



rapid-fire tips from her own practice. The members brought samples of their office policies and other business information, including overhead cost breakdowns, IT management plans, and marketing materials. Betsy Bakeman, DDS, a private practitioner in Grand Rapids, Michigan, recalls, “I could hardly take notes fast enough!”

It is strongly recommended that at least part of such meetings be held in the host’s office. One of the norms established by LEAD involves opening and then discussing the contents of the operatory drawers. This provides an excellent way to learn about what instruments and supplies the colleague uses, how the supplies are organized, what the overhead costs are, and how each clinical system is laid out in the operatory. In other words, the members are able to dive deeply into the operations of one another’s practices and learn from their colleagues who face the same challenges.

Practice growth is only possible when dentists can imagine how they might do something differently, and LEAD provides opportunities for member dentists to look closely at how their colleagues practice so that they can incorporate new information into their own practices. LEAD members openly share both successes and setbacks with each other, which helps each individual expand beyond her own perspective to achieve growth. The support and encouragement within the group often empowers members to step outside of their comfort zones and expand their competencies into new areas of the profession.

It is important to note that this kind of transparency can only be achieved in a close network where the norm is that participants can trust each other and share without judgement. Although this atmosphere is built over time, it is also most easily achieved when the group members have similar goals and are on similar journeys. In addition, members must also be able to consistently take real joy in the successes of the other members and be eager to learn from those successes in order to become more successful themselves. As Amanda Seay, DDS, a private practitioner in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, notes, “My growth has been exponential since having these friends in my life.”

The LEAD annual meeting, which is 2 to 3 full days that take place during a weekend, has two primary purposes. The first is to enable content and interactions that are designed to provide practical and applicable continuing education about running and

expanding the scope of a successful dental practice. A secondary goal is to socialize and develop friendships with other like-minded dentists. Before the members return home, the date for the next year’s annual meeting is chosen, and it is selected to avoid the dates when other dental meetings are held.

Making good use of every attendee’s time is critically important when planning these meetings. The host dentist plans the meeting, including its agenda, any outside speakers, dinners, and other engagements. Generally, outside speakers are only invited when a majority of the LEAD members have an interest in a business or clinical topic that is outside of the group members’ areas of expertise. The remainder of the weekend is devoted to sharing knowledge and experiences between the members.

### CAREFUL EXPANSION

After the first annual meeting, LEAD’s founding members decided to expand the group to enhance its reach and content. They recognized that this needed to be done carefully in order to maintain the group’s values and norms as it grew. To accomplish this, the founders suggested individuals for consideration who they thought could bring value to the group, and then these people were invited to attend the next annual meeting.

In deciding who to invite, they had one key metric: whether or not the individual would be a good participant with a like mind and spirit. Any new members would need to be willing to share openly—both successes and setbacks. They would also need to honor and maintain the trusting, judgement-free learning environment that the founders established. In addition, the founders looked to increase the diversity of the group’s clinical strengths and practice focus areas because the learning and growth comes primarily from within the group.

Ultimately, the LEAD members chose to cap the group’s membership at 14. At this size, the group is broad enough in experience to generate excellent content, yet still small enough to maintain the trust and intimacy that has proven to be so valuable. Having a larger group would also present a barrier to the members being able to gather within one another’s operatories for their critical hands-on learning.

### ENHANCING COMMUNICATION

LEAD members stay in touch between the group’s annual meetings, often informally connecting when attending other dental

meetings or courses. All of the communication is based on a foundation of supporting the higher good of the whole group. The simple rule is for members to share whatever they think could benefit someone else’s practice. Most prefer quick and easy communication, and a key group norm is immediately responding to emails and group texts.

WhatsApp has been an effective communication tool for LEAD. Documents and images can be easily uploaded and are searchable by topic or file type. Because the group includes dentists from around the globe, the ability to communicate across different time zones and between countries is important.

LEAD is currently planning to hold quarterly Zoom meetings, except for the quarter in which the in-person meeting is held. To make the best use of everyone’s time, the Zoom meetings will also have an agenda and a meeting facilitator. Members are responsible for sharing any new practice strategies that they implemented during the last quarter as well as reviewing any continuing education courses that they attended. They are also encouraged to discuss any practice challenges or setbacks that they have encountered since the last meeting and are accountable to each other for sharing progress on their goals and aspirations for the year.

As one would expect, LEAD is not finished improving on what is already successful. The members are continuing to refine their processes and are writing bylaws and a policy manual to maintain consistency in their meetings, which will include a business meeting with recorded minutes going forward.

### INSPIRE OTHERS

LEAD members have a goal to inspire other dentists to form similar groups of practitioners. “It was always a vision of mine to form a peer group that shares experiences and learnings openly—without judgement and with full trust,” says Georgia Haddad, DDS, a private practitioner in Oxnard, California. “What began as four friends grew into a committed group of 14 clinicians from across the United States and the world. These relationships produce results; practice growth and improvement are so much easier with the help and guidance of our colleagues.”

### References

1. Vujcic M. Practice ownership is declining. *J Am Dent Assoc.* 2017;148(9):690-692.

Dental practice management has become increasingly complex, resulting in significant challenges for dentist entrepreneurs. Most continuing education courses have a clinical focus; therefore, there is limited information available to help dentists master the business management tasks that they face on a daily basis. Dental practice owners must maintain competence in a variety of ever-changing and complex management skills. Although there has been a decline in practice ownership, especially among younger dentists, approximately 80% of dentists were still practice owners in 2015.<sup>1</sup>

Four dentists decided to address this information gap directly, and the LEAD mastermind group was born. LEAD, which stands for Ladies Entrepreneurial Affiliates in Dentistry, is a group of women dentists

who came together to achieve the kind of growth that would ensure financial success and freedom throughout their careers. Although some mastermind groups are led by a coach, the LEAD mastermind group members learn from each other.

The members of LEAD are all women; however, creating or joining a similar mastermind group presents an excellent opportunity for any dentist who has the mindset and motivation for continual improvement or who struggles with juggling his or her personal life while taking skill-building continuing education courses and running the business side of a practice. According to Tara Hardin, DDS, a private practitioner in Mason, Ohio, this type of group is for “anyone with an open mind and an interest in growth.” Practice growth and success are much easier to achieve with group support. The majority

of dentists work either as solo practitioners or in small groups, which creates a void that a mastermind group similar to LEAD can fill.

### A NEW BEGINNING

Initially, the four founding members of LEAD met at dental meetings and continuing education programs. Their conversations during breaks often became useful discussions about how they organized their offices. In the spring of 2017, these conversations evolved into a commitment to meet annually. The group selected a weekend in October for its first meeting, which Hardin volunteered to host.

Prior to that first meeting, the group established norms. Each member would give a 1-hour, clinical- or entrepreneurial-focused presentation intended to provide information to elevate the other members’ practices. The speaker was to end her talk by sharing 10 short,