



# Mental Health Growth Management

## Ticket Manager Console

by Reuven Lirov, M.A.

### Getting on Track

Laura sliced mushrooms and tipped them from the cutting board into the salad bowl. “Ready for dinner, Alex?” she called.

Alex came in, watering can in hand. “We’re getting a second crop of tomatoes,” he said proudly.

“Are there any ready for tonight’s salad?” Laura asked.

“Not quite, but they are growing.”

“Speaking of growing,” Laura said, setting the salad bowl on the table and taking her seat, “I hear your practice is growing a lot lately.” At Alex’s questioning look, she added, “I ran into Luisa at the grocery. She said you’ve been crazy busy.”

“Busy is good,” said Alex. “It’s true that we’ve added quite a few patients recently, but we need more. High volume is a requirement for profitability these days.”

“So it’s not leading to any problems? The new software is helping?”

“We haven’t actually taken the plunge on that software, but I think we’re managing okay. Why do you ask?”

“Luisa looked a bit frazzled.” Laura speared a chunk of cucumber.

Alex thought. “I guess at this point she’s the one who would be having to do extra work for the new patients. It hasn’t really hit me yet.”

“Maybe it won’t.”

“Oh, no,” Alex sighed. “If Luisa suffers, I suffer. We’ve made some changes, of course, and solved some of the issues, but it does seem as though we just go from one problem to the next. So I guess I’ll find out what the next problem is soon.”

“Is that what you want, though—management by coping with problems? Maybe you need to rethink and make your practice scalable. If you set up systems designed to grow with you, you won’t have to scramble around and come up with something new every time you get a bunch of new patients.”

“We’ve rethought,” Alex protested. He tore off a bite of bread and dipped it into a saucer of olive oil. “We just went through this whole reimagining process, looking at where we are and where we want to be and what we have to do to get from A to B.”

“You sound pretty proud of that, and I do remember how much effort it was, but have you actually implemented anything?” Laura asked. “I mean, have you done the things that have to be done to get from A to B?”

“We’ve been crazy busy,” Alex pointed out.

Laura laughed. “So I hear!”

“I see your point, though. Just identifying the problem isn’t the same as solving it. But honestly things are so busy day to day that I didn’t even realize we hadn’t actually made the changes we decided on.” Alex frowned. “Do you think I’m incompetent to run the practice?”

“I think you’re very good at what you do. What you do isn’t necessarily running the business side of things.” Laura shrugged. “That’s not what you learned in school and it’s not the part you’re passionate about. It makes sense to get things set up so that you and Luisa will actually be on the way from A to B, though. Growth can be dangerous for a business.”

Alex nodded thoughtfully. Growth was something to celebrate, but it could also bring problems.

*Is Dr. Alex Friedman ready for growth in his practice?*

## Danger, Crisis or Opportunity?

“Danger,” Alex said, deftly spinning the TV remote, “is the same as opportunity in Chinese.”

Laura gazed at him blankly. “Is that a clue to your choice of movie this evening?”

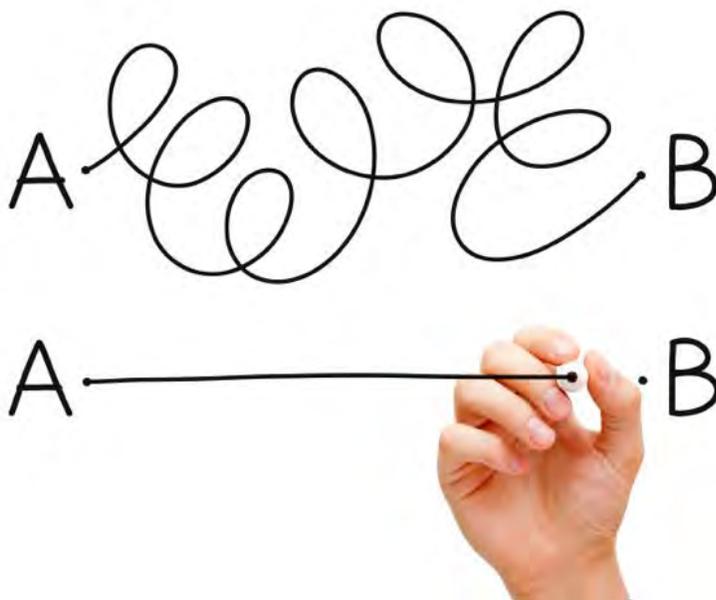
“No, I think it’s a proverb of some kind,” Alex said, flopping onto the couch and wielding the remote. He scrolled through the available movies.

Laura was punching the keyboard of her phone. “Found it! Some say that the word ‘crisis’ in Chinese is made up of the words ‘danger’ and ‘opportunity.’ Apparently that’s not true.”

“Thank goodness for Google,” Alex said, not taking his eyes off the TV screen. “Otherwise we might never have known I was wrong. Want to watch something with tigers and dragons in it?”

“Sticking with the Chinese danger/opportunity theme?” Laura asked, curling her legs under her.

Alex selected a movie, punched a few buttons, and settled into the sofa. “Actually, while mostly I was thinking about how cool I would look if I had a sword instead of a remote, I was also thinking about work, where I think I’m facing both danger and opportunity.”



Laura nodded. “Catching up now. What’s the danger and what’s the opportunity?”

“Growth,” said Alex. “In both cases, so the Chinese missed a chance there. I think the way the practice is growing is a terrific opportunity.”

“Sure,” Laura agreed. “More money, more stature, more opportunities to do great things.”

“Opportunities to invest in some things I’ve wanted to do, too. Things that can improve the practice, and maybe even make a difference in my field.”

“I see that. So where’s the danger?”

“The danger is that as we grow, we have crises.”

