

# 'I HAVE 100% PASSION FOR THIS ROLE'

Laura Horton advises all DCPs to focus on their career and what they want to achieve. This article outlines Laura's own route to success. Interview by **Kate Maynard**.

**H**ow did a girl from Bishop's Stortford in Hertfordshire who worked in the local fish and chip shop after school go on to be voted the twentieth most influential person in dentistry? At the age of 31, Laura Horton has created her own business empire on the strength of her idea to develop the role of treatment coordinator into something special and share it with the UK dental industry.

## STARTING OUT

When considering her career options while still at school, Laura's only firm idea was that she wanted to have her own business. Her other ambition was to travel the world, so looking for inspiration, she enrolled on a travel and tourism course at the local college.

'It was boring and I left a couple of months later,' says Laura. 'To tide me over until I enrolled on another college course or started A-levels a term later than my friends, I applied for a job as a receptionist in my dental practice.'

Laura was offered the job of dental receptionist and was asked if she would like to train as a dental nurse and said yes, why not.

'Within the first few days I absolutely loved my job,' explains Laura. 'The dentist I worked with was also an oral surgeon and

did sedation. We saw patients for apicetomies and impacted wisdom tooth removal and I loved it.'

Laura's first week was not without drama, however. 'On the Friday afternoon of the first week after a very late night and nothing to eat that day, I fainted during a very gory procedure and my now best friend, Alison (then a nurse and now a hygienist), had to put me in the recovery position! This did not deter me. I learnt a valuable lesson - I must eat breakfast and have not skipped it since!'

The following week Laura's employer enrolled her on the dental nurse National Certificate course and she passed her exam in 1998. The day that Laura received her qualification, she enrolled on a 13-week dental radiography course.

Laura worked in an NHS practice for two and a half years before deciding to work in London.

'I had an urge to work in London; all of my friends worked there and the social life was great. I worked in a practice in the West End which was good but too quiet. There was only the principal and me. So I decided to temp for a while and it was fantastic. I loved meeting new people and gained a wealth of experience.'

Laura spent another three years working in a mixed practice followed by four in a private cosmetic and implant practice, and it was

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## COVER STORY

here that she began acquiring new job titles and responsibilities.

### **BECOMING A TCO**

When Laura was interviewed for the role of treatment coordinator (TCO), she had never heard of it before. 'I went for an interview and was told it was an exciting opportunity. At the time I had done everything I could as a dental nurse and was feeling the need for something new. I felt lost in dentistry; I did not want to do dental hygiene so when I was offered the job of treatment coordinator, I took it.'

Laura was that dental practice's first TCO; they had been looking for the right person for some time. She was given brief training on the consultation form and visual aids to show to patients. She explains: 'Within a short time I felt that this role could be something very special and with the permission of my principal I tried many different things to make the role special. I was lucky to be able to do this but as I changed the role and took things further as regards verbal skills and customer service, my level of success improved greatly. Aspects of communication that were taught to me by Bill Blatchard, my boss and through the vast number of books I was reading also contributed to my success.'

Laura loved working as a TCO, meeting new people every day and helping scared patients to have confidence in the team. 'Finally I knew what job satisfaction was about,' she says. 'I did not have a day off sick in the four years I worked in that practice.'



### **MOVING INTO MANAGEMENT**

'While working as a TCO the practice needed a manager and the principal offered to train me in this role. I took the opportunity and in the final year at that practice I was the practice manager at both of their two branches.'

The dental team at that practice were working with Bill Blatchford from Blatchford Solutions in the USA (a company that works with dental practices to help them realise their goals and ambitions). 'This was a fantastic learning experience as regards to how a dental practice is really a dental business,' says Laura. 'As a team we worked our socks off to ensure the practice was a success in the eyes of our patients as well as from a business point of view.' The dental team had a target to hit each month and they hit the target consistently every month and were rewarded for their hard work. 'Three of us often

## LAURA'S TREATMENT COORDINATOR IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMME

The aim of the TCO role is to remove 90% of non-clinical dentistry from the dentist, to provide a high level of customer service and to build excellent relationships with your patients. The TCO will connect with the patients on a different level - in sharp comparison to the traditional way this has been done.

