



# Vision Source® TRUSTED COLLEAGUE

## Gregory Aker, OD

akereyecenter@yahoo.com

### From Marauder's Maps to High-tech Instruments, Patients Find Something to Talk About

For the first 20 years in practice, Gregory Aker, OD, worked in his hometown for a surgical group in Orlando. But he became frustrated with the limitations of working for others. "Then I opened my eyes and realized that I wasn't doing what I had set out to do. I didn't want to look back on the next 20 years filled with regrets and thoughts of what I could have done better," he recalls. So 10 years ago he opened his own practice, Aker Eye Vision Source® in Titusville, on Florida's Space Coast, with the goal of having the most technologically advanced practice possible. His office includes an Optovue OCT, Optos, Diopsys ERG-VEP, and corneal topographer, as well as a Marco 5100 refraction system in each exam room.

Such a practice not only allows him to manage more patients and treat to the fullest extent of his license, but it also provides patients with something new to tell others about their visit to the eye doctor. "From a marketing standpoint, patients are our best referral sources," he says. "Our goal is to give each patient a story to tell." As the economy – and funding for the US space program – dried up, his drive to keep patients satisfied became even more important. "I can see the Kennedy launch pads from here. Our main employer is the space program, and it lost 6,000 jobs. So I needed to figure out how to survive a major economic downturn," Dr. Aker says. Consequently, he moved forward on several fronts. He joined Vision Source® and attended a Great Game of Business session offered by Dr. Walt West. He added the EDGE software from GPN so he could track his profitability better. He also took on an associate, Sarah Harbove, OD, a fourth-generation Titusville resident who had shadowed Dr. Aker as a high school student.

He also hired ODLean as a consultant. At the time, he had 4 exam rooms and 2 pretesting rooms for managing 40-plus patients per day. The consultants helped him identify time management problems, with the most notable one being that 4 exam lanes for 1 OD was not efficient. So he dropped it to 3 and then took what ODLean taught him about tracking and timing the patient process through every step of the encounter 1 step further. He hired a company that specializes in RFID technology and had it create an RFID small-scale program for his office for patient and staff tracking and timing.

He calls this his marauder's map, a nod to the magical map in Harry Potter books that shows where every person is at that moment. "Every room has a marauder's map on a screen. And everyone in the office has an avatar. My patients are blue. Dr. Harbove's patients are purple, and the doctors are red." When patients check in, a RFID badge is clipped to the patient's chart, and the timer starts. As the clipboard travels with the patient, the marauder's map adds the patient's movements to each screen. If a patient sits alone in a room for 15 minutes, a red flag pops up, alerting doctors and staff that a patient is still waiting. "It's not uncommon for me to walk into the exam room and see the patient staring at the map on the screen. Often, the patient has a big smile because he or she could see my little avatar approaching the room."

The system's value is greater than just its entertainment quotient. "Patient visit time has dropped from 1 hour and 6 minutes to 52 minutes, on average, and that includes all patients, whether they visit the optical dispensary or not. Patients typically allot 1 hour of their time for a visit. If the visit takes longer than that, they'll spend less money," he says. So improving efficiency means he has been able to capture more – and higher-dollar – purchases on the day of the exam.

### Measurements Yield Success

Although Gregory Aker, OD, owner of Aker Eye Vision Source® in Titusville, Fla., hasn't yet implemented all of the lessons learned from The Great Game of Business, he did start to play some of the mini games almost immediately.



In these games, different departments or the entire office set short-range goals. For example, last summer they conducted a mini game around sales of sunglasses. The year before, they had sold 26 pairs of prescription sunwear. With the game in place, that number jumped to more than 80. Recently, an Optos game was implemented that increased screenings from 65 percent to 87 percent.

Similarly, 2 years ago, the practice brought its Essilor representatives in to conduct training on anti-reflective lenses. "Our anti-reflective percentage had been around 25 percent. Immediately after and for the next 18 months since, we've been averaging 75 percent," he says. In addition, every one of his employees is CPO-certified. With games and metrics being shared with the staff, revenue per exam is up by \$30 this year. At 6,300 comprehensive exams per year, that should yield \$190,000 in additional revenue. Little changes add up.

