

## Ep #246: Paul Etchison - The 3-Day Dentist Part 2



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**Dr. David Phelps**

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## **Ep #246: Paul Etchison - The 3-Day Dentist Part 2**

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David Phelps: One of the things I know, that you're at this point in your career is that you're down to two days a week, three weeks a year. In fact, when you mentioned your next book isn't going to be about the three day dentist and why that is important and I totally get it. So let's talk a little bit about that because here's what I think a lot of listeners are listening to. They're going, okay, great. Got it. Paul's a good leader. He's focused on communication skills, absolutely essential. He's built a culture. And part of that culture is that he acknowledges his team. He's not a shell answer man, because he's talked about empowerment, but in terms of caring about who they are, what makes them tick. Now you've got 26 of those people, that team around you, 26. The only way you can have some level of engagement, some pulse with them, which is important, is that you don't practice more than three days.

In fact, it's two days. But how does a doctor right now that's listening to this and thinking, boy, I wish I had that. But now they're stressed out financially. They're treading water. They got their staff, their team, but they're going I've got five, eight people, I don't have any more time. I'm stressed out. And when I finally have time, at the end of the day, everybody wants to go home. How am I going to

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have time to build this culture? What's the transition look like because I know you've gone through it and I know you're helping other dentists figure this out. That's got to be a huge piece of your foundational part of helping dentists go to where they want to go.

Paul Etchison: Yeah, absolutely. Before I get into that, you mentioned there were two days a week, three weeks a year. It's actually three weeks a month. I wanted to correct you.

David Phelps: Well, I'm always about setting goals. So right now I'm just trying to have you envision what that next could be? So thank you for correcting that. Yeah.

Paul Etchison: Yeah. Well, you know? What I think it is, it is a practice owner and from a practice management standpoint, there should be two major goals and one is to get to capacity. Once we get to capacity, we get to make decisions. We get to expand our capacity by adding providers, adding hours, things like that. Or we get to increase the value of what we already have and that's pulling off a fee schedule or having stringent policies such as prepaying appointments and stuff like that. But you can only make those decisions once you get at capacity. So that's one goal.

The second goal is to drive revenue as much you can per hour, and I'm saying this within the boundary of ethics. I'm not saying that we're going to treat and plan things that don't need to be done. I'm not saying we're stepping pedal to the metal doing crappy dental work. We're doing excellent work, we're taking excellent care of people and we're giving them the time that they deserve and that they paid for. But we want to drive our practice the best we can. And really, it boils down to about six different things and it's that we're going to increase our new patients,

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we're going to increase our collections percentage, we're going to increase our scheduling and clinical efficiency. And then we're also going to increase this, I'm doing this off the top of my head. What else are we increasing? Yeah. Something else I can't think of. I should've wrote it down.

David Phelps: It'll be in the book.

Paul Etchison: It'll be in the book, but we're decreasing our fee schedule participation as well, and that's part of it too, as well as decreasing our attrition, our lost patients. So that's increasing our reappoint and just keeping our patients. So keep more patients, more spend per patient, like case acceptance, that sort of stuff. And I think we're doing all that to get the most dollar per hour out of our practice and then get us to capacity because that's how we grow and the bigger practices get, the more we can step back and enjoy more owner profits versus more producer profits.

I didn't touch on your thing about the three days. I would say this and this happened just serendipitously to me when I went down to three days, I was scared to do it. All my friends were like, "You're too young. What are you doing that's so stupid. You're doing so well. Why do you want to work less?" And I said, "Well I want to join more time." And what I found is when I went down to three days, I actually made more money and more profit because we were producing more out of the office as I added an associate.

But also, I was able to grow the practice faster because it wasn't like when I had like my four day clinical work week. I was done. I didn't want to do anything. I wanted to get out of that practice and never return until Monday. Now, when I'm on the three days, especially now when I'm on

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two days, I'm at the practice on days is not seeing patients and it's great to talk to my team to find out what makes them tick, what are we working on and it's great to come up with strategy and implement and check in with people that I've asked them to take on these projects and stuff like that and be more of a CEO because now we're seeing just that rocket-level growth that wasn't possible when I was sitting in the chair all the time.

Now, the patients love me and do they want to see me versus my associate? There's quite a few that do, but they still see my associate and I still do see them from time to time. I don't have as many available hours, but I can tell you that they didn't leave, they didn't go to a different practice. Everything was fine. The sky didn't fall down. And I think it's very difficult for the owner of practice to see astronomical growth if you're just in the chair all the time. I know it's scary to get out of the chair and go down to three days, but I think it's absolutely essential.

