

**Ep #113: Building the Staff Managed Practice with  
Frank Curtin**



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**With Your Hosts**

**Dr. David Phelps**

## **Ep #113: Building the Staff Managed Practice with Frank Curtin**

Frank Curtin: I can work hard, but if I work hard on the wrong things, I will spin my wheels, and I will not get the traction I'm looking for, for whatever that endeavor might be. And this is true of all of us.

You're listening to the Dentist Freedom Blueprint Podcast with David Phelps and Evan Harris. Navigating you through the uncharted waters of a turbulent economy with straightforward advice to transform your practice into a self-sufficient cash machine, compound your net worth assets and multiply your passive cash flow streams.

David Phelps: Good day everyone, this is Doctor David Phelps with the Freedom Founders Mastermind Community and the Dentist Freedom Blueprint podcast. Back today with what's gonna be a really fun, and I think we'll do a deep dive in some areas that really affect all small business owners, and certainly in our professional practice community. Issues that I think really keep the business, and the leader, and the owner of that business, from really taking the steps that they wanna take. The breakthroughs, getting away from the plateau issues, or maybe even a downsizing, the commoditization of our practices, which seems to be a common theme throughout. So, my good friend is Mr. Frank Curtin. Frank, how are you doing today sir?

Frank Curtin: I am wonderful David, thank you.

David Phelps: I'll talk to you all in just a minute about how Frank and I got to be friends, but let me tell you a little bit about Frank before we get started. Frank earned his master of business administration from Ohio State University, his graduate certificate in administration and management from Harvard University, and his bachelor of science from

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Kent State University. He's got over 30 years of business experience, and he offers, really, I think the benefit of his experience and his knowledge in a really easy to understand format, which is the problem, I think, for a lot of teams, to try and figure out how to organize, how to build the team. It all seems so complex, and I'll talk about my experience with Frank, and why he makes this work. Really what, Frank, you help people do, is to gain better outcomes in their business, higher margins, and even complete turnarounds of businesses that maybe are just really stagnant. You have a real aptitude for solving problems. Your joy ... and I know this because I know you and your family ... your joy in life comes from assisting others to gain control over their lives, so they may have a balance of health, wealth, and happiness. Because, we both know Frank, that it is small businesses that drive the economy of the United States. Frank, again, thank you for being here with us today.

Frank Curtin: I'm excited to be here David.

David Phelps: Your company is The Smart Guides LLC, what do you mean by Smart Guides, what does refer to?

Frank Curtin: Well, the namesake behind that was all about being able to provide people with information and guide them smartly rather than through hard work. A lot of people believe, or have this gumption, that ... and we're taught this as youngsters ... work hard, get a good job, and you'll get ahead in life. And this is that mentality. And then you get this school of thought that sort of comes at you, that says "Work smarter, not harder." And so The Smart Guides was about where to apply what.

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Hard work is required in any business, let's face it, right? Let's not kid ourselves, it takes hard work to do anything. But if you couple hard work with smart work, I think that you can do a better job with your time management and your prioritization. Because, for me, I can work hard, but if I work hard on the wrong things, I will spin my wheels, and I will not get the traction I'm looking for, for whatever that endeavor might be. And this is true of all of us. So, if we work on the right things properly, that's where the name Smart Guides actually came from, was all about guiding people smartly.

David Phelps: I love it. So Frank, you and I met, probably it's been about three years ago, in another Mastermind group, and, not surprisingly, that format, the Mastermind format, place where I really have met some of the key people in my life. Not just business partners or strategic alliances, but actually true friends, and I count you, and your lovely wife Michelle, as friends. Yes, we do business together, you have helped me help my team immensely, but those are the kind of people I look for.

And I'm kinda giving a little bit of a precursor to our listeners today, to understand the value of being in smaller groups, Mastermind groups, where the trust and the authenticity is there. Where you can really do a deep dive with people, and determine ... you know, there's someone in this small room that can either help me directly, or they can give me authentic advice about who I could get help from. That's the problem that a lot of small business owners have today, Frank, and whether it's staffing issues, or they have marketing issues, or whatever it might be, it's like "Well who do I go get to help me? There's consultants galore out there in the world that will come in and try to bring X, Y, Z." And some do, a lot

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try to, and some just don't at all. And so, finding the right people has been the key.

So, I wanted people to know where we met and, so it was a real estate meeting. You've done so much in life, have so much experience, you actually have a connection in the real estate arena. You've done a lot of work there. And more recently, as I've found your value in my space, with my business, Freedom Founders, you've come in and now, because I saw the value you brought to our company, I thought, why not give you a chance to do the same thing for other people in our group. Professional practice owners, the dentists, the orthodontists, the veterinarians, the chiropractors, who I know because I am one, and I had that business for so many years. The same issues. I would try so hard to bring different consultants in, or I'd try to improve myself by taking CE courses, like we all do, or bringing technology in, or trying to plug this system or software, and all these pieces and parts, and yet there never seemed to be a time when it all came together. And I kept beating my heads against the wall, thinking why, why, why is this not working like I want it to? Not that I didn't have a good practice, but it was, like you said a minute ago, I was working really hard, and I never really figured out what some of the keys were.

And what I finally realized, it was partly me, my leadership, lack of knowledge of what leadership meant. And then, how to pull this together. You really opened the door to my eyes, when I felt like you were a person of integrity, that you'd come in and give me good advice. I didn't know where it was gonna go, but you came in, and we did the hard work, because as you said, it is hard work, but the hard work paid off.

