



Do I really
need
Applied
Strategic
Planning?

In today's *complex* world
you cannot afford to plan traditionally.

Applied Strategic Planning provides
a *comprehensive, adaptive* approach
to achieving your preferred future.

Read on to learn more or contact us at www.InsperoTeam.com



Sadly, most people spend more time planning their family vacation than their life and life's work.

Do you feel fulfilled, appreciated, and rewarded at the end of your workday? Do you feel an increasing sense of satisfaction with more freedom and less burden of responsibility due to your staff's high level of shared leadership commitment? Do the great majority of your patients choose your finest and most complete care? Does your practice enjoy a reputation for being valuably unique in your community? Have you achieved, or are you well on the way to achieving, financial freedom? Is your home life filled with joy — most of the time — and is it balanced with your work life?

If you answered “yes” to the above questions, then you most likely have a vision for yourself, your family, your staff, and your practice. You may even have an Applied Strategic Plan (ASP). The first step in such a process is the creation of a compelling vision of the future. However, if you are like the majority of dentists — and the population in general — you do not. Don't beat yourself up for that. Many small business owners and the vast majority of dentists don't have a plan for their future.

For most, the words “Applied Strategic Planning” connote something that General Electric, General Motors, AT&T, or the military might use. It's certainly not something for dentists or individuals in general. Sadly, most people spend more time planning their family vacation than their life and life's work.

In 1970, I was a young Air Force dental officer stationed in Tacoma, Wash. Like most new graduates, I needed the business knowledge that dental school had failed to provide. Quite fortunately, I took one of the local community college's professional extension courses titled “Incorporation of a Professional's Practice.” It was there that I met a dynamic teacher by the name of Howard Church, who introduced me to the power of vision.

Those were the earliest days of incorporated practice. Howard taught us many practical lessons, plus sound financial planning for running any small business. But his greatest gift may have been his insistence that we each write a prospectus for our practice, looking five years into the future. It was to be part of the package we took to banks to secure lines of credit for starting our practices after we left the service. I can still remember how surprised

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the bankers were when I handed them that prospectus. They just weren't used to doctors doing such a thing! The loan packages we received were exceptional but, as I said earlier, that was much less consequential in the long term than the visions we wrote.

So, what is this thing we abbreviate "ASP" and why does it begin with vision? Let's begin with a history lesson.

In the first century B.C., the Roman philosopher and senator Seneca said, "Our plans miscarry because they have no aim. When a man (or woman) does not know for what port he (or she) is making, then no wind is the right wind." Seneca was right. No ship has ever missed the port because the port moved. The course set by the captain was wrong! ASP guides us to develop the details of that port while also teaching us how to navigate through the turbulent waters along the way. How many colleagues do you know who always seem to follow the latest speaker or fad and, though they sometimes experience short-term improvement, it's usually all too transient? A year later they are back where they started or have developed an entirely new set of problems. Most of us are guilty of this in the first few years of practice. Why? Because we become mired in the moments of the everyday challenges every young professional faces when he or she signs large bank notes and assumes the major responsibilities necessary to lead a practice.

Young doctors often lack emotional maturity and have only the high-fear/low-trust leadership model they experienced in dental school. When he or she takes his or her focus off the vision, he or she will react just as I did. It's hard to remember that the primary objective was to drain the swamp when you're up to your ears in alligators!

Fortunately, about five years into my practice, another gifted teacher, Clay Sherman, Ph.D., reintroduced ASP to me. Clay was a consultant primarily with Fortune 500 companies. I became so interested that I sought extensive training in ASP, reapplied it to my practice, and began to teach it. It has made an extraordinary difference in my life — and practice — and for the many people with whom I have been privileged to work. Let's now get deeper into the process itself so that you can begin to apply it.

Stephen Covey's best-selling book, *The Seven Habits of*

Highly Successful People, which serves as a primer for our annual ASP series for dentists, spouses, and core team members, tells us that highly successful people are proactive and that *they begin with the end in mind*. This is very different than the average person who simply reacts to things happening to him or her.

Covey also tells us that successful people understand that the private victory over oneself always precedes the public victory, and that these people *always put first things first*. Of course, this implies that they have thought seriously about what is important in their life and work. In my own early years, it was more common that I was reacting and putting first what was important to others and not to me. I thought that was the way it was supposed to be!