David Phelps: I couldn't agree more. And that's the biggest issue that I face in trying to help. I don't do practice management, but I'm a, I'm a visionary. I know the big pieces and when I have the same conversation about someone who's really on the hamster wheel, they may be a good producer, but that's all they do, right, and there's no time to be CEO. It's scary, but you, and many other people that I've talked to in life, and in my own practice situation that evolved some years ago to where I became more outside the practice, I've had the same thing. If you can carve out the time to work on the business rather than always being in it, the leverage, the inflection points are huge there, but it's a little bit scary. So what would you suggest to somebody who is going, "Well, I can't go to three days a week right now." Would you cut an afternoon off? Would you take

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small steps to start getting that to happen? Would that be the way to go?

Paul Etchison: I absolutely would, and I think if you're worried about it... Say you're a four-day-a-week dentist, cut an afternoon out just from your production to check hygiene. Go ahead and check hygiene like you normally would and let the hygienist stay that whole day. But just sit there and be able to look at your practice. What's going to happen to you is you're going to look at it and you're going to say, "Oh man, I got to do that payroll. Oh, I got to write up those charts. Oh, I got to do this," and you're going to do all this busy work playing office and you're not going to get anything done. You need to push that off to the side. You have to have time management enough to know that you have to spend the right amount of time on things that are going to propel you forward versus those things, those fires that always just land in your lap.

You may have to just go in your office at the clinic and just shut the door and put a sign on there says, just don't bother me. Let's say use that time to talk to your team because they know what's going on in your practice. They know how to improve your practice, but you have to ask them and they know what's wrong and they know Sally's saying this and Sally's blaming us for scheduling this, but it's really Sally's scheduling this stuff and dah, dah, dah, dah and all this bickering and stuff. I'm not saying that we have a lot of that, but they know what's happening and you need to talk and sort those things out. It's not so much going to the people and saying, why are you doing this, but what can we come up as a team, like I said before, to fix this? Why is the system breaking down?

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Then when you get everybody's input, everything just kind of lays out and fixes itself and you get to the point where I'm at, I don't even need to be there anymore. I've got leadership there. We have team lead meetings. I'm supposed to go to them and sometimes I call and I say, "Hey, are we still doing this meeting at one?" They say, "No, we already did it," and I'm like, "Okay, well I guess I'll stay home today." It gets to that point, but you have to let them take that ownership and you have to just work on the business stuff and I think a lot of people are scared to do that.

Half a day a week, give it a half a day a week. I guarantee you. I'll tell you September, I took two weeks off. I actually took three weeks off in September this year, and I produced almost as much as I used to when I was open three or four weeks in September. All that empty time with this slow month, smush it all down into a few days. You would be really surprised. If you feel like you don't have time to smush it down, then you got to work on some systems and some efficiency because I think a reasonable level for a dental producer, a doctor should be, I think a reasonable goal to shoot is about \$900 an hour. I think everyone could do that and I know that because my associate does that. She does no specialist procedures whatsoever. That's just crown, bridge, and fillings, and she produces a level of \$900 an hour and she's not pedal to the metal.

I've got another one that's right out of school about two years and she's up there about \$675 right now. So if you can produce more in less time, why not use that extra time to grow your business?

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David Phelps: Let's talk just a few minutes about associates because there's the thought that associates, it's just a revolving door that most motivated doctors, dentists, male or female,. Most of them, if they're motivated, they want control somewhere in their life. They want some amount of control and the only way to get that in their thinking is I got to own something because otherwise I'm working with somebody. Sure, there's a group of people. So what is your focus when you are seeking, interviewing to meet that expectation of somebody who right now you have no opportunity to buy in, at least not right now? You've got two associates, you're going to be looking for a third one. Give us a little bit of your secret sauce there because that's a big conundrum for a lot of people who think they would like to set up that model or have tried it and it's failed.

Paul Etchison: Yeah, so I don't have a lot of experience in this because I've only done it twice and I still have my same two associates I ever had. No one's ever left on me yet. What I look for when I hire any position is I want somebody that's outgoing, enthusiastic, and easy to talk to. That's first things, okay. I will ask questions pertaining to their previous jobs and why they left, why are they seeking other work and why I ask that question is I want to hear if they are more kind of internal locus of control, meaning like, "It wasn't the right place for me. I saw some things that I weren't liking so I decided that it wasn't for me. I had to leave," or if they're like, "Oh, my boss promised me this and never did this for me and they would do this and someone was mean to me and nobody was doing this." I don't want to hear like that victim speak. So I want to hear that they're got that the right attitude. That's the attitude that I want.