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Frank Curtin: Right.

David Phelps: Talk a little bit about my team, but speak a little bit about that, Frank. Your experience. Now, you also, I'm just going to throw this in, you also spent a number of years with IBM. So, you've seen big, and you've seen small. That's what I love about you. You got that big 30,000 foot elevation look at things. Let's talk a little bit about some of those problems that we know that small business owners have. You've been working with a number of our member in Freedom Founders and you helped my team. Jump in, we'll just have a conversation about what that did.

Frank Curtin: Sure. Yeah, just going back to the IBM days, what ... I really feel blessed to have any opportunity to have worked for a company like IBM, because what they open my eyes to are things that no small business would ever be exposed to without looking in from the inside to those things. We look at these large corporations, the Syscos, the IBMs, these massive companies. Fords and General Motor, et cetera. We look at them and we're like going, "Yeah, the people that go there, they tend to be career people, they tend to do this stuff." I don't even know what they do. A lot of that thought is, "I don't even know what these people all do. What does a living look like for somebody that works in those corporations and stuff?" When I was at IBM, I got to as a consultant go into other businesses as a representative of IBM to help these people do something different than they were doing already. We were change agents, we'd come in with process management and stuff of that nature.

So, my exposure to that stuff was pretty intense, and like I said, I really feel blessed that I was able to do that. Fast

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forward into where we met in a mastermind. First and foremost, I'll say about a mastermind, I believe that the quality of people that you need in your life will never exceed that of which someone who is willing to invest in themselves and mastermind is a great demonstration of your ability and your willingness to invest in yourself. What's different from that than what most professionals experience, which are the CEU, the continuing education units that we require for professional degrees and things like that, is rather than getting spoken to, you're spoken with because if I go to a continuing education program, you're going to speak to me. I don't get to dialog you. It's monologue, one way.

When you go to a mastermind environment, it's not a one to one relationship. It's a one to many. It's you to not just the people facilitating but to the peers in that group as well. It's the greater collective sharing of ideas and ways to get over things that are troubling you, whatever that might be. Or to take advantage of opportunities that you would have never otherwise been exposed to. Sometimes the things aren't problems. Somethings they're opportunities, right? We love that, so whether it's a problem or an opportunity, masterminds give you the exposure to stuff like that which is why I love those things. Yes, I met you in one, and that was fantastic in that environment. I'm still part of that as you know.

Still part of yours. And I love working with people who are willing to invest in themselves to that extent and the reason for that is they've opened their mind to the opportunity to listen to others, which means I already know they know how to accept advice because a consultant like myself, I can't help somebody who comes in ... I come to, and they have a closed mind. That close

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mindful individual is going to have a difficult time listening to me give advice on something within their four walls, and I'm not part of their four walls. They'll be like, "I know best." That type of person is probably the same type of person that doesn't say yes to your organization. Right? That would be that person.

This is where that kind of falls into place. Small business in general, what I have found, now that I talked about IBM and talked about mastermind, what I find with the small business owners is that they tend to need a lot of help because they were never given the proper training. They weren't given the schooling of how to run a business. Let's take dentists for example, or any of these professional practice owners. They've been grilled with a plethora of education about their trade, about how to do this, about how to drill teeth, about how to prevent illness, how to cure problems, how to fix and restore and all of these wonderful things that we're grateful for those people that do that. They were never given the business training on how to run up something when you get that.

Now you take this dentist who is a phenomenal person, a great practitioner, loving, caring individuals and they really care for their patients well, and now they got this thing call staff. Hello, world. It's an awakening, and so what used to be you as an associate go in and yes, you'd have to interact with people, but they weren't your responsibility. Now you own your own practice. All these people are all the sudden your responsibility, and you have to do something with these people and their problems are now your problems. You didn't have this problem before, and now you have it. So, you have to deal with it, so you have to pick and choose what management style you're going to use and everybody will default to what they know. Now,



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I don't know, for the listening group out here, I don't know where they all have their mindset from, but the prevailing wisdom is work hard, nobody's going to do it as good as you. They tend to take it all on themselves.

I just have to say, David, there's a better way. There is a better way, and that's what I hope that people come to understand is that through delegation, and you've experienced this first hand, through delegation, you can be amazed and you will be amazed at what your people will step up and do when they're empowered to do so. I get a ton of enjoyment out of helping people do that, because I know once they're up and running, it's not on day one, it's a journey. Once they grasp it and once you can start seeing their feet gaining tracking and they're moving forward and then all the sudden people surprise you with what they do, and that to me is just ... Oh, it's so exciting to see that. It's like oh, the lightbulb's coming on. Because it doesn't come on for each person at the same time. But when it's all on, you got a bright room, and it's just rocking and moving forward.

David Phelps: Yeah, well said. You know, Frank, when we met a few years ago, you know, Freedom Founders, we were kind of getting off the ground and I have a relatively small leadership team back there. It was really two of us, myself and one key person. And some volunteers and some vendor contractors, but we were getting things going. We were doing our events, right? And the thing that I told you, and the reason why I was so committed to doing things differently in this business, because I don't have a dental practice anymore, love that, did practice. I wanted to be different in terms of ... I love doing things. I couldn't stop, I could never retire. This was my second half of my life, right?

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So, it's like, okay, I'm going to do it this time. I'm going to do it a little bit differently, meaning I still want to have the impact, I want to help people, just like I did when I was in the industry. I'm serving in a little bit different way, little more consultative way, but with people I know, like and I love my colleagues in the industry. I didn't want to have a business though that was going to be once again, dependent upon me. I wanted to more focus on what I love to do, it's what I do today. It's what I call today being in your genius zone. For most professionals that have expertise, health care, could be law, could be accounting. There's a certain part of what they do or we do that we love doing.

