

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Dr. David Phelps

Welcome to the Dentist Freedom Blueprint, a podcast about freedom—
freedom from expectations of society and the traditional path to success
that has been ingrained in us from our early years, I'm joined by mavericks,
renegades, and non-conformers to discuss an anti-traditional path to
financial freedom, freedom of time, relationships, health, and ultimately
freedom of purpose. My name is Dr. David Phelps. Let's get started.

David Phelps: Good day, everyone. This is Dr. David Phelps of the Freedom Founders Mastermind Community and the Dentist Freedom Blueprint Podcast. Today, you're going to really enjoy my conversation with Mr. Jake Conway. Jake, how are you doing, sir?

Jake Conway: Oh, I'm doing well, David, thank you so much for having me, man. I'm really excited about this.

David Phelps: Well, Jake, you and I got to spend a little bit of time together not too many weeks ago doing some fun, crazy stuff in Nashville, and we got to spend a little time, I think at breakfast or lunch.

And just I've known about you for quite some time through other mutual friends', people that have definitely a high regard for the value that you bring to our industry specifically, in this case dentistry. But certainly, the topic we're going to talk about today, I think could also pertain to really any business owner, particularly small to medium.

Just a little bit of background on Jake — Jake spent four years in the hospitality industry, working as an operations analyst. After realizing that the corporate ladder and some help from

people around him, he decided to make the leap into entrepreneurship.

Founded in 2012, Custom Practice Analytics has grown, shifted and changed around the dental industry. Ultimately, molding Jake into the dental business analyst he is today. Masquerading as a business therapist, at time he really loves connecting, learning, and ultimately, providing value to any and all of his clients.

So, let's go back in your earlier life and talk to us about hospitality, and really how it did allow you to morph into the entrepreneurial role that you play today.

Jake Conway: Yeah. So, back up even further, I don't have a formal college education around this, school of hard knocks, per se. So, I started my journey back in the corporate world, that was gosh, 2007. And started out in actually in IT, which I know nothing about computers, but that was my first education on people and how to interact.

I started off learning how to communicate and actually provide value in the form of just talking to people, understanding what their needs were and kind of understanding what exactly were the issues they were dealing with. Again, with IT, which I knew nothing about.

But the value was being able to provide that level of communication, understanding. And then I would just call out the guys because again, I didn't know what the heck I was doing.

So, that was short-lived. Eventually, I moved into the analytics world, if you will, of the hospitality industry. Focused on operations where it's kind of similar to what we're doing today.

We'd look at efficiencies within the different departments, from housekeeping to the front desk engineering, which is basically maintenance.

And we would report back to the general managers appropriately with a little bit of custom reporting. And it was kind of light work I would say. There was a small task force of us, of about seven that were in charge of about, I think it was 50 or 60 properties at the time.

And yeah, realized that the corporate ladder wasn't for me. I kind of took what I knew and gained along the way and applied it to small business. I started in the ... once I opened up shop with my own endeavor becoming entrepreneur there, I started in the salon industry, which that kind of started giving me some insight on small business operation. And kind of expanded on what I already started learning getting knowledge in the hospitality industry.

So, flash forward to now, along the way, I met a lot of cool people, Mark Costes, being one of them that was kind of a springboard into the dental world. And here I am 10 years later and I really love working with dentists. I think it's ... as you know, David, they're a unique group of individuals that again, I really love working with.

And I think that the business knowledge is just so grossly undereducated and I think that there's a lot to learn in the dental world that a lot of these dentists don't have access to. So, that's kind of where we're at today.

David Phelps: Yeah, that's an interesting background and I love the way that you morph from maybe what — well, I think all of us when we go to school or we're looking at a vocation or career, first thing you think about, well, I need safety and stability. So, we

try to land on that thing, whatever it is. In your case, it was like getting something corporate. Well, that sounds like pretty safe.

But safe doesn't necessarily mean it's what you want in your life. I mean, being an entrepreneur means taking a little bit of risk and that's what's out there today. There is risk in any kind of business venture today. And if that's not who you are, then probably you should put a different hat on and go that direction.

But we're talking to the entrepreneurs, we're talking about the risk takers out there. It's definitely a very dynamic time that we're in right now. I think we could go back to pre-pandemic, end of 2019 starting 2020, and then seems like the world just kind of hyperbole, but things kind of blew up.

And we're still in the aftermath of what area of disruption with COVID and labor shortage and supply shortages, and just the whole shutdown from the government and trying to now weave our way through. And now, then we're facing rising of interest rates and potential inflation and recession and trying to manage all this.

