Unveiling management programmes

The importance of learning how to structure and organise a dental business

By Dr Toni Surace, Melbourne

Unveiling management programmes can improve communication skills. (DTS Photo Tyler Olsen, Canada)

Let’s face it, when we think of investing in learning and improving our practices, it is usually to help us keep up with the latest clinical techniques and technology. So why would you bother investing valuable time and money in developing skills to run your business, especially if you have placed that burden on someone else, such as your staff or practice manager?

I used to think this way. It took a while to change my mind and now I am happy to share my honest perspective as a principal dentist on what a dental management programme really is all about. Firstly, I am going to tell you what it is not about. It does not involve persuading patients to pay for dentistry they do not want and forcing patients to push patients to have crowns.

All of my preconceived ideas created the image of a marketing machine that would destroy my relationships with my patients and take away my ethical responsibility of doing what was best for the patient. I could not possibly become one of those practices after all. I had sworn to an oath on my graduation that I would always do what was in the patient’s best interest.

I had thought and that many dentists are perfectionists, become burnt out or suffer from overwhelm. An exciting revelation was that I could be a dentist and have a life.

I knew I had the intelligence to work out systems to make my practice run more smoothly and if I did a little advertising I would attract more patients and hopefully make more money.

I was short on though was time. I finally decided I was not as unique as I thought and that many dentists who had their own unrewarding rationale. I had sworn to an oath on my graduation that I would always do what was in the patient’s best interest and I still stand by this today.

So what is it about? To my amazement, I found that a management programme is all about something I had not experienced for years. I am eternally grateful for the skills it helped me develop.

I was also fortunate to have my husband, who had his own unrelated business, be part of this journey. We have become family.

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It helped us all work towards a common goal and be on the same page. This is a journey your team embark on as well, and through which they develop personally and professionally. Initially my team were not all committed. A few staff members resigned. In the past, this would have been devastating for me, but I soon learned that this was a fabulous opportunity to obtain the support I really needed from my team.

I learned how to hire and train staff to be an engaged and empowered team member, something I had never experienced with my previous team. Not only did I grow, but so did my team. Personal and professional growth is something that anyone who puts in the effort in a management programme will experience. It is this personal growth that is worth more than financial gain for me.

To watch members of my team grow, develop and become more passionate about the practice and their roles was worth more to me than the money that followed. These employees have become loyal staff members and continue to work with me in my practice. They have become family.

Of course, joining a management programme will help you reach your financial goals and will help you structure and organise your business. For me personally, it was important that I create more time, more time for my patients, more time for my young family and for me, and more time to work on my business. I was able to cut down my days dramatically. I went from working more than five days a week clinically to working three days between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. (school hours) and still earning the same amount of money.

Obviously, it took some time to reach this stage. Now I run my practice remotely. I perform clinical dentistry about one day per month and the rest of the time I have a highly trained and enthusiastic team attending to my patients and my business. For me personally, it was important that I create more time, more time for my patients, more time for my young family and for me, and more time to work on my business. I was able to cut down my days dramatically. I went from working more than five days a week clinically to working three days between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. (school hours) and still earning the same amount of money.
C.E. SYMPOSIUM

Booth 7-9 Dental Tribune Study Club at the ADX 2014 - Australian Dental Expo, 21-23 March 2014

FRI, 21.03
10:00 – 11:00 | Sabine Nahme
Clinical and diagnostic advantages before, during and post endodontic treatment to investigate the root morphology in 3-D
Live Lecture

11:00 – 12:00 | Dr. Marius Steigmaann
Implant Placement and Treatment in the Aesthetic Zone - Part 1
Recorded Lecture

12:00 – 13:00 | Dr. Rana Al-Falaki
An Overview of Minimally Invasive Periodontal Surgery Using ErCrYSGG Laser Technology
Recorded Lecture

13:00 – 14:00 | Dr. Hom-Lay Wang
MBP Socket Augmentation
Recorded Lecture

14:00 – 15:00 | Gilles P. Chaumaneet
Lasers in Oral Implantology
Recorded Lecture

15:00 – 16:00 | Sabine Nahme
3-D imaging solutions for powerful diagnostic value without guesswork
Live Lecture

16:00 – 17:00 | Prof. Lorenzo Breschi
Adhesive systems: Overview, Evaluation, Development
Recorded Lecture

17:00 – 18:00 | Dr. Marius Steigmaann
Implant Placement and Treatment in the Aesthetic Zone - Part 2
Recorded Lecture

SAT, 22.03
10:00 – 11:00 | Dr. Marius Steigmaann
Implant Placement and Treatment in the Aesthetic Zone - Part 3
Recorded Lecture

11:00 – 12:00 | Sabine Nahme
3-D imaging solutions for powerful diagnostic value without guesswork
Live Lecture

