

# What Do You Believe In: Developing a List of Core Values For Your Practice

By John B. Pinto

[C] 2005 J. Pinto & Associates, Inc All Rights Reserved

20<sup>th</sup> Century advertising legend David Ogilvy, an Oxford University dropout, door-to-door salesman and farmer, was one the most revered marketing minds in the world before his death in 1999. Among thousands of brilliant client campaigns, he launched the most famous automobile advertisement of all time:

## **At 60 Miles an Hour the Loudest Noise in This New Rolls-Royce Comes From the Electric Clock.**

Was his inner secret to success mere hard work and a fluent typewriter? No. As odd as it may seem to say about a man from the rascal-filled world of advertising, I believe Ogilvy's fame--and his customers' victories--came from a few core philosophies and values about what worked in his particular profession.

Here's one of his most famous quotes, expressing the values he used in selecting staff to work with: "Ordinary men will hire men who are less than they are, and then those men will on to hire men of even less stature until the organization is replete with pygmies."

Just imagine how applying that simple value over the past 10 years would change the practice you work in today.

Every profession is different, of course. The core values leading to commercial success in the business of marketing are perhaps different from the list you would expect find helpful in the business of medicine generally or in your own special practice. The point I want to make is that you should have them...these core values...and you probably do, although it is unlikely you've taken the time to write them down.

I often hear clients say, "We are absolutely committed to our core practice values." But when I ask what these are, from memory or a written list, most doctors and their managers wince and admit to little more than one-word platitudes like, "quality" or "caring."

We're not looking here, obviously, for anything as momentous as the Magna Carta or Declaration of Independence. But it should be reasonable for even the smallest practices and the youngest doctors to develop and memorialize a few core goals. Here are some to get you started.

1. We embrace the concept that patients should receive the most modern and effective advances in care, wrapped in old-fashioned notions about caring. We solve problems AND we develop relationships, with equal attention to both.

2. We work as a practice team, supporting each other for the benefit of our patients at all levels of care. We will readily terminate any individual who, despite our best efforts at intervention, continues to be poor at working as part of a team.
3. We hold the team to performance standards which are high, subject to constant elevation, and documented in writing.
4. We are a “Learning Company.” We believe that each member of the team, no matter how formally or informally educated before they arrived here, has more to learn every day. We put large resources of time and money into learning, and we do our best to measure the return on this investment.
5. As doctors, managers and support staff, we tell the truth to each other, even when that truth is difficult or painful, and we stay sufficiently engaged with such discussions to talk out any hurt feelings. We regularly foster a “safe space” in meetings to air such discussions.
6. We seek continuous improvement in the services and products we provide to patients. We also work together to contain costs. It’s a really big deal to us when we can discover a protocol change that improves quality without increasing costs, or decreasing costs without reducing quality.
7. In delivering patient services, we value the “subjective” quality that patients can measure for themselves (cleanliness of facilities, friendliness of staff, engagement of the doctor, etc.)
8. We also value the “objective” quality that patients might not really notice, but that very much count in medicine (evidence-based care pathways, surgical and clinical outcomes, medical equipment in good repair, etc.)
9. We believe in the power of measuring and benchmarking the numbers of the practice: patient visits and surgical volumes, growth trends, new patient levels, revenue yields, etc.
10. We strive to extract daily the full value of every practice resource. We work hard to make sure that doctors and staff are working to their full capacity, and that precious facilities, equipment, promotion, and expertise are not wasted.
11. After screening for quality-of-care, ethical and legal issues, we make most practice decisions based on whether it’s more profitable to do “A” or “B.”
12. We balance our operational standards with appropriate resources. When we raise our performance standards, we provide staff with a commensurately higher level of resources.
13. We are appropriately vanguard in our business and clinical management, but not so “leading edge” as to be wasteful, error prone or distracted. In the main, we wait for leaders in our industry to point the way. Typically, this means that we are among the first 50% of practices to try something new, but not among the first 5%.
14. We work to create a “consequential environment.” This means that there are positive consequences for great performance, and adverse consequences for poor performance that does not improve.

15. While most of our practice income is “active,” derived from direct patient care—provided one patient at a time—we are making efforts to shift to achieve more of our practice income from “passive” sources such optical dispensing and surgical facility fees.
16. We make decisions about the practice based primarily on what will be best for the overall company and it’s customers, not based on what will be easiest or more enjoyable for the doctors and staff.
17. We compensate our professional and lay staff commensurate with their contributions and their value to our practice, and our practical ability to pay.
18. We make hiring and staffing decisions to have a smaller number of high-output, highly compensated staff, rather than a larger number of just-average workers.
19. We are careful to not starve our practice of needed financial resources and reserves, as by drawing excessive sums from the practice to support desired but unsustainable doctor lifestyles.
20. We work daily to develop the leadership skills of our staff and doctors, so that the next generation of practice leaders are in the wings and ready to go.

\* \* \*

Copy whatever you like from the above list of sample core values for your practice. I hope you'll add some your own, as well. Meet with your people to refine the list. Post a copy. Read it out loud often. Keep improving the list. And try your best to live up to it.

As Ogilvy so aptly put it, "Look for people who will aim for the remarkable, who will not settle for the routine." As a practice owner, or a practice administrator, this obviously refers to you, first.

###