I recall countless times during the first retreat in our ASP series when a dentist and spouse made similar discoveries. They were somehow living someone else's script. I remember one particularly successful dentist who was grossing about \$1 million with a good net, but she was a single parent whose children were being raised by her mother and the housekeeper. She was just too busy making the practice a smashing success to have time for the children. She eventually sold the practice and changed careers, allowing much more time for the people she decided were really first in her life.

She had quite unintentionally been following what was the norm for the "successful dentist." She had not stopped to ask herself what really mattered most, nor had she projected herself five or more years into the future and then asked herself to imagine, looking back, what will have mattered most today viewed from the future. The simplest and most effective way to do this is through the **process** of Applied Strategic Planning.

First, ASP helps you clarify your values and create an image of the future personally and professionally congruent with your values. We do not live our lives to work, but rather we work to live our lives! When our work is a response to a higher calling, it is indeed an integral part of our life, but never our entire life. I believe that your spouse or significant other will find great value by also doing this work. Then you can compare notes and create a shared vision.

There are four reasons why we use Applied Strategic Planning:

1. To increase personal fulfillment through our work
2. To add to the perceived value for our work in the mind of our consumer/patient
3. To decrease competition
4. For continuity of purpose and action over time

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You may be asking, “What do you mean *vision*? And how does that differ from *mission*?” Vision is a waking dream — a consciously created fantasy of what we would like to become. Vision expresses our deepest values about work, family, community, achievement, and self. It creates a preferred future with a purpose unique to you. Vision comes from the heart, while mission comes from the head. Mission is our pathway to the vision.

Secondly, I believe that today’s highly competitive dental marketplace demands that you create a practice unique from others. Our profession is experiencing rapid and profound consolidation as a true free-market economy comes to dentistry. All one has to do to recognize this is to observe the rapid rise of alternate forms of practice — MSOs, DPMCs, DMOs, etc.

During a recent Environmental Scan of the dental industry we found, as you’ve likely read before, that dental corporations continue to grow. This combined with the continued growth of the dental insurance industry has resulted in more options and more competition for the private practice general dentist. With the backing of venture capital, some of these entities are growing rapidly.

How do you intend to compete with these people who have a strategic plan when you do not? Imagine that you are the head coach of an NFL team playing a worthy opponent. Both teams have tremendous athletes and great staffs, but your opponent has a well-thought-out game plan, while you do not. Which team would you bet was going to win the game? I don’t tell you this to scare you, but rather to inform and alert you that these people have a game plan.

Strategic planning is the process by which an individual or the guiding members of an organization envision their future and develop the necessary procedures and operations to achieve that future. This vision provides both the direction toward which they should move as well as the energy to begin that move. The envisioning process is very different

from long-range planning (the simple extrapolation of statistical trends or forecasts). It is attempting to anticipate the future through creative cooperation rather than control it. Envisioning involves a belief that aspects of the future can be influenced and changed by what one does now. Properly implemented, the applied strategic planning process can help the individual and the organization to create their respective futures.

ASP is more than an envisioning process. It requires the setting of clear goals and objectives, plus the attainment of these within specified periods of

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time in order to reach the desired future state. Thus, targets must be developed within the context of the desired goals and

must be realistic, objective, and attainable. The goals and objectives developed within your strategic planning should provide you and your key people with a set of core priorities and guidelines for virtually all day-to-day managerial decisions. This greatly simplifies daily operations and reduces the stress inherent in a busy organization.

This new model of applied planning focuses on the **process** of planning, not the plan that is produced. Although documents delineating vision, mission, strategic goals, functional objectives, and so on do emerge, it is the **process** of self-examination, the confrontation of difficult choices, and the establishment of priorities that characterize successful ASP. Documents too often are merely filed away and forgotten.

Outside facilitation with the process is most helpful, since we are often blind to our own limiting viewpoints. Also, with such group processes, we tend to need someone to keep us on course and help us, at times, get “unstuck.” Most traditional planning is incremental and boring at best.

Our experience is that, when Applied Strategic Planning is undertaken seriously, it is inspiring, and the results are usually exponential in effectiveness. Such things as *team commitment, case acceptance, sense of fulfillment, targeted marketing, continuity of purpose and action, profitability, etc.*, don’t improve 10 or 15 percent, but rather 50 to 150 percent!

The day-to-day implementation of Applied Strategic Planning and management are the most important, never-ending tasks of all leaders who intend for their organizations to thrive in the 21st century.

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