“Ah, now we’re bringing the crisis back in.”

Alex nodded. “We can’t keep everything in our heads any more

the way we could when we had fewer patients. We’re flying by the seat of our pants a lot of the time. We don’t get reports out when we mean to and when we do get them ready, we don’t always read through them. Our team members are running to keep up, not coming in to work with a clear idea of what they need to do. They don’t feel like they’re in control, and neither do I.”

“You have to hold them accountable,” Laura advised.

“Accountable for what?” Alex asked. “When things are always right on the edge of falling apart, it’s hard to say just what anybody’s responsible for, so it’s hard to hold them accountable.” He thought for a moment. “I think the way that we handle our growth right now will determine how successful we are in the future.”

Laura looked at Alex seriously. “That doesn’t have to be a crisis. A danger, sure, I see that. You’re saying that there’s a possibility of dissatisfied staff and a lower standard of patient care, if you don’t get systems in place to handle the larger volume in your office, and I agree. And it’s clearly an opportunity. But I think it’s less a crisis than a turning point.”

Alex nodded. “I guess this is where we either take action and move toward having the dream practice we envisioned, or hesitate and get knocked down like that guy on the screen.”

Laura rested her head on Alex’s shoulder. “I know you’re up for the opportunity.”

Alex hoped she was right.

*Growth in Dr. Friedman’s practice could be a danger or an opportunity; what can he do to influence the outcome?*

## Bottlenecks

Laura brushed her hair and added a slick of lip gloss. “How do I look? I feel like I’ve had a long day and should probably just stay home and relax.”

“Let’s go out and relax,” said Alex. “I hear there’s a new place downtown with jazz. We can sit quietly and you can tell me all about your long day.”

“There’s not that much to tell, I’m afraid. We’re just having to do all the quarterly reports.”

“Isn’t it automatic?” Alex asked. “We just click on something and out pops a report.”

“Hmmm,” said his wife. “Are you the one who runs the reports?”

“Obviously not,” said Alex, opening the car door for her, “but I’m the one who has to look at the reports and figure out what they mean.”

Laura leaned back and closed her eyes. “We don’t have to do



that part. We just prepare all these long reports and turn them in. Somebody else has to figure out what they mean.”

“Lucky you. Back when the practice was smaller, we hardly needed to run reports, because we knew everything that was going on. Now, when we have so much data that we actually need reports, we also don’t have time to run them all or to figure out what they mean. In fact, half the time we don’t agree on what they mean, and the rest of the time we don’t know what we ought to do about whatever the report says.”

“Mmmm,” said Laura. “Reports don’t give you action items. And it just gets worse when you have more patients and more staff. You need someone to analyze the reports for you.”

“I think part of the problem is that our reports are too specialized. If I’m looking for a way to improve the workflow for our staff, I know that their jobs don’t pertain just to one aspect of the practice. Checking in a new patient can involve new patient flow, scheduling, patient billing, and maybe more—and then the next payment might involve No Shows or No Future Appointments, and then there’s inventory and third party vendors and—” Alex looked over at Laura. “Am I boring you?”

Laura breathed softly. She had fallen asleep. Alex sighed. He switched on the turn signal.



“Bottlenecks,” said Laura. “You have to look for the bottlenecks in the workflow.”

“I thought you were asleep,” said Alex, turning the car.

“Oh, no, I’m wide awake,” Laura yawned.

“I’m taking you home,” said Alex. “You can explain about the bottlenecks later.”

As he drove, though, he thought about bottlenecks in the workflow. There were bound to be some, but he didn’t know where they were, and he had a feeling that the reports weren’t going to tell him.

*Will Dr. Friedman’s reports tell him where to look for the bottlenecks in the workflow?*

## Win-Win

“Dr. Friedman?” Luisa’s greeting was different from her usual brisk “Good morning.”

“Good morning, Luisa.” Alex said as he approach his office manager’s desk.

“Dr. Friedman, I’d like to know when we’re going to get the new ClinicMind software installed.”

Alex’s eyebrows rose. This was not what he had expected.

“As I understand it,’ Luisa went on, “this new practice management software will show us the information we need to keep our practice on track. It’ll cut down on surprises by showing our progress toward our goals. It’ll give us clear workload assignments so every worker can see just what she’s supposed to do.”

“Or what he’s supposed to do.”

“Of course.” Luisa acknowledged Alex’s correction dutifully.

This was not like her, Alex reflected. “You know we’ve been planning on making that change—”

“I know, believe me,” said Luisa. “I think I’ve put quite a few hours into research and preparation. Now I want to know when that investment of time is going to pay off.” She pursed her lips and folded her hands.

Clearly, it was Alex’s turn to speak.

“I think we’ve pretty well decided to do it, Luisa,” Alex began, “but there are costs involved, and it will probably take some time to get everything in order for the change. Everyone will have to learn the new systems...”



“I think we’ve already determined that the ROI would be positive,” Luisa remarked. “And they offer training and support. They have coaches, even.”

“I’m not disagreeing,” Alex frowned. “I’m just not sure that I can give you an exact date—”

“Listen, Dr. Friedman,” Luisa said firmly. “I’ve seen the demos. Now every day when I do these things on paper or using a bunch of different tools we’ve tried to make into a system, I think about how much easier my life would be if we had ClinicMind and how much more work I could get done. If you’re not planning to use an integrated system—”

“Oh, I am,” Alex assured her, “I just—”

“I’ll call them this afternoon,” said Luisa, turning back to her computer. “Thank you.” Alex smiled. “Don’t mention it,” he said, with almost no sarcasm.

Luisa was right. There was no reason to keep waiting. He’d let her win this one—and he expected it to be a win for him, too.

*Is Dr. Friedman’s office manager right to take action now?*

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