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It's hard, man. You don't know what you got until you're hired most of the time, until you're doing it. So I think I've been very lucky with both of my associates. My first one, she's been there just over four years. My second one has been there over about a year and a half now. Actually, yeah, about a year and a half and yeah, they're still just associates. Every year they get a little bit of a raise as far as a percentage that they get, but there has not been any equity talk yet. I think for most doctors, if they want to take that associate road and they find a really ambitious doctor that wants ownership, you probably are going to have to give up some ownership. I don't think this is a sustainable model what I'm doing currently. I think at some point I'm going to be giving up ownership.

David Phelps: Are both of your associates female?

Paul Etchison: Yes. Yes.

David Phelps: Do they have family?

Paul Etchison: My four year associate just had a baby, yeah. She came back right away and she wants to work and she's just a driven, ambitious girl. My other one, she's going to be with me for another year and a half and then she's moving Arizona.

David Phelps: Okay, so that's already planned. That's-

Paul Etchison: Yeah.

David Phelps: ... already set up. All right, that's good. When you're thinking bringing on another associate, I don't know how you found the first two, were you proactively seeking or did they find you or where do you go? Where would you

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go if you want to find that someone today? Where would you go, Paul?

Paul Etchison: I put an ad on Indeed and for the first one, I had five applications. For the second one, I had maybe four or five applications. There wasn't very many. I'm kind of too far from the city for most people.

David Phelps: Well that's what I'm thinking. That's a common situation for a lot of docs who are a little bit more rural. They're a little bit away from the city and they say, "Gosh, it's so hard to try to attract somebody to where we are." You put ads in Indeed, but is there anything about the ads that you try to incorporate in the messaging to the person that you might be looking for? Do you do anything more than just a...

Paul Etchison: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, we do put in there like we're looking for somebody who wants to be part of the best dental team in the universe. We'll put verbage like that. We are a team that's focused on giving the absolute best patient experience possible. We have a great family culture. If you do not have a positive attitude, don't even bother applying. We are the number... No turnover for the past seven and a half years. I want them to know that this is the real deal. This is a great place to be and I'm going to ask a lot of you. I am going to push you and I'm going to coach you, but I'm going to get a lot out of you, but you're going to love working there because you're going to love taking a part and being such an amazing thing that we provide for patients.

Yeah, I do want to stand out. It does not just say associate needed three to four days a week, 30% production or some jazz like that. You've got to make something stand out. But yeah, you've got to have a

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practice that stands out too. I mean the same thing, not just for finding associates, but for marketing to your patients, what makes you special. It's not very difficult to be special in the dental industry. Our colleagues are not doing a very good job of setting the bar very high. So if you just put some attentionality into making your practice a little different and a little bit more caring and patient-focused, it doesn't take a lot of effort to be honest.

David Phelps: Paul, give me your thinking about doing what you've done, which is really optimize and leverage a single practice because the opportunity was there. You were in a place where you could expand versus thinking about doctors who say, "Well, I've done pretty well in one location. I think I'd like to try to have more profit in and I need to do that with multiple practices, so I'm going to go out and try to find a second and then a third." What's your thinking there?

Paul Etchison: I would say, and I'm part of a mastermind group with some other dentists that we're all about the same way in our career. The collective goal that our mastermind is multi-practice. I'm one of the guys that just sitting there and just like, "Nah, you know what? I'm think I'm just going to stick with one." But I can tell you my one practice is about as profitable for me as most people's three. It's all in one roof, one facility, one ceramic, one column beam, a lot less capital, a lot less to manage because I'm there all the time. I think if, depending on what you want to go, now you want to go over three, four practices, go for it, knock yourself out. That's a different type of model. It's a different type of workload.

But for me, I want to keep it small and in-house as much as I can. Not small, but I just don't have that multi-practice

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bone in my body right now. I'll tell you, my associate went on maternity leave for two months and I worked her shifts and I was just thinking if I had five, six associates, that's probably going to happen a lot. If I had multiple places, I might have an associate leave and I'm always covering for somebody and that's not how I want to spend my life. So I think right now I'm at one practice, but I could tell you, it's as profitable as most people's three. I think you could highly profit in one location, but you've got to maximize your facility. You got to maximize your hours and your chairs and you've got to get butts in those chairs at all times. That's what it takes.