One of the questions I think, maybe comes from a lot of people, I think I understand the answer pretty well today, and have an appreciation for what you do. But some people will say, well, you call yourself a business analyst, isn't that what my like CPA accountants are supposed to be doing for me, because they provide me numbers every month. They look at my QuickBooks reports and they give me numbers and do my taxes.

And aren't they kind of looking at those? How is what you do different than what I'm getting from other vendors in this case?

Jake Conway: Oh, that's a great question. I get this a lot. So, the simplified, I guess strip down version of this is you have

management reporting and then you have tax and accounting reporting. Your CPA and bookkeeper will absolutely take care of that, which they should, that's their value, the tax planning and that sort of thing.

But then there's the management reporting, which is what we do. So, we take the numbers that are given from your CPA, your financials, your payroll, we combine that with your software reports, whether it's Dentrix, open dental, what have you.

And we use that to wrap it into an easy-to-read report. It not only gives you insight on some key metrics and KPIs, I'm sure our listeners know what that acronym means (key performance indicators) but also, it gives us kind of a story. And it kind of breaks down the interpretation of what the numbers are showing us.

So, for instance, pulling numbers from these different sources, we're going to look very quickly and very easily see, is hygiene a true profit center for the business? If it isn't the case, why is that? What are the potential causes to this symptom of hygiene not being a true profit center.

If your dental supplies are high, why is that? If your overhead in general is high, what are the contributing factors for that being the reality that you're experiencing in your business right now?

So, it's really just taking the information, compiling into an easy-to-read format that makes sense, but also furthermore, it's the interpretation of that. And again, digesting and analyzing the story, the numbers are telling us, and then creating action from those numbers. From what we're seeing, trend-spotting, opportunities in the business.

There are ways to grow, if you're bumping up against complexities of growth, what does that look like in your practice? What are the numbers that show us when it's time to grow, when it's time to shrink down and keep it small?

So, I hope that answered the question, but that's kind of in a very condensed form.

David Phelps: No, I think it's a great way to put it. And I love the fact that you talk about specific metrics or KPIs that as a business owner, I know I appreciate having ... I'll just call it like a dashboard.

It's great to know there's underlying numbers to support what I need to see as an owner, but I'm sure you help your doctors with a certain ... what are the key things that doctors should see? What should he be looking at? Green, yellow, red?

And then as you said, digging down what's the story behind that? It's just one thing to show on a P&L what last month's P&L looked like — well, great. But what does that really mean? Until you dig down underneath the surface, you have no idea; was it a good month? Was it an okay month? Was it a bad month?

And probably more importantly, as you said, what are the trends? We've got to be aware of trends because certain key aspects that you would pick up very quickly, we might not take a look at as the business owner until we see our bank account dwindling. That's not a good day. You're like what happened? Well, this actually started upstream about five months ago.

Oh, well, how was I supposed to know that? Well, you probably didn't because we're not taught to read the tea leaves. That's what you do in a sense, is you take all the numbers and then as you say, you blend it with the reporting that comes from the

practice management software and tie it together in a way, in a fashion that you can tell us the story.

And then with you, we look at the story and decide, okay, well, what moves should we be making? What moves can we make if we want to take advantage of opportunities, and what maybe absolutely should I not do right now? Like oh, well, I can bring an associate in, that'll help.

Well, will it? Well, you don't know, it just sounds like a great idea. But you help interpret, well, is it a good idea or maybe a later idea. And maybe here's some things you get done first, and then we can talk about the associate or expanding or whatever it might be. Or can I drop off a certain insurance plan? Boy, I'd sure like to get rid of some of those, but boy, I'm scared to death.

Well, how do you want to analyze that? For most people, Jake, just tell me if I'm wrong, but it's just like it's kind of a guess. They're just kind of like stepping out there and seeing if it's going to work or not. And then you don't know till you do it. And maybe it was a good idea, maybe it's a bad idea.

Jake Conway: Absolutely. A lot of feeling: "I feel like I should do this" as opposed to true awareness of what the business is showing us. I view this as, almost, like a funneling system. You mentioned like what are the key numbers to pay attention to in the business?

Well, you start with kind of the bigger picture; what is your overhead? What is your profitability? What are your growth rates? What's your production and collection of new patients, which if you ask any doctor, they're probably going to know what their production and collection of new patients are.

When you start getting into overhead, true overhead profitability, hygiene is a profit center. The things we just mentioned, they start to kind of freeze up a little because they don't know.

So, first starting with awareness of your business, where are you at? What's the baseline? And then from there, and I think we talked at lunch a little bit David about the clarity, starting with what exactly do you want as the business owner?

