

TEN TIMELESS TIPS

for Ophthalmic Practice Success

First, develop a plan; then, engage skilled people to implement it, and modify when necessary.



BY JOHN B. PINTO

The national economy will ebb and flow, ophthalmic surgical and medical trends will evolve, and the current fixation with private equity and corporate consolidation may wane. There is, however, an enduring list of evergreen initiatives that are intrinsic to practice success regardless of extraneous conditions such as these.

1 Evergreen Tip No. 1: A written strategic plan is crucial to long-term success. The plan represents intentionality—that is, the practice is not drifting from one random expedient to the next. It is, rather, intentionally pursuing a logical, linear progression of opportunities. The plan should describe the practice's mission and values, intended service area, desired growth rate, service and provider mix, positioning strategy, and alignment with other market participants. The plan is not etched in stone; it should be a living document that provides the context for tactical priorities.

2 Evergreen Tip No. 2: A strong administrator who has appropriate experience, skill, and dedication is crucial to the practice's health and growth. This professional should have competencies that are aligned with the practice's current needs and with your aspirations as a business owner.

3 Evergreen Tip No. 3: Physician leadership, in conjunction with a strong administrator, can take your practice to new heights. Without a fully

engaged physician leader, even the most talented administrator will fail.

4 Evergreen Tip No. 4: Install a management committee consisting of the physician leader, administrator, and department heads. The committee should meet bimonthly to ensure timely progress on all open issues and opportunities. This meeting can also provide a forum to ensure that, if a conflict arises between employees, it can be addressed early, with the proactive aim of resolving the matter in a mutually acceptable way.

5 Evergreen Tip No. 5: Have written operational guidelines for all practice areas. These guidelines should contain the agreed-upon best way to do everything in the practice, and they should be regularly updated.

6 Evergreen Tip No. 6: Create a quality assurance/performance improvement committee. This group is to monitor outcomes, utilization, facilities, and the customer experience. The process fosters and advances a commitment to continuous quality improvement.

7 Evergreen Tip No. 7: Maintain a sufficient profit margin. Practices with high percentile profit margins (>40%) have the resources to seize opportunities, react to challenges, and weather potential cuts in the Medicare physician fee schedule.

8 Evergreen Tip No. 8: Invest in new technologies and techniques. The goal here should be to stay on the leading edge without tipping over into unproven,

costly capital investments. This usually means being neither the first nor the last to adopt new methods.

9 Evergreen Tip No. 9: Maintain access to capital. Keep not less than 3 months' expenses worth of cash and cash equivalents—accounts receivable, credit lines, working capital accounts, personal funds—at the ready. This fund can act as a business shock absorber in the event of third-party payment delays and the like.

10 Evergreen Tip No. 10: Always be marketing. A marketing mindset should inform staff behavior throughout the organization. Everyone, at all levels, should be conscious of the desired growth rate and the practice's mission to preserve or increase its market share. This includes a continual focus on customer service, continuity of care, and referral outreach, and an appropriate array of direct-to-consumer efforts.

JOHN B. PINTO

- Practice management consultant and author, J. Pinto & Associates
- pintoinc@aol.com; (619) 223-2233
- Financial Disclosure: None

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