12:00 – 13:00 | Didier Dietschi
Ultra-conservative smile and aesthetic rehabilitations: indications, limits and clinical procedures
Recorded Lecture

13:00 – 14:00 | Prof. Dr. Roland Frankenberger
Preparation techniques and luting of all-ceramic restorations - What are the key issues?
Recorded Lecture

14:00 – 15:00 | Dr. Derek Mahony
Early interceptive orthodontic treatment for the general dental practitioner
Live Lecture

15:00 – 16:00 | Sabine Nahme
CBCT-assisted treatment planning, implant placement and prevention of surgical failures. Confident surgery, powerful tools
Live Lecture

16:00 – 17:00 | Stephane Brochet
Fibre reinforced composites … a real breakthrough
Recorded Lecture

17:00 – 18:00 | Dr. Ed McLaren
The “BFEP”: Bonded Functional Esthetic Prototype a little PSD
Recorded Lecture

SUN, 23.03
10:00 – 11:00 | Dr. Marc Geissberger
Quarterbacking Difficult Cases in Restorative Dentistry
Recorded Lecture

11:00 – 12:00 | Sabine Nahme
Clinical and diagnostic advantages before, during and post endodontic treatment to investigate the root morphology in 3-D
Live Lecture

12:00 – 13:00 | Prof. Andre Pelegrine
Dr. Luz Antonio Cosmo
Soft Tissue Regeneration - The State Of The Art With a Clinical Approach
Recorded Lecture

13:00 – 14:00 | Didier Dietschi
Ultra-conservative smile and aesthetic rehabilitations: indications, limits and clinical procedures
Recorded Lecture

14:00 – 15:00 | Dr. Marius Steigmaann
Implant Placement and Treatment in the Aesthetic Zone - Part 4
Recorded Lecture

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The greatest surprise of the management programme was that I learned to communicate better. This skill enabled me to develop deeper relationships with my patients, my staff and my family. The skills I learned are true life skills. I truly thought I was already an excellent communicator, but I had a great deal to learn. I learnt the art of listening, something I had forgotten years ago. I had so much knowledge I thought I needed to use every opportunity; I had to impart this valuable information to my patients. It is amazing how much better my relationships have become now that I know how to listen. I thoroughly encourage you to try it. Instead of solving your patients’ problems immediately, listen to them. Show you understand and care, and you will be amazed at their responses. I learned all this through a comprehensive examination process, my case acceptance rates skyrocketed and I was able to perform the type of dentistry I wanted to do. Life became so much less stressful.

Well, those are the good bits. What is the downside of joining a management programme? Well, firstly, such programmes appear to be costly. Most are around $3,500 per month. I looked at this as being less than two crowns a month. I personally began doing more than two crowns a day after a year in the programme. I had prevented me starting. In all honesty, once the programme had begun, I increased my case acceptance and never thought about the monthly fee again. If the programme is not making money for you and you are doing all you have been asked to do, then it is not right for you to continue. Most programmes will allow you to drop out if this is the case, but I can honestly say that if you complete the required work within the always improvement in your bottom line.

Secondly, it takes time and hard work. Eventually, you will have more time to do what you want but at first you need to make changes to your current business. This will mean that you have to give up your hair cut on more than one occasion. It does get better; you just have to give it a chance.

The final challenging aspect, which got me out of my comfort zone, was the verbal skills I was taught. I struggled with some of the statements I was supposed to use. One day I just gave up and started saying the same things but in my own words and it was so much better. In Australia, we need much more of an Australian spin to the things we say to patients. I always say the verbal skills are the recipe, but you need to add your own ingredients to make it comfortable and yours. As Aussies, we do not like anything that sounds fake or non-genuine and we can detect it from miles away. It is important that the conversations you have with people are genuine and not forced or fake.

There are many other great reasons that make joining a management programme a good idea. Often, as dentists who practise on our own, we can feel quite isolated. Unless you have friends from university with whom you keep in touch or you are involved in other dental groups, you may never socialise with other professionals who face the same issues you do. It is amazing how even dentists in the same suburb can become friends and genuinely help each other with support, ideas and companionship, and in doing so share their knowledge and grow their businesses. The community spirit and opportunity to talk about difficult cases, patient problems and start to help ease the burden we all endure in being a practice owner. Why spend your time trying to reinvent the wheel when there are companies out there that have done it and proved it works in practices all over the world?

I must reveal that I have a bias towards Momentum Management. I found the programme so life-changing for me, I had to be part of it and help others to experience the same. With my own successful practice practically running itself, I now have the time and financial means to purchase Momentum and continue the great work it has done for over 13 years. And yes, I can now use the famous tag line “I loved it so much, I bought the company!”

A Dental Science graduate of the University of Melbourne, Dr Poni Sourace is a principal dentist and the Managing Director of Momentum Management in Melbourne. This Friday, she will be lecturing on the importance of marketing in dental practice as part of the ADX14 continuing professional development programme.