Do you want more time away from the practice? Do you want multiple locations? Do you want to get into the time trade game where you're scaling back from your flagship, but opening up two, three, four locations to build an empire? Whatever that looks like, we have to first get clear on what that is for you as a business owner.

Then, we start building the scaffolding around that path, carving that road out. But it starts with the awareness of your business to begin with it, because that's really going to be the conduit that gets you from point A to point Z or again, whatever the end result you're searching for.

But awareness of what that looks like is pivotal. There's really no decisions to be made until we know where we're at and where we want to go.

David Phelps: So, that's where the dental therapist side comes from.

Obviously, we've already talked about the numbers and hardcore numbers are one thing and they're super important.

But you're right, unless you know where you want to go and it's not just about top line revenue, it's not about ...I don't know. It's not about certain metrics that some people allude to being successful.

And it sounds like what you do is you really kind of help get the clarity back to the clarity point of really what are you trying to design here? Overall, what's this mean? Is it more money? Well, what's more money mean? Well, is that going to get you there? Or is it profitability? Is it more time off by inserting certain efficiencies into ... it doesn't mean you're bringing on other doctors.

All these things come into play, but until a doctor has clarity, again they're just kind of throwing lines in the water and hoping they snag something. And usually, what they snag is not what they were after.

Jake Conway: Absolutely. You mentioned the business therapist and once we identify these, what we call opportunities, what we call these symptoms of something going on, whether it's supplies being over, hygiene, whatever the case may be.

Well, we would dig into the potential causes to this symptom. Now, these causes could be a plethora, a number of things. It could be leadership. It could be the fact that you don't have the right staff on board. It could be that you just don't know what you don't know in certain cases that you didn't have the awareness to begin with.

So, we really dig deep into these causes and really, we take an inch-wide mile deep approach. We really want to get to the root cause, to these symptoms. I kind of equate it to the Eastern versus Western medicine approach. We want to fix the actual root causes versus just prescribing Xanax and sending you on your way.

So, we get to the root cause and we offer solutions based on what we've seen, obviously, work in others in similar situations. And develop really custom — a lot of times it is custom

approaches with the certain skill sets with the individuals we're working with.

We have a mutual friend that talks about the different avatars of a dentist, whether it's social doc, the clinical doc, what have you. So, we leverage the skills that the docs already have and again, we offer solutions based around that.

David Phelps: Jake, is there a cart before the horse? Is there a chicken before the eggs kind of a contrast here? And I'm just asking this real time, because I'm not sure if I have the answer.

But small business owners, and again, we're talking about our dental colleagues here today. And somebody who is mired in the complexities of running that business, operating it as a solopreneur type person — in your experience, is there a right place to start?

Some people say, "Well, I need to go out and find a practice management coach or a consultant, or maybe I should go take more CE right now. Or maybe I need to find somebody like you, Jake, who can help me interpret and establish better metrics. Maybe I need a life coach to help me figure out what my life and personal vision is." I'm just curious.

I'm sure you enter into relationships with different practices and doctors from different angles. Is there a right way or wrong way, or is it just start somewhere and try to get some help wherever it comes from? I'm just curious.

Jake Conway: No, that's a really good question. It's really depending on what the vision and where you want to go to start with as the owner. A lot of times, gaining clarity, for instance, more onboarding calls is spent a lot of times with developing that to

begin with. Because a lot of times we have skewed versions of what a trigger word would mean.

One trigger word that is always there is growth. What does growth actually mean? Define that for yourself. For instance, could growth mean that you scale down two days, but you're still maintaining levels of profitability as you scale back timewise, is that growth to you?

And if it is, how do we define that and what are the next steps given the opportunities in your business? Are you tapping out? Can you afford an associate? Is the practice ready for that next level?

If it isn't, what needs to happen in the short term to get the practice ready for the next leap, whatever that looks like. So, in a roundabout way, it is starting with the owner themselves of like where I want to go and gaining clarity.

Because a lot of times, I see that everyone compares to others. Because there is enough knowledge out there to understand that there are thriving dentists who are killing it at profiting millions of dollars and yada-yada.

So, there is a level of comparison inherently. So, if you can strip that away and keep it condensed to your own path on what feels good for you, that's where we start, defining that.

So, if you can define that, then you go, "Okay, great, I'm here, and I want to go there. Let's look at my business and my current situation to find out, am I ready? If I'm not, what is it going to take to prepare myself, the business, the team, what have you, to really make it to this next level and feel one thing?"

As human beings, we have to feel progress. When we don't feel that progress, we feel stifled, all things start to unfold. We get resentful. We get complacent, that sort of thing. So, really filling progress, but we have to identify the path first before we can start filling progress.