Dentistry, most dentists really love actually working on the ideal patient, doing the ideal type of treatment they want to do. Most of them, they don't want to do the drill, fill and bill, kind of the bread and butter. I want to go into implants and rehabilitative restorative or I want to do more cosmetics or combination thereof. That's what I want to do, but as you said, so much of what we learned in school was about being the best we could be and actually to the fact, to the point, where we have to control it all. We have to control everything, so we try to wear all these hats in our quote staff which I don't even like that word anymore. I have a team, so staff that I would call a team. Team that collaborates. I used to think, well, you know, they're just there. I got people at the front desk that answer the phone and they then make appointments and I've got people that handle finances, I've got assistants, I got my hygienists, but we were not a team.

It was just plug and play, and I still had to wear all those hats and so I would say that probably at least 50%, probably more like 60% of the time, I'm doing things in my

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business that I shouldn't have been doing, that I didn't like to do. Working longer hours because I didn't know how to delegate. I didn't have the right team in place. Every doctor that I talk to today, and I know you do too, the big thing they say is if I could just do the work I like to do, if I could just see the patients do that work and not worry about all this other stuff but I have to, I'm working late, I come in early in the mornings to do administrative work, I stay late to do treatment plans or things in QuickBooks or crazy stuff that we shouldn't be doing.

What's the breakthrough there? What's the mindset that someone that comes to work with you in this capacity, have they already seen the light because they've been around other people that have already gone that direction? What kind of opens them up and makes them finally committed, Frank, and say, "Okay, I'm going to do it differently. I'm going to take the time and effort to do it."

Frank Curtin: The people that tend to say yes to Frank and bring me in to have them come in and help them implement this practice management system and get this going. The people that do that have already seen a peak of it from somebody else, okay? So, initially, the very first few doctors that wanted to take advantage of this saw it in you. You talked about it. They're like, "I don't know what's different here, but I'm really liking what I see." Then they'll have the conversation and in the conversation I explain to them, "This is the process we took them through. The same one that David said, is the same one that you would go through." We did that, and as we did that, they started seeing that for themselves and of course then it gets viral and they share it with their collective colleagues in the program.

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So, with all of that being said, there's sort of an inspiration if you will from somebody else that they admire. They know, like and trust them or they admire them from afar, but one way or the other, they have this affinity for this individual and they now see that they have something that they themselves don't have, and they're like, "How do I do that?" Usually it's like, "Well, go talk to this guy because he did it for me." That tends to be how people get introduced to me or I get introduced to them. Then from there, it's whether they agree to do this or not, there are sometimes when people say, "Well, I think I can do this myself." I can tell right out the gate when people want to do that, when they try to take on something like that themselves, I'm going, "That is fine. It's certainly within your grasp and capability. It's within your skillset to do that," because you've done that your whole life.

You've taken the challenge on, you've done the homework, the research on it, and you've done it. The question is when you don't know what you don't know, do you know what you don't know? Of course you don't. That's the perspective that bringing an outside person in does. And as you had said earlier, you'd hired consultants before when you had practice, the question was is, where did you get the consultant from? Right? Where was the recommendation coming from? Was it somebody that used this individual or this team before, and they came in and did a great job for X, Y, Z person, and you were like, "I want that," and then so you did that. Or did you pick up the Yellow Pages and flip open to consultants, you know? Where did this person come from? Where did they do?

Because I would be skeptical, too. I absolutely would be about hiring somebody that I don't know, and I'm just going cold call, like clicking on a Facebook ad. I'd be

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skeptical on that. I think in life, we should be, because there are a lot of people out there who will claim to be something that they are not. It's really easy to do in the social environment we have today. It's real easy to do that. The warning flash should always be up. It should be an alert that there's a potential that the people who I'm speaking with aren't who they say they are. Then there's your friends, and when you talk to your friends about what you're doing and things like that ... And that's what I encourage people to do is talk to your friends, find out what they're doing. If you're a practice owner, and you see one of your friends is doing something and they seem a little bit happy about it, find out what they're doing. Ask them about it. They may have some insight for you, you know, and share something with you of value and things like that.

I do think, though, that there's an opening through from someone else usually, David. It's not like their own revelation, just one night wake up and say, "I need a consultant." It just doesn't seem to work that way. I think part of that is because generally, they tend to be older in their stages of business ownership meeting. They've owned their practices for 10 plus years already. I'm not seeing this, and maybe in the mastermind, we're not seeing this a whole lot. We're not seeing somebody in their first year of practice going, "Hey, I need to get some management help and I need to get this and I need." A lot of these people come in with the mindset if it needs to get done, it needs to be me to do it. The reason they feel that way is that's how they got through school. That's what they've been taught.

You will do it. You will be great at what you do. You're going to be the great doctor. It's all this you, you, you

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stuff. You statements. And internalizing, saying me, me, me, I, I, I, and so now you take on a practice. You're like, "Okay, well I know I need staff, I need this, I need this. Why? Because I've seen this elsewhere. This is what they need. Now, do I know specifically how to do that? I'll figure it out, because I figure everything else out in life

David Phelps: I'm trying to change that through our Freedom Founders national line, Frank, because here's the question I get both in the mastermind and even people outside who are following this, and many people will say, because they know a big piece of what we do is real estate, but real estate is a piece of the puzzle. It's something to plug into once. A plan, freedom plan at the right place, right time, sometimes in combination with working on the right practice, but you just mentioned younger people. I'll often get younger people who are relatively soon out of school, maybe they've got a practice started, and they're very disciplined. I sense that they're disciplined and they're not living too big a lifestyle, and they actually come to me very often and say to me, "David, where would you recommend that ... When I'm in my youth, my youthful practice, youthful family, what do you recommend I invest in first?"