David Phelps: I think that's where people make a mistake. They haven't optimized, they haven't reached capacity with what they've got. So they think, well, the answer is I just got to go do this and they're not even there. Multi-practice is a different animal. There are people that do it successfully, but I tend towards, what you said is I like things under one roof. Too many people, too many moving parts to manage too much overhead. It's just, it's heavy duty. And I think, again, there's an inflection point. I think the second one's very difficult, the third one, some difficulty and then if you can get the four and you can start to rise above and be more of the CEO and you've got other people in place then yeah, you've probably broken the inertia, you got the critical mass, pushed that orb.

But boy, a lot of people, they get up there to two or three and they're just spinning and spinning and spinning and as you said, where's the profit. It's probably less than what they had in that one practice.

Paul Etchison: Mm-hmm (affirmative), totally agree.

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David Phelps: All right. Second to the last question I've got for you, because you keep giving me these little pearls, these rabbit holes I want to go down with you. Thank you for that. You mentioned the word mastermind. How long have you been a part of the mastermind and why do you think that's important?

Paul Etchison: It's from some like-minded dentists that I've met through dental success summit or dental success network, I'm sorry, and just going to different seminars. We see each other, we call each other a lot. And then we just said, Hey, let's get together. You know, so we're actually getting together here in October. I'm going to miss this October one because I just had ACL surgery and apparently you can't get on airplanes if you have surgery of your lower extremities, so it's just totally bumming me out. But it's so powerful, and we did one in Chicago about two years back and it was exciting and it was helpful. There was me and two other guys that really were kind of the same level. We really just enjoyed, we went out to the bar, we talked and we said, man, we should get together again, and those two other guys are a part of the mastermind I'm in now. You've got to find people at your level.

But yeah, I can't tell you how many times I went to see events and just going to the bar. You'll learn more at the bar and then you do it in the class sometimes because you just find out what is other people's best practices. You're like, man, oh you do that? I didn't think about that. That's awesome. I'm going to try that at my practice. It's just the old talking with people, finding out what people are doing. I mean one of the things that us dentists do is, yeah, it's like that guy that hit the longest drive. If you swing that club exactly like he did with the same club, the

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same force, the same speed and trajectory, you're going to hit that ball that far. But we're not studying that guy. We're just going out and drinking with our friends and getting pissed at We keep hitting the golf club into the ground.

We do that with dentistry. We're mad that we're struggling, but we're not seeking out answers from people that have figured out how to do it. And everything I do at my practice is not my idea. This is from my mentors. This is from the classes I've taken. This is not stuff I've invented. There's a way to solve the game of dental practice, and if you're not looking for how to do it, you can't be upset when you don't get the results. I kind of went a different way. I don't even remember what you asked me, David, but-

David Phelps: Well, just the benefits of mastermind. It sounds like it's really well. You said you want to be with like minded people, people that are at your level, but you talked about the golfer who could hit the long ball. So you also want people that are ahead of you, right? They'll stretch you. It will stretch your mindset, your thinking, where you think there's constraints, I can't do that, that model won't work.

And then you've got people right there that you're sitting at the bar with so you know it's real. It's not just someone sitting on stage and talking about what they think. In theory it's actually people in the trenches who you sit there button elbow to elbow, and that's where the pearls come from. That's where you go, okay, these are the insights, this is the real deal. And this personal, not only tell me what has worked for him or her, but guess what? They'll also tell me what didn't work. And it's okay to not have anything work. It's okay to test some things and it's

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not always going to work out right. It's okay. It's actually that's the way you've got to go forward.

Paul Etchison: Yeah, and true too. Even dentists that are or are below me as far as collections and production and profit, I could still learn a whole bunch from them. Everybody is superior to me in some level or another. It's just my job to pick their brain and figure out what exactly that area is. I could tell you, I could sit in this mastermind, I talking about culture, leadership, I could talk about some systems. I could give you a rock and roll reactivation system and missed appointment thing. We just implemented something four months ago and it's been awesome. That's something that I've been kicking butt on, but I might have issues with presenting finances with my team and someone else might have a rock star treatment coordinator that's doing something. That's a problem with the mastermind. Everybody's filling in the weaknesses of others because somebody in that mastermind group has a very strong suit in that area and you're just sharing and all growing collectively.

