotten, the inactive patient base holds significant untapped potential in established practices. Develop systems to re-engage them, offering compelling reasons to return and become active patients again. A simple, thoughtful outreach can transform these deeply hidden diamonds into valuable assets. Here are actions your practice can take:

1. Reactivation project

Create a reactivation project targeting inactive patients who haven't visited the practice in a specified period.

2. Share your news

Share practice news and improvements, emphasising any issues that may have been resolved (e.g., team member concerns or appointment flexibility).

3. Offer incentives

Offer incentives or promotions to entice return, such as discounts or bonuses on dental services or free oral health screenings for returning patients.

4. Oral health education

Remind inactive patients of the importance of maintaining good oral health and its impact on overall well-being.

5. Share educational content

Share educational newsletters and content that highlights the significance of regular dental check-ups. Include pictures of new team members, interesting aspects of their lives and in particular, their pets!

6. Information seminars

Host information sessions or webinars on various dental topics. Invite inactive patients to attend, providing an opportunity for them to reconnect.

7. Feedback survey

Send a feedback survey to inactive patients to understand the reasons for their absence. Ask for their input on what would encourage them to return. Use survey responses to address specific concerns and enhance the patient experience.

8. Generate referrals

Ask this group to consider referring your practice within their networks and connections.

The parable of Acres of Diamonds serves as a powerful reminder to practice owners and team members. In your relentless pursuit of success, don't overlook the wealth that already surrounds you. Your practice is teeming with untapped potential. By focusing on comprehensive care, patient retention and re-engagement strategies, you can unlock the true riches of your practice without the need for endless searching and external investments. Your Acres of Diamonds are right where you are, just waiting to be unearthed.

About the author

Julie Parker is a Dental Practice Management Consultant and Team Educator. At the age of 33, Julie became the first non-dentist to own a dental practice in Australia. Julie is Co-Founder of Julie Parker Practice Success and Co-Founder of Dental Business Mastery. Visit julieparkerpracticesuccess.com.au and dentalbusinessmastery.com.au to find how Julie can help your dental practice be more successful. You will find information about consulting programs, online courses, podcasts, free downloads and more.