They got the right mindset. I want to start investing. I want to figure this out. I go, "Great question. The best place for you to invest is invest in yourself, which means investing back in your team. Your practice, your business is the engine that drives and everything else will do. The real estate is an add on. It's like a bolt on to an engine that's already running. I never let anybody run and go start jumping into real estate until I know that they have fully optimized, meaning put up the time and investment on themselves, and I'm talking again about all CE ... Yeah,

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some CE there, and continue to roll your clinical skills, but more now on the business. And where's the best place to spend the money? Invest the money? Maybe yes, you need some technology. Maybe yes, you need some automation. But let's look at that as a total picture. But the biggest thing I tell them is you've got to get right people, right seats.

We're going to talk for a minute, few minutes about the vision. How you bring these people on. I will not let people jump into real estate until I know they've optimized the engine because if we do that, I'm not being a good leader, a good advisor. You and I had the benefit, or I guess I had the benefit of working with you when the honors my love of my life today was relatively small. I didn't have three, four, five, six, seven, eight people on my team. Many of the people you work with today have an ongoing business or practice, and they have people and sometimes again, and I'll say this was the case for me. I think I've got ... I don't have the right people. They just don't do what I say, they don't read my mind like I wish they would. Nothing seems to happen.

Tell me if this is not true, Frank. For the most part, sure, there's always going to be maybe some people who aren't right for it. Maybe not just right person on the team. But how many times when you go to work with a team, assess a team, and start to build a model that we'll talk about here in a minute, build the model, bring together other people on the team so there's a common vision, there's buy in, we have stakeholders, not just staff. We have stakeholders. When that's been built, how many times do you find that there really are people that do need to go, and how many times can people that maybe the doctor or the owner felt like, "I don't know about that

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person," actually became a very good person because they just needed structure. They needed feedback. They needed to be on a team with a business owner where there's a pulse, a rhythm, and that's what you helped us create.

You helped us create on Freedom Founders a pulse, a rhythm, that runs so, so smoothly. So smoothly, we don't have time to deep dive into what all that means, but I want to say that pulse, that rhythm with having the right people, the accountability comes into play, it just works so well. Speak a little bit to that if you would.

Frank Curtin: Yeah, one of the biggest things that I always find is when a new employee comes on board, somebody new, and I'll get into that. I'll take it from there and then I'll lead into that. I'll use this as a lead in. When somebody starts that job, on day one, they are eager to please you. They are eager to do a great job. Here's one of the challenges, though. We aren't the best trainers in the world when it comes to getting people up to speed with what they need to do, right? And sometimes we don't have the patients when people don't quite get it on the first, second and third try. They're doing it, and then they're asking. They're asking, they're asking. At some point, the eyes start rolling in the back of the head and they're bugging and they're getting a little frustrated with this individual and going, "I've shown you this three times."

That's kind of ... That leads to a point where at some point a discipline is going to say or somebody's going to snap or somebody's going to say something to this individual saying like, "Hey, look. I told you this three times already." You're going to start to get this tension built up. It's starting with the individual who's asking because they're



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tense asking. Nobody likes to feel like a dummy, and they feel like that when they have to ask how to do something that you already showed them once, or twice, or three times, right? There's this tension built up.

As soon as that tension is made real by somebody acknowledging what they're feeling, like I acknowledge this, like yes, you are annoying me with asking me this. Now this person is no longer getting excited about showing up for work. They're starting to lose their confidence in themselves that they can do that job. Most of the time, I won't say all, but most of the time, we as owners? It's our fault. We didn't put the tools in place and the resources in place to help this person succeed. If we had video training for that individual that we they didn't have to come to us but that they could go watch a video on how to do X, Y and Z, however that is. We talk about great process documentation and stuff. If we had all that in place, well then, they wouldn't have to come to us. But because we didn't put that in place and we expect this individual to learn something initially. So that's the premise.

When we have a staff and some of them are really superstars and some of them are really not viewed upon as likely as being a superstar, some of that is on us. In fact, I would argue 100% of it's on us. Somehow, some way, we failed these individuals in what we've provided them to give them the opportunity to be their best. Because you give them the opportunity to be their best, and they will. People love that, and especially if you acknowledge it. People will work a lot harder for an attaboy than they will for a dollar. You pat them on the back, you will see smiles come out of them. You give them an extra dollar, you may not hear from them. You

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may not even ... Because it's such an insignificant amount in the grand scheme of things, but those attaboys, those are phenomenal.

So now, most of the time what I experience in these small businesses when I come into them is that the owners actually get it wrong with who they think their good people are, and there is always somebody on a team that needs to go, and quite often, we know who it is on day one. They know who it is on day one. Occasionally, they get surprised and what I tell somebody is this. Show me your ops manual, and I'll show you whether you have a happy staff or not. Don't introduce me to anybody. Show me your ops manual. Show me what you have from training, and I'll tell you if your staff is happy or not. Without that kind of stuff in place, all of the training is on you or it's on your staff to train the other staff. It's all on you guys. Which means every time you bring somebody new in, you have to do two jobs until that person learns it, which is why people hate hiring. Oh, my God, I got to hire.