David Phelps: Yeah, well said. All right. So my last question it's what we touched on kind of on the prerecording part, but this is where I'm always just interested. So you've taken a pathway from coming out of school. You did what I call an apprenticeship for a couple of years, and then you did your start up and you've evolved that and you talk about three-day dentists, you've actually gotten down to two days per week. You continue to evolve yourself and pull yourself out of the practice in terms of operations doing just what you want to do on patients, which procedures. That's what I call freedom. Financially, you've got a business that's running well, you've got a team and a culture.

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My overriding question here is you're a relatively young guy. What's next for you? What's on your vision board? Where do you take this? What's your passion now? Because what I see you've done is you've created some space, space not only to build your, your current business and practice, but space so you actually can think, think about who you are and what's next. Most people that are busy in a practice or business, they'd never create space. You already see why that's important. So what is it for you, what do you see if you can give us a little bit of what's inside you for going forward.

Paul Etchison: Yeah. Going forward, I'm writing my second book right now and partially why I'm doing this because I just had ACL surgery and it's been on my mind. I outlined it. I said, "Okay, I'm going to be off my feet for a while and I'm going to be off work for three weeks. Let's write another book." So taking care of that, I want to get more into speaking. I really enjoy doing speaking. I see that in my future. I'm dipping my toes into consulting. I have two clients right now. I don't think I'll ever take on more than four unless I really love it. Who knows. And then the other thing I'm working on is I'm getting on Instagram and I'm really trying to brand myself as the cosmetic dentists in Chicagoland. That is a slow grow and a lot of stinking work.

But I see the value in it and I know someone who's doing that out west where literally is just booked out for months for cosmetic work, just doing veneers after veneer. It was all built through Instagram and just using technology to get influencers in and do their teeth. So it's more about focusing on that. Like I said, I do a lot of... I think I told you, I don't know if I said this during the show, but the majority of my production is molar endo and orthodontics



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on kids. I like doing banded brackets on kids, and I'm trying to get an endodontist in my practice so that I can pass off the endo. But I just want to do orthodontist and kids and I want to do big cosmetic cases because I think that's what's going to be fun.

I could see myself being completely out of the practice game in 10 years. I think in maybe four to five years I'll be at a point where I'll be at that freedom level where I could take three and a half percent off my investments and be safe to stop, but I would be so incredibly bored out of my mind. I don't know what I would do. So who knows? I get there and take it as I go. Just every time I get a little less busy and I have some extra time, I take on another project and that's what keeps me going. So right now it's my book.

David Phelps: So your first book was Dental Practice Hero: From Ordinary Practice to Extraordinary Experience. That's out there, you can get it on Amazon. I checked it out. Your next book is probably going to be titled Three-day Dentist. Is that... Not necessarily, but something like that, right?

Paul Etchison: Yeah, something like that. You send it to the editors and they think you've got a good title and then they come back with like five other possible ones and I'm sure I'm not going to pick my original title. I'm sure I'll pick what they pick.

David Phelps: Sure. And then then have you launched your website, dental business mentor? Is it launched at this point?

Paul Etchison: Yeah. Yeah. We actually launched that a few weeks ago. We had a lot of people sign up. It has been really cool and I'd been getting some really good feedback on it. It's just a series of videos, 175 videos, me and Dr. Justin

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Bhullar. He's a dentist in... He's got six practices in Canada. He lives in Florida and what I really like about what we teamed up and collaborated on is it's two different perspectives of being an owner, but I can tell you it's coming from two people who've actually done it. We've done it. This is not just dogma and stuff that we've heard. We're living it. These are the systems we use in our practice to make our practices successful. So it's just an all encompassing 175 videos, maybe 30 or 40 documents, and it's just a yearly subscription. Just watch the videos and hopefully you can do what we've done and at least get some more information that can help you start thinking of how you can improve your practice.

David Phelps: And that's [dentalbusinessmentor.com](http://dentalbusinessmentor.com)?

Paul Etchison: Yeah, that's correct, [dentalbusinessmentor.com](http://dentalbusinessmentor.com).

David Phelps: All right, we'll put that and your first book in the show notes so people can find those links.

Paul Etchison: Excellent.

David Phelps: Well Paul, this is fantastic. Thank you. You gave a lot of pearls. You let me ask a lot of questions. I was very interested too, to getting into your story. I'm a big believer in what you have done with your life, with your skillset, which started out investing in yourself, your education, what you've taken that levels ahead to what fits you. Everybody's got a side of that in life, what fits you. Build a business that suits your lifestyle, not the other way around. And that's exactly what you've done, so congratulations.

Paul Etchison: Thank you so much.

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