So, I hope that answers your question, but it is a case-by-case approach, but starting with the awareness is really where we dig in first.

David Phelps: I've got to say, Jake, you really do understand the human side of all this. And I say that — to be totally transparent and complimentary, I find oftentimes people that are really good with numbers and you are definitely, but oftentimes, they're not-

Jake Conway: Excel is good with numbers.

David Phelps: Excel. Well, alright. So, somebody before you made it easier for someone like you to take it on, I get it.

Jake Conway: Yeah. Thank you, Microsoft, yeah.

David Phelps: But see, I don't even like to do Excel. That's how old I am. So, I can't even use the stuff that's been made for people that don't know like numbers.

But what I'm saying is really what I've really gleaned in the time we spent together is you're not just a numbers guy, which is important, but you are really, I think, gifted in a secondary or maybe it's a primary gift of yours, a superpower that allows you to help create that vision.

You've said it several times today already, but that's why I want to make a point of it, is everything else that we can inject into the practice model, KPIs, dashboards, efficiencies, whatever it might be, all those things that we inject in, there's a myriad.

There's a whole myriad of things, but until you know what you really want and have clarity on that vision, all this other stuff is outside the realm of anything that's going to have any dramatic effect.

In fact, trying things that don't merit where your vision wants to go, can actually upset the upper part and cause more pain and ascension and resentment, as you said, I think it's so important.

I love the fact that you're on onboarding calls start with that because many times people that are into the numbers it's nah, it's just about the numbers. And well, what number do you want to see? Well, I want to see this number. Well, well, who cares about why, let's just go get the number. And it's like what was that all about?

So yeah. No, I love the way you look at it. It comes from where you started. You said back to IT when you didn't really know IT, but it was really about the people, and it sounds like you were like translating or communicating expectations. And then somebody else do the actual technical work, which I mean that's needed.

Jake Conway: Yeah. Can I make a point here, David?

David Phelps: Yeah.

Jake Conway: Oh, thank you. I got to tread carefully here a little bit. But a lot of times, I see numbers become like an ego check or like the whole concept of, if you're a golfer you putt for dough, you drive for show, you know what I mean?

David Phelps: Yeah.

Jake Conway: So, like sometimes numbers can be, "Oh, I show 20% growth," but what's your real bottom line.

So, like as we move through this there's a concept that I really — and it's very simple, but the numbers are actually a byproduct of what we do with the people and the team and the culture and the patients. Quality care to the patient is always going to trump all the numbers. Because again, those are byproducts of how well we're doing, fill in the blank.

And then you can go another step down, if treatment acceptance is down, from the accepted parameters, why is that, let's dig in? Is it the fact you're doing too many exams? Do you not have enough resources? Are you under diagnosing or over diagnosing, whatever the case may be.

But again, you said there's a myriad of KPIs, but starting with the understanding that these numbers, the overhead, the growth, the profitability, these are all truly byproducts of "the dirty work" the stuff that people don't want to do and potentially are afraid of. Truly piercing that veil of what's really going on in my business can be a little scary at times. And hopefully, I can provide a little guidance and assurance that it's going to be okay.

David Phelps: No, that's very helpful, Jake. In working with practices and practice owners, is this one-on-one, or is there some aspect to what you do? Is there a group or is it one-on-one, just for the benefit of our listeners so they kind of know what the approach is.

Jake Conway: Yeah. So, I have a team that will provide reporting. So, we do provide custom monthly reporting that kind of breaks the stuff down. We have training videos associated. So, you can kind of get an idea of our flavor and how we do things.

But we have some different tiered packages where you can do reporting only, which is just the reports with the videos. We

have group calls each month as well, which is kind of a step up. And then there is the one-on-one coaching with myself, which is what we call the reporting plus premier.

But there there's a package for everybody. If you're looking to gain insights and understanding of what's going on, there's a couple of options for those out there.

- David Phelps: Who would not be a good client to work for you? What characteristics would make somebody not particularly a client that would benefit?
- Jake Conway: Someone lacking humility and someone who's not willing to do certain things regardless of their ego.
- David Phelps: Yeah, okay. Because handling and being a leader in the practice, this really is something that ... this part can't be delegated. Lots of things can be delegated for good leaders, but as the owner, it's the owner's vision. The owner, therefore, has to build a culture and the team, and this is something you can't delegate this part, you got to step up, stand up, dig in.
- Jake Conway: Absolutely. It's a Jocko Willink extreme ownership, you're right. It comes down to you, but to delegate, you have to identify what that's going to be in the first place and create a vision for your team.