David Phelps: Exactly.

Frank Curtin: That's the headache, because it's like, "I got to show them everything now."

David Phelps: Exactly.

Frank Curtin: So, if it's not you, it's your staff member having to do it, and they're thinking, "Great, doc needs another one of these. Oh, I hate training people." That's sort of the mentality that tends to come into play. So, what I find when we start working together is when we build the accountability chart, which is one of the things you're referring to, we now see the picture of the structure of what we need, so we see that, which makes it clear what

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are the roles and responsibilities that any organization has to deal with. What they need to succeed in providing the services that they offer to the community. If you're a dental practice and you provide hygienic services and cosmetics and clinical and, you know, ortho and you provide all these different services, there are certain seats and roles you have to have in your organization to fulfill that. To get paid for that.

Those things have to exist, and it takes people to do that. Now, it could be all you. I'd be very, very busy person. Or, you start bringing people in to do that. And as we get this staff built out, sometimes we start getting walls built up, so before I come in, I see that a lot of times there's usually a ring leader and then there's a dissension group that they don't like this group over here and little kind of things going on, and sometimes I believe that exists and it's a false sense of division and it's all based on drama. It's not based on anything real. There's nothing real behind it, right? But it is based partly on attitude, and when you don't have the attitude set and your expectations in place properly, we call that your behaviors, your core values. If those attitudes, those expectations ... I like to refer to them as your non-negotiables. Do this and everybody will love you. Do that and everybody's going to despise you, including me, and you won't be here very long.

There are certain behaviors expected of us and so in an organization where the behaviors are sort of broad about through happenstance rather than on purpose, when that seems to be the case, we see that kind of stuff. A lot of times, we get it wrong on people that we think aren't performers because there are people blocking what you know about them. They might be under somebody, and

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this person needs to look good all the time and the only way they look good is by making these people look bad. That stuff happens a lot in business, unfortunately. Right? So, sometimes, that's what happened, and all the sudden you put this behavioral structure in place and you put measurables in place, now you're starting to see what's really happening at all levels, and those that had attitude issues before, it's kind of like ... I view it like driving down the highway at 75 miles an hour in a 60. If there's a car in the median up ahead, what do we do? We slow down.

Why? Why do we slow down? We slow down because we know there is a consequence for the action that we are currently doing. How many people know the consequence of their action in business? Most don't. Most don't realize that if I bring my drama to work that it's going to be frowned upon. Why? Because I heard Sally doing it and now Bill's doing it and Mary's doing it. I should be doing it, too. Why is that a problem, right? That's a great environment for your patients to be walking around and listening into, right? I mean, come on. So, these are the things that we're talking about. Some little changes and an open mind to change that kind of situation, and when everybody knows the rules, it's as if there's a car in the median when you're driving along the highway.

Now if they violate it, that's when we talk about that's a non-negotiable. That's when doctors' eyes start to open to who is good, who's the right person in the bus, and who might not really be a good fit, because you know what? They're going to blow by that cop at 75 and let the stakes fall where they fall. There are people out there like that, and those people are the ones who have to go. Those are the ones that have to go. The ones that slow down, that's

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all we're doing. We're just giving them guidelines. If there was a cop every mile, traffic wouldn't move so fast. Right?

David Phelps: That's right.

Frank Curtin: Because everybody would know the consequences of stuff like that. And there are always those that stay within the 60 anyways. There are those that do that. You have some people who are just a good fit with you whether you had those values or not. There are some people you don't know. Then when you set the behavior standards in place, guess what? They modify their behavior, and now they're a wonderful person. And they're a superstar because they're highly productive. They were just attitude driven before. Now that they're in the right attitude, they know what to do. You've got people doing the right thing so they're the right person in the organization, and they're really good at their job, so it's the right seat as well. Your bus is full of good people.

David Phelps: Yeah, exactly, and I think, Frank, one of the big differentiators that you brought to me and our team that I never really saw with other ... but you had very good consultants that came in and helped us with different aspects. I'm going back to dentistry now. Good consultants that have good track records. The thing that we ever had or no one ever brought to the table was what you start us out on, and that was what you just mentioned. Core values. Non-negotiables. What was the vision? That was something I could not have done myself. I could read about it, I could sort of conceptually get it, but I could not have led that myself. You have that experience, and you led us through that, and it was really eye opening. We had some people on our team that were a little bit pushed back. You know, who are you bringing

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in to kind of mess up our flow, David Phelps? You know? Things are good enough as they are. There's a little bit of that fear of change, right?

So, but the cool thing was, within a few weeks, maybe it was a month or several meetings, those couple of people on the team who were a little bit askance about I'm not sure about all this, they are so bought in and that's what I could not have done myself if I tried to bring something in because you brought the track record, you walked the talk, and you took us through that. That was the foundation and everything else you just talked about built from there. I think that's the one thing that's missing from a lot of otherwise probably good people who provide practice management consulting out there. The core. Going to this work to get it done, it really was eye opening to me and I didn't want people to miss that. That's what I think is different about what you do for small business owners. I've never seen it before.

All right, I got one thing. One last, and this is a big question and I struggle with it so I think there's others that do, too. I read a lot of books, right, about business, management, marketing, leadership, you name it.

Frank Curtin: That surprises me, David.

