

Rock-solid time management

In the third part of the series, Jane Lelean shows you a way to organise your appointment book to increase your effectiveness and profitability

Time for a quiz

One day an expert in time management was speaking to a group of business students and, to drive home a point, used an illustration those students will never forget. As he stood in front of the group of high-powered overachievers he said, 'Okay, time for a quiz'.

Then he pulled out a one-gallon, wide-mouthed Mason jar and set it on the table in front of him. He then produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar. When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked, 'Is this jar full?'

Everyone in the class said, 'Yes'. He responded with, 'Really?' and reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. Then he poured some gravel in and shook the jar, causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the space between the big rocks. Then he asked the group once more, 'Is the jar full?'

By this time the students were on to him. 'Probably not', one of them answered. 'Good!' he replied. He reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand. He started pouring the sand in the jar and it went into all of the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the question, 'Is this jar full?'

'No!' the class shouted. Once again he said, 'Good'. Then he grabbed a jug of water and began to pour it in until the jar was filled to the brim. Then he looked at the class and asked, 'What



is the point of this illustration?'

One eager beaver raised his hand and said, 'The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard you can always fit some more things in it!'

'No', the speaker replied, 'That's not the point. The truth this illustration teaches us is, if you don't put the big

rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all.'

This parable beautifully illustrates how to organise your appointment book to maximum efficiency and profitability.

Dental rocks

For this system to work you must first identify what the rocks are in your appointment

book. My clients and I recognise rock appointments to be the ones that:

- Generate the greatest profit
- Generate the highest number of high value referrals into the practice.

Spend some time with your practice management software or paper records to identify which of your treatments return the highest profit and

which of your patients have generated the most profitable referral sources.

Rock treatments will generally include:

- Implants
- Cosmetic cases
- Quadrants of crown and bridge
- Quadrants of restorations
- Whitening
- Some new patient consultations
- Any treatments charged above your hourly rate.

Dental gravel

Dental gravel comprises those items of treatment that are profitable and form the bulk of your day.

Gravel treatments will generally include:

- Anything charged at your hourly rate
- Single units of crown and bridge
- Single units of restorations
- Endodontics.

Dental sand

Dental sand consists of those items of treatment that are less profitable or invoiced at a rate lower than your normal hourly rate.

Sand treatments will generally include:

- Most examinations
- DTBS/DTTS work (if applicable)
- Emergencies.

Categorise your appointment book

Once you have identified your treatment equivalents of rocks, gravel and sand, you must allocate the time in your appointment book accordingly. This can easily be done with most dental practice management software or different coloured pencils if you are using a paper-based system.

Just as with free days, focus days and buffer days, discussed in the previous article, the best way to implement this system is just to do it.

Some of my clients have implemented the system so that it starts in six months' time. By implementing it this

way, it means they don't have to change any appointments. Most of those who have made the change in this way report back to me that the system worked so well they wish they had implemented it sooner. You can too, if you choose to implement it immediately and reschedule patients as necessary.

Whichever way you choose to implement rocks, gravel and sand, it will make your appointment book more efficient and profitable.

Involve your staff

For this system to run smoothly, you should have the understanding of your team, particularly your reception staff. Schedule meetings beforehand, share with them what you are seeking to achieve, and discuss openly any teething problems you may experience and solve them together.

In this article, I have shown you a way to organise your appointment book that will increase your effectiveness and profitability.

In the fourth part of the series, which will be published in the next issue of *Irish Dentist*, I will address the tricky issue of time management. 

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