

PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

Leadership: The key to creating the future

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While the future may be hard to predict at times, one can always influence how the future will turn out. If you think that is impossible, think again. When you treat a patient with optometric vision therapy you have changed what was a poor outlook for that patient's future into a very bright, exciting adventure. One of the keys to influencing the future is to take a leadership role in your life, your practice, and even in the College of Optometrists in Vision Development (COVD).

While there is a lot to be said for how to become a leader in life and in your practice, for this article I want to focus on COVD. COVD has been very fortunate to have many great leaders over the years. But, new leaders are needed. COVD is a "college" which means it is "an organized body of persons engaged in a common pursuit or having common interests or duties." COVD truly is a team effort.

Members of COVD are joined together by the common interest of helping patients with optometric vision therapy. The leaders of COVD are focused on

how to not only help members now, but also into the future.

So the question is, how does one become a leader?

What's the secret? I thought you might like to hear Dr. Neil Draisin's answer to that question.

COVD Past President, Neil Draisin, OD, FCOVD, also served as President of SECO (he recently completed his term) and brought developmental and binocular vision care, vision therapy and COVD to more than 7,000 eye care professionals at the SECO Congress earlier this year. The SECO Congress is widely acknowledged as the largest optometric education meeting in the world.

Dr. Draisin is celebrating his 40th year in practice and he has provided vision therapy since day one. "I have always sought out being involved in organizations, even as a kid. They taught you how to work within a group," Dr. Draisin shares. "My father taught me early on that you have to give back and be involved in your organization so you can help shape the future."

During the early years of COVD, he got involved by attending the national meeting that was held in New York City in 1973. Dr. Draisin remembers this meeting fondly, "All these people I had read about in books were there: Bob Kraskin, Tole Greenstein, Drs. Getz, Wold, Flax – all these giants were there and speaking. This is why I became an OD. It really lit a fire under me."

"When I got to COVD and met my contemporaries, it was obvious to all of us that COVD had to grow and get stronger. And, because of my roots, I didn't know any other way to do it than to become involved. I eventually became a state director (that was in the mid-70s), then I earned my

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Fellowship in 1978. I was president in 1988-89,” Dr. Draisin continues.

“I remember talking with Gary Williams, after my term as president was completed, and we decided that we needed to be involved in organizations within mainstream optometry to help them realize that we have something to contribute and that COVD is a valuable group. So, I went back home and got involved on the state level. I went up through the chairs in the state association.”

When asked what lessons he learned as president of COVD, Dr. Draisin shares:

“One thing I learned in COVD is that there is a protocol for everything: regarding every decision we made, I could not say, ‘Do it this year and that’s it.’ We have great thinkers in COVD. We developed policies that the next group of leaders after us could use to make the organization better and better.”

“When I came back to the state level, there were no protocols and there was no administration, so I was able to develop protocols and administrative policies that they did not have before.”

What recommendations do you have for members?

“If I had no leadership experience, I would start by being involved and becoming a member of a committee to get my feet wet and see how it works. I would start at the bottom, but pay attention to what’s happening at the top and how the organization is run and how it’s all done.”

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Taking leadership into your office:

“Leadership roles help with private practice, too. Probably one of the most important lessons you learn through COVD leadership is time management: certain things have to be done on time lines, so there’s no time to waste. All time has to be valuable. “

“You also learn about working with staff. If you want certain processes implemented, you need to know how to talk to people and get them motivated, and also how to give constructive criticism when needed.”

At what point in one’s career should you get involved in leadership?

“On day one! Learn from history how optometry evolved from a jewelry store/watch repair shop to what we have grown to now. That did not happen by people sitting on the sidelines. Pay your dues by being involved, and get on a committee. Maybe become a chairman, or a director and then an officer.”

What if there just isn’t enough time?

“It is important to learn how to delegate. Throughout my career I have worked with practice management consultants, to learn how to run the practice better, and it has always made a big difference. Your first step is to make leadership a priority and the rest will fall in place.”

What do you see as the future of COVD?

“This organization will continue to grow and be stronger and stronger. COVD is *the* voice of developmental optometry and I only see it getting stronger. The leadership now is excellent. But, if we don’t continue to have members who step up and take leadership roles, we could have a problem down the road. It is important that every member gives back to our profession and becomes involved.”

“Optometric Vision Therapy is more of a household word now than it was twenty years ago. We don’t have to start from ground zero with every patient or group; we’re finding people are aware of COVD and vision therapy. This is a direct result of everyone working together to make this happen.”

There is always a place for you to start and a way to help. You can either talk with your State Coordinator or, if you are not sure who to talk to, you can always contact the COVD International office at info@covd.org.

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