David Phelps: There's a few behind me right now. I know right? I have to read the biographies and autobiographies of people that have been in business, like Steve Jobs with Apple or Jack Welch with GE or even our now president Donald Trump, whether you agree or not agree, those are people that create cultures and you could say that they're all in their own right successful in some way or form or fashion. Apple, GE, Trump, whatever, and read with some of

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those that they seem to have created a little bit of what I might call a fear based culture. In other words, they talk about the fact that every year, they are quick to let people go. Let them off the bus. Fire, terminate. Maybe they would call it the bottom 15 or 10 or 20% of the company. Kind of this churn to keep everybody just a little bit on their toes. That's their culture, and you might say it worked. On the other hand, I read books like from Simon Sinek who ... Start With Why, or a great one, which is Leaders Eat Last.

Simon talks more about a collaborative culture for the team where you don't have fear based because the fear base means that people are going to be afraid to express ideas and I want ... See, I want ideas. I want my team to push back on me. I'll bring ideas, I want them to push back. I want them to be bought in, and I feel like fear based is all ... They'll still just look to me to be the driver and they'll just sit back with eyes big, okay, what's going to happen today. Even though I figured out like I want to do that some days, I don't think that's me. How would you address that? Because I think a lot of people think the same thing. Gosh, am I supposed to be this guy, or should I be that guy or gal? What do you think?

Frank Curtin: Well, you bring up a good point, David. There's thousands of books on the topic for leadership, and really, what you're talking about is styles of leadership. There's two real distinct ones. There's many styles, but there's two distinct ones that you're kind of drawing out here. The first one is the dictator. This is the individual that says if it's to be done, it's got to be done by me. One of the things that consultants tend to do. The traditional consultant going into a business owner, is they come in and they'll work with just the owner or a leader and they're going to build a

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vision together and then they just come out and say, "Here's our vision." When I came in with you, what did we do. I made everybody participate. Everybody participated, so more along the collaboration approach. The reason is, in my belief, when a business is formed and it's just you, it's support you and your family.

The first time you hire anybody into that business, the business is now bigger than you, and if it's responsible for feeding not just you and your family, but this person and their family, and so add a third person, add a fourth, add a fifth. For the person that is the dictator mindset, they're willing to pull the plug quickly. It's hire slow, fire fast. That's the mentality on it. There's a prevailing wisdom in that. It's like take your time with your hire, and once you do it and when they start making mistakes, get rid of them. For me, I look at it from this perspective. I look at it as right person, right seat. I can take objective measures to sort of get that in place. This domination group of individuals. Jack Welch was one of these guys that said, "We will be number one or two in every industry that we're in, or we'll divest it. We're going to be number one or two. Period."

So, that creates a go, go, go. We used to call it elbows and butts. That's all you want to see. Everybody head down, working hard, and those that didn't perform at the level that you needed to achieve number one or two, you got to go. Think of sports teams for example. They don't keep people around just because you have a name. You perform or you're gone. Right? It has to be that way because of what they're doing. They game they're playing is different. But business, sometimes we use sports analogies with business a lot, but sometimes it's not really that way, because in the sports world, when you look at



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some of the things like, take a football team, like an NFL team for example. There is 53 guys on the roster. They vary on what they're getting paid. Not too dissimilar than a business. They vary on what they get paid. Bonuses vary as well. It's all contractually done. Then there's the player's association union that supports them against the owners. Right? And pits them all against that.

Well, when we run our businesses, we're small business, we got 15 and 20 employees or something like that or even five and three, whatever that number is. We're it. We're the guy in control or the gal in control. Right? That's the truth behind it. We get to decide whether we want to be a dictator, which might be your inclination to say I'm just going to give the directive because nobody's going to know this better than me anyways and I'm going to give directives on how this is going to go down, or I can get the buy in of people. Let's take a dentist practice for example. If I have a really good hygienist and I have a really good clinician and a really good front desk person and they understand their job really well, who would better represent their functional areas in a leadership meeting? Me or them? Who would be the better person to give input?

If a hygienist needs something, and I the one that should be making the decision on what they need or should they be the ones making it? You as a doctor, should you be the one deciding what a doctor should need, or should some consultant come in and tell you what the doctor needs? You need this equipment in here and you need that equipment in here. It's like, time out. I know what I do. I know what services I offer. Now, you might be a machine salesman and you're telling me what I need based on this and if it fits within what I do, okay. That's

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how chairs come into being, that's how the different equipment comes into being, right? That's all okay. But if I am of a collaborative mindset, if I'm more of a Simon cynic, leaders eat last.

If I'm more of that mindset, I'm going to look down for help from my team. I am not going to be the guy or the gal that says, "I'm going to take this all on me. I don't need you. You're only here to serve a purpose and that purpose is to sit in the seat that I put you in, and you do your job, and behave, or you're gone." Kind of mentality. I can be that extreme, or I can go to the other side and say, "If I did this more collaborative method, I'm going to have a much better opportunity of getting what I want out of this thing." Because one of the things that people never really ask and answer, the question that's never asked and never answered, is what do I want out of this business? What do I want out of it? Why did I do it? Did I want a glorified job? Because really, most of these guys, when they set up themselves, or set themselves up in practice for themselves, they can't leave the chair or the business falls apart.

David Phelps: That's right.

