



TAKE YOUR PRACTICE FROM GOOD TO

GREAT

ASK, “FIRST WHO,
THEN WHAT?”

by Erin Masercola

“Great vision
without great people
is irrelevant.”

—Jim Collins, *Good to Great*

Want ideas on how to make your eye care practice more successful? Take a page or two from Jim Collins’ now-classic business how-to book *Good to Great* (2001). Collins and his team of researchers looked at 1,425 “good companies,” examined their performance over a 40-year period, and identified habits that caused them to pull ahead of the pack and outperform their competitors to become “great.”

HERE’S THE GOOD NEWS: YOU DON’T NEED TO WRITE A MISSION STATEMENT

“When we first began the research project, we expected to find that the first step in taking a company from good to great would be to set a new direction, a new vision and strategy for the company, and then to get people committed and aligned behind that new direction,” Collins writes. “We found something quite the opposite.”

As a practice leader, think of yourself as a bus driver. Good leaders are like bus drivers who first get the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) and then figure out where to drive it, Collins explains. If you’ve got the right people on the bus (and in the right seats), your practice can meet any challenge as it grows and as times change—as they always have and always will in eye care.

GROW PEOPLE AS YOU GROW YOUR PRACTICE

On a flight home from the recent SECO conference, I sat next to a young woman whose boss, I’m betting, is strategic enough to think “first who, then what” as he grows his optometry practice. I’ll call her “Kelly” (not her real name).

At first glance, Kelly seemed like nothing special—she’d grown up in a small town, had some community college, and had been hired six months previously to work the front desk of an eye care practice. But it was soon clear that Kelly has strong people skills that are an asset to the front desk. (I was feeling grumpy and introverted on that flight, but she soon had me talking happily, and I’m sure she does the same for her practice’s patients.)



Over cocktails and conversation (Kelly, Kahlua on the rocks, me, bourbon neat), I saw why the doctor Kelly worked for had asked her to get on his bus. She had a mind like a sponge, and I could tell the doctor had gotten his money's worth when he sent her and her clinical tech colleague to SECO for training.

I suspect the doctor Kelly works for hired her because she has an emotional intelligence. And you just can't teach EI as easily as you can teach specific back office skills like coding and billing or even some of the clinical skills that techs need.

Successful practice managers tell me they make similar hiring decisions when looking for good office

staff or techs, especially in areas where good entry-level staff are hard to find. They look primarily for smarts, high EQ, and a general commitment to excellence and patient care and then train up their hires on particular skills. To help with this training, practice managers often take advantage of excellent educational opportunities like SECO or other association events.

"BE RIGOROUS, NOT RUTHLESS, IN PEOPLE DECISIONS."

In Good to Great, Collins lays out two rules for making sure the people on your practice's "bus" are the right people who can take your practice where you want it to go.

1. **"When in doubt, don't hire—keep looking."**

2. **"When you know you need to make a people change, act."** This doesn't always mean firing the person. Sometimes, you have a good person in the wrong bus seat, Collins explains, and as a leader, you need to work to match your people's skills to your practice's needs and opportunities.

Want to learn other techniques for taking your eye care practice from Good to Great? Visit our blog at www.theeclgroup.com/magazine.

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