And this is getting a little outside of the numbers, but gosh, the numbers are a great place to start to identify wherever we can start seeing impact. Because again, with the numbers as a byproduct, as you focus on your team, your culture, potentially getting rid of some of these what we call cancers of the practice, it's going to be tough work, and that's where you have to step up and be the leader of the practice and make some tough decisions.

And yeah, put your ego at the door and again, yeah, just having humility to make decisions, what's best for the team, the patients ultimately, leading to best for yourself.

David Phelps: Last question, this is just more generic about kind of where we are in the marketplace today, the economic cycle. Are you in general ... I don't mean just from your clients, but you're out there, you spend a lot of time with a lot of dentists in different groups and get a lot of feedback. Is there, in your opinion, a high level of concern, moderate concern, not much concern at all about kind of where the economy seems to be going and the threat of inflation, higher interest rates, maybe a recession?

Is there much out there right now, or is it still you think early before people are really getting too excited about it?

Jake Conway: Well, I think obviously, COVID was sudden and unexpected, but those that were prepared, it wasn't as detrimental for those that were prepared for whatever.

Obviously, they couldn't have projected or anticipated a COVID shutdown. My point is that if you're prepared from a number of standpoint and have a healthy business, you can kind of kind of weather the storm.

I know that you've been in the game for quite some time, David, and if you have a well-oiled machine, and again, you have a profitable business that is operating at a level that can kind of pivot and kind of fluctuate and move with the business cycle out there, you're going to be prepared for whatever; whether it's recession or inflation, or potentially both all at once. So, I'll start off with that.

As far as the concern out there, the main concern you touched on it earlier, which is that the hiring crisis, this great resignation

that's going on, there are some strategies there that we've seen kind of people are kind of tweaking and pivoting on how they actually start to attract and trying to pull potential candidates.

But right now, dentistry is coming back. Some of our clients have had some of their best months literally ever in the past few months. I don't know if that's just a surge from the shutdown and we're experiencing some effect from the recall cycle being broken for so long.

But for right now, it's stable. It's just really trying to hire the staff to keep up with the demand right now. But, as you know, David, dentistry is one of the most recession-proof industries out there. Unless you're doing huge cosmetic cases all the time, you're probably going to be pretty fine.

But again, just being aware and being prepared for whatever it is, could you really ... if you're going to anticipate, let's see a 20% reduction in collection in revenue, could you sustain that? What's your overhead, what's your profitability? What levers would you need to tweak and move to sustain that?

So, that's kind of where we're at, is preparation, but those that are prepared, it's business as usual. It's just trying to keep up with the demand and rolling with the punches.

David Phelps: Yeah. No, very well said. Jake, what's the best way for people to connect or contact you for more information?

Jake Conway: Oh, that's great. You can go to custompracticeanalytics.com. I will say that it's still under a bit of a work. We're transitioning to a new website, but book a consultation there. It'll be a one-on-one call with myself.

You can reach out with the with the online form or you know what, you can just email info@custompracticeanalytics.com. That could be a great way as well if you just want to get a direct line into the water there.

David Phelps: Great. We'll put both those links in the show notes for those who might be listening while they're driving a car, and if you can't memorize quickly enough.

Well, Jake, you're very easy to talk to. And I think that just bodes well for the relationships you have with so many ... the great reports that I hear about folks that I know who have had the opportunity and blessing to work with you.

And I know you're making a big difference. I hope people who're listening today will ... if they have any concerns about where they are in their practice or their vision, not being really crystal clear, as you said, and are trying to figure out where they want to go, I can't think of a better person to start with other than Jake Conway. So, Jake, we appreciate you being here today.

Jake Conway: Oh, David likewise, man. Thank you so much. I have to say that this is an extreme honor to be on ... looking at Dr. Phelps here, one-on-one. Just keeping up with you through the years and learning of you, and just knowing of what the impact you're creating yourself. Again, this is an extreme honor and I really thank you for you taking the time today.

David Phelps: All my pleasure, Jake. Thank you so much. We'll talk to you soon.

Jake Conway: Alright. Thank you, David. Take care.

You've been listening to the Dentist Freedom Blueprint Podcast. If you're tired of trading time for dollars and you want to create more freedom in your life, I encourage you to visit my week blog, freedomfounders.com/blog. I post weekly hard-hitting videos about creating more freedom in your life. Check out my latest book on Amazon, What's Your Next?: The Blueprint for Creating Your Freedom Lifestyle, or visit freedomfounders.com to learn more about how we help high income earners create the freedom to buy back their time and create more impact.