Frank Curtin: Can't leave that chair. Got to be there. And oh, by the way, all day long, "Hey, doc. Hey, doc. Hey, doc," because you haven't allowed your people to be great, and think of the theft. I mean, to me, it's like theft. You're stealing from those people the opportunity to shine when you think you have to do their job, too. Why not let them try, and if they fail, correct them and guide them. Because you know what? You only failed once or twice, and then you'll get it, and you won't fail anymore, and you'll be good at it. You'll be really good at it. None of us got it right

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the first time every time and the things we do in life. We have to fail. Think of it like kids. Right? They have to let kids fail. If we don't let them try and fail then you end up with an individual that cannot support themselves. They're very needy on what they need because everybody did everything for them all the time. It's like, let them try and fail. Failure, to me, it's been one of the great teachers of the universe. Lots of failures in a lot of different areas.

You know, I wish I did other things in the hindsight, the 20/20 goggles. Oh, good lord. Some of the choices we've made, what we would make going forward. Don't we always wish we could go back on those 20/20 goggles and look backwards and say, "Ah, I get to do it, the do over. Her mulligan." We don't get to do that, right? But the beauty in life is we do get to learn from it. We can either be bitter about it, use it as a crutch, use it as an excuse, or we can use it as a tool and take it forward. For those people that embrace it as a tool, they're the ones that are more likely going to empower others more collaboratively, because they know that this person, they may not have it today, but very quickly they're going to do it. If they can do just 80% of what I do, it's better than me doing it. All right?

David Phelps: Exactly.

Frank Curtin: And they always say perfect is the enemy of good.

David Phelps: That's right.

Frank Curtin: And so it's from that perspective. It's like, "We think we're perfect in the way we do things." Because why would we think we're not? I think my thoughts are right. I don't think that I have inaccurate thoughts. I think I have good thoughts, right? So, that's my mindset. Well, why wouldn't I listen to the other person that I empower to do

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something. Why wouldn't they be long the same track if I give them the opportunity? I don't give them the opportunity, whose fault is that?

David Phelps: I tell our doctors in Freedom Founders that when you're doing your surgery, when you're doing treatment in and out or whatever part of the body you work on or animals, whatever it is, that is the area where we do strive for perfection. We're not perfectionists all the way, but that's what we strive for. That's where we're trained. That's where the problem comes, because I said then, for everything else, within your business, take that hat off and put on the 80% is good enough and that's the difficulty, because we still have that mindset, "Hey, I was trained to be perfect, trained to do it all myself, trained that if I didn't do it myself, it wasn't going to be good enough," and again, that only goes to one segment of what we were specifically trained to do. Everything else about a business needs to be with a different hat on, different lens.

Frank Curtin: Right.

David Phelps: Let's do this. How can people reach your, contact you, get more information about what you do? Tools, resources, what's the best way?

Frank Curtin: If they just go to [thesmartguides.com](https://thesmartguides.com), which is the company, so it's T-H-E-S-M-A-R-T-G-U-I-D-E-S dot com. Go there. You'll be able to reach out to me in any fashion, way they want. I'm borrowing carrier pigeon. I don't think we use that one anymore, but you know. We've advanced a little beyond that. It's interesting how easy it is to find people when we're looking, and it's amazing how difficult it is to find somebody when we're unsure if we're looking.

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I am very easy to find, and the reason that I believe that some of the choices that people make on whether they are even going to look or not is really where they are and who they know in their life, what willingness they have to invest in themselves, too, because I believe who invest in themselves and are more likely to invest in others, which is like the people in their practice and stuff like that. That's the real key, is because we think we're doing this for our company. We're doing it for the people of our company. The company is the people.

David Phelps: That's it.

Frank Curtin: It really is. It's the people. You take them all away and you try to operate like that. It doesn't work. People provide it. I really believe that those are the people that ... The ones who that ... Especially I've always been big fan of the people that are a member in the Freedom Founders network because through that mastermind and through that program, these are people that just get their eyes open to a lot of things that they ordinarily wouldn't see in just everyday life. It's just there. Not available for him.

David Phelps: I want to leave a few resources. I try to do that when applicable. In working with you and what I've learned, and you can jump in and add any or modify these, but I'm going to get some books because I know for each one of us, Frank, there's a journey, there's a pathway. We hear something, we go to the mastermind, we maybe listen to this podcast. We go, you know, I think there's people saying, "I think there's something there, but I'm still not quite sure what that looks like, what that really means. I've tried consultants before. Blah, blah, blah."

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I think there are some good books that really help me frame this up. I'm going to list some of them. Now, may not be in this exact order. But, there's a really good one called Making Money is Killing My Business by Chuck Blakeman. That's a great book that talks about setting the vision for what you need to do to launch your business, you want your practice to look like and how you can go from level to level to level where you're doing everything, you're still on that job, it's moving to a business where it's not all dependent upon you, and that should be the goal of every business owner, professional practice owner. To have a practice, a business, that is not solely dependent upon them. You do what you love to do and really nothing else. So, that's a great overall framework book. I think that the books that we used, I used. Kind of our bible in working with you was the book Traction. Traction by Gino Wickman. Then he's got a couple others. The other one I think that's very good was Rocket Fuel. Rocket Fuel by the same author, Gino ...

I sort of think that people should read Rocket Fuel before they jump into Traction, but what do you think? Because it kind of gives that overview of what the visionary integrator looks like, and then maybe ...

Frank Curtin: If you're the owner, yes.

David Phelps: Yeah, okay.

