



ORTHO2

What Does Orthodontic Success Look Like to You?

by **Roger P. Levin, D.D.S.**

Most orthodontic practices have incredible growth potential. Unfortunately, many offices are underperforming due to inefficient systems. Bottlenecks and inefficiencies can occur during any time of an orthodontist's career, which can be divided into three stages:

Start-Up

Growth

Continuing Success

Stage 1: Start-Up

Orthodontists are usually in the start-up stage for up to three years after opening their practices. In this stage, many doctors struggle to build a growing patient base. Due to gaps in the schedule (excess capacity) and a desire to keep overhead low, orthodontists will often take on administrative, marketing, and other non-treatment-related tasks.

Unfortunately, as the practice grows, orthodontists often refuse to let go of these tasks because *that's the way the doctor has always run the practice*. Taking on all these additional duties can set a bad precedent especially as the doctor moves on to the next stage of practice growth. Levin Group has observed that habits and protocols established during the start-up stage can contribute heavily to the practice reaching a plateau (flat or slightly negative growth) in later years.

While a practice can survive without too many problems when it has excess capacity, the same office will "hit a wall" once it gets busier. The bad habits established in the start-up stage contribute to a lack of systems at later stages. In numerous conversations with orthodontists who have moved beyond the start-up stage, I find that these doctors are frustrated because they cannot take their practices to the next level. But often the very source of their frustration is the unsound practice management foundation set in the start-up stage.

Stage 2: Growth

In this stage, orthodontists are extremely busy juggling the demands of a growing practice. Unfortunately, a great deal of the "busyness" is due to a lack of strong, effective systems. The growth stage should be a time of increased productivity and production, but it often becomes a period of stagnation, especially the longer the orthodontist stays in this stage. It can be an extremely frustrating time for many orthodontists who are working hard to grow the practice, but not reaping the full benefits of their efforts.

Stress mounts. Problems snowball. The fun and excitement disappear. The days become long and tension-filled. Orthodontists often tell themselves "it's just a rough patch," but then things don't get better—they get worse. Systems break down. Customer service suffers. Team members leave. Even good orthodontic practices have bad days, but the growth stage can test the talents of the best orthodontists. Levin Group has seen many orthodontists who have become stuck in this stage without experiencing growth. To combat this phenomenon, orthodontic practices in the growth stage must address how to achieve higher production and reach the next level of success by working smarter—not harder.

How do you get unstuck and move on to the continuing success stage? Three major strategies are required:

- Update business systems
- Maximize doctor time through use of an orthodontic treatment coordinator
- Create a consistent, referral-based marketing program

Without implementing these three strategies, practices will struggle to get beyond the \$1.2 million threshold.

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The systems that got you to the growth stage weren't designed to take you much farther. As the practice attempts to grow, the orthodontist must be focused on providing patient care more than 90% of the time. Unfortunately, without a treatment coordinator in place, the doctor in many practices will spend an excessive amount outside the treatment area, handling patient consults. The orthodontist has a role in this process, but most of the duties can be assumed by a well-trained orthodontic treatment coordinator.

To achieve your practice potential, you need both high-performance management system and a strong referral-based marketing program in place. Implementing a consistent referral-based marketing program will increase referral sources and ensure a steady stream of new patients to practice.

Stage 3: Continuous Success

Practices at this stage are generating from \$1.2 million to \$4 million, or even more, in annual production. The main focus here is to maintain growth at an acceptable rate in a low-stress, high-performance environment. Opportunities for improvement include team building, systems refinement, and leadership enhancement.

In its orthodontic consulting program, Levin Group teaches a concept called Level IV Leadership. Level IV is about working through others to achieve maximum productivity, effectiveness, and success.

Level IV is a great place to be. It's where orthodontists want to spend the majority of their careers. In Level IV, the doctor becomes less involved in administrative areas of the practice and focuses almost exclusively on providing high-quality orthodontic care. Going from Level III to Level IV leadership is a process that allows the practice to increase production and profitability while significantly decreasing stress. Attaining this level of leadership drives a high-performance practice to unlimited success.

Conclusion

Orthodontic practices—no matter what stage they're in—have incredible growth potential. The key to ultimate orthodontic success is to work smarter—not harder. Many practices struggle when they reach the growth stage. Some orthodontists spend a decade or more trapped in this stage due to poor systems and inconsistent referral-based marketing. Levin Group has seen other practices go from start-up to the continuous success stage in 5-7 years due to the right systems, marketing, and leadership. The use of key advisors can propel a practice forward past the barriers and hurdles into the realm of ultimate success.

Many orthodontists often lose sight of their practice vision once they become immersed in their practices. Don't let that happen to you. Your vision keeps you focused on the big picture and

motivates you toward your orthodontic growth potential. Your future success awaits. Are you ready to make it happen? The time to start is now! 📍

About the Author



Dr. Roger P. Levin is Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Levin Group, Inc., a 23-year old premier dental practice management firm that provides Levin Group OneSource™ consulting to its clients. A third-generation dentist, Dr. Levin is a sought-after speaker, lecturing to thousands in the dental field each year, and is a regular columnist for numerous dental publications and author of more than 50 books. For more information on Levin Group Practice Success seminars, visit www.levingroup.com or call (888) 973-0000 and mention Ortho2 for a 50% courtesy.