Frank Curtin: If you're the owner of your practice, then reading Rocket Fuel sort of gives you an understanding of this dichotomy that you fight with all the time and this is this struggle we have, and that is, "How do I be the buck stops here person, and a visionary? How do I be a creative individual when I'm the one stopping myself?" Right? So, people will

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do one of two things. Either they'll go crazy and they'll find themselves in financial trouble because they don't stop themselves, they're not good integrators. They're not good operations people. They're better at thinking up the really cool stuff, and then being a practitioner, hands in mouth. They're great at that. They can make money, but they're real easy at spending it, too, on all these different gadgets and when I say gadgets, I'm not talking about like iPhones. I'm talking about things like even office things and buying latest and greatest and this and that and I'm sitting next to you, you know there's no cash flow in the company. Then there is the visionary side of an individual who stifles it because they always tell themselves no.

Their first answer in their mind, if you're your own integrator and you're the visionary, when you have a good idea, your first answer's always no, because you're trained to do that. You're trained to say no. Right? So, you're not giving it its due. You're not flushing out the opportunity or the decision properly among other people giving other input, right? So, that is all done up here. By yourself. Rocket Fuel is the book that will give you that distinction of when you're wearing this hat and when you're wearing this hat. Most people are their own integrators. You have office managers, but they generally don't have an idea of what an integrator is.

David Phelps: Right. Then the other book, we mentioned Simon Sinek, Leaders Eat Last. We're looking at the kind of collaborative culture that you and I were talking about. One that we recently looked at, Frank, is one called Turn the Ship Around. The author is David Marquette. Turn the Ship Around. I think it's a great follow up to Leaders Eat Last. Again, very, very instructional - a US submarine commander who had to totally revamp and existing sub

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crew that was like the laughing stock of the Navy, and how he took on the leadership and did not go in and wholesale move people out, but it was his leadership that he did something different along the lines ... We're talking about a very instructive book.

Then another one, always good to read, is Jim Collins Good to Great. I want to say. To me, those are like some substantial, very good strongholds that really lead along the lines of what we're talking about, and I think some of the listeners, they are still trying to grasp, you know, is this really possible? What could this look like? If you as the leader or the owner of your practice, if you don't have a clear vision of what you really want and believe is possible, it will never happen. It will never happen. You want to work with people, Frank, that are open to that vision, and once you help them to really define it and get really specific about it, that is when it happens.

This is a great ... I went longer than I wanted to, but I didn't want to stop this because I think this information's really good. One last little quick story is I was talking to one of my friends, who's a periodontist, the other day, and he was talking about how he wants to see his practice move to where he's going to work like three days a week then to two and a half and bring an associate in, and he goes ... And I said, "Great, when's that going to happen?" He goes, "Well, the next two and a half, three, maybe five years." I go, "No, no, no, no." I said, "No. No," I'll just say, "Bob." Okay? "Bob, you have got to be more specific. You have got to get this dialed down to exactly what you want this to be and you got to be in with where you want it to be, what date, and then reverse engineer. As long as it's just a wish, a hope, a dream sort of out there somewhere."



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I said, "You're going to be like everybody else. Great intentions. Great ideas. But you're shooting for what I call someday. Someday has no definition, it has no date on it, and some day for most people never comes." Great guy, and he can do this. I said, "You have got to get specific. You need some help getting specific about this. Once you do that, then it will start to happen. What you focus on, you will get. What you don't focus on is never going to happen."

Frank Curtin: You know, it's funny, David, that you talk about that because I'll sometimes use as a joke when somebody says, "I'm thinking about putting that practice management system and all that." I said, "Why don't we schedule an appointment for Sunday at 2:30."

David Phelps: Exactly.

Frank Curtin: And they'll look at me funny, and I'll be like, "Oh, there is no someday, is there? I can't find it on my calendar either. When would you like to schedule it?" So, let's get specific about it, because otherwise it's a pipe dream. It's on the radar, maybe on the bucket list, but it's not a priority. At the end of the day, we start it off as conversation, talking about priority. It was sort of the priority. That's really all this is. It's a priority. It's putting yourself as a priority by investing in yourself. That's why masterminds are phenomenal at doing that.

It's putting a practice as a priority, and it's putting the right things in the right practice in the right order so that you can get the controls in place that you need, so once you start pushing stuff down to other people and getting it off of your plate, you become the greatness and your uniqueness in the things that you love to do. You love and

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like to do if you get rid of all the things that you don't like to do, whether you're good at it or not, if you don't like it, why are you doing it? Push it off. Sometimes it's a trust factor. You got to get over that.

David Phelps: That's right. That's right.

Frank Curtin: You got to get over that.

David Phelps: Well, Frank Curtin, this has been a pleasure. Thesmartguides.com, and you know, I'll say it in finishing, Frank. I only give what I would call 100% quote endorsements to people that I have personally worked with. There's lots of great people that I know of and I'm in masterminds with, and I believe him to be of good character and integrity, but if someone asks me, I'll say, you know, "I haven't worked with them. I believe them to be good. You got to do some more due diligence," like I would tell anybody about anything I would do with you, because I've worked with you, and I also know quite a few people in Freedom Founders are working with you and very, very pleased with the results as I knew they would be if they come with the right mind set to do it.

I am giving one of those very rare 100% endorsements to you, Frank. If anybody's even thinking about wanting to take the next step, the right step, what's right for them in their practice. They got to at least have a conversation with you. You're high integrity, you're not going to take anybody on unless it's right for them. I know how you work. You're not a needy person. You like to work with people you like to work with. That's the way we build personal freedom into our own lives, so I just want to say that working with you is not ... It was never a cost, it was never an expense. It was 150% investment. Investment in

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my team, my company, future and my personal freedom, and I want to thank you for that.

Frank Curtin: Well, thank you, David. I very much appreciate that.

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