Laura can implement the role of TCO into a dental practice in two days. After the two days of intensive training a TCO will be able to:

- Offer excellent customer service
- Provide slick consultations from the day after the training is completed
- Have confidence to quote fees
- Understand the basics of personality styles
- Complete documentation required
- Be extremely motivated.

The TCO will also have and continue to develop team leader, relationship building and outstanding communication skills.

(from [www.laurahortonconsulting.co.uk](http://www.laurahortonconsulting.co.uk))

**‘Giving people job satisfaction is amazing, after all the TCO role is a win for the patients, the team, the practice, the dentists and the TCO!’**

worked 12-hour days so that all of our patients' needs were met,' adds Laura. 'When you make a promise to deliver excellence - working 9-5 will not cut the grade.'

### ITCHY FEET

Laura had come a long way in her first decade in the dental industry but in 2008, she began to get itchy feet.

'As I was now running two practices and a successful training academy, I could no longer perform the TCO role. I trained two other people to do the role, one in each practice, and that is when it hit me - this is my business idea, this is what I can do. It is unique and I have 100% passion for this role.'

Laura is also a self-taught dental photographer and she knew that she could teach photography as well, which she

considers a vital skill for TCOs as it is another area in which they can save the dentist non-clinical time.

Motivated by her business idea, she went to see her father, who has his own business, and told him what she wanted to do.

'My Mum said that I should stay in my well paid secure job, but within a couple of hours my Dad and I had a business plan.'

Laura had recently helped her partner Glyn, a carpenter, to set up his own company, and this spurred her on even more to set up her own business. It took Laura a further five months to build up the courage to wave goodbye to her full time job. 'I was very scared about leaving my job and working for myself but my gut instinct was telling me to do it. I had all my experience to fall back on if it didn't work out. I knew that my attitude would help

as I am a positive person. I was ready and it was now or never,' says Laura. 'One month later the recession broke, but this made me more determined.'

### GOING SOLO

Within four months of setting up Laura Horton Consulting, a 'bespoke consulting company specialising in training of treatment coordinators', Laura had her first client who had heard about her through an article she had written. 'Luckily I knew lots of dentists through my last job and the training academy run by the practice and those dentists recommended me to their friends.'

Laura found that free social networking using Twitter and Facebook was the ideal platform to launch her business and help build relationships. She also sought advice from her father and from a successful businesswoman who acted as a mentor.

'Once I had left my previous employer I was then able to contact other leaders in dentistry and ask them for their advice, which has been invaluable.'



Thereafter a slow but steady stream of clients began to emerge. 'Lecturing at events was scary but I was fully aware that it was something that I had to do,' adds Laura.

### THE WORKING WEEK

A typical week for Laura includes two to three days in a practice, depending on the locations; a day for meeting; Friday for business development and a day for administrative tasks, although Laura has recently employed a PA to help out. 'On top of that fitting in the gym has to be 6.30-7am or it doesn't happen,' says Laura. In addition, Laura also lectures on average one day a month over a nine-month period. She is an instructor for practice management, photography and team advancement for the California Centre for Advanced Dental Studies (CCADS) over the winter.

Laura has two weeks a month where she goes to dental practices and completes the TCO implementation and the other two weeks are for the practices that she visits monthly for a one-day event.

'I do not work weekends and spend that time studying and seeing my family and friends. There is no time in the week to socialise and right now I have a big list of people I need to arrange to see!' Laura is currently studying with the Open University towards an MBA but is thinking of applying to a university to speed up the process.

'The most challenging aspect of what I do is the travelling,' says Laura. 'Some weeks are crazy, for example if I am in the North I try and do that all in one week - and other weeks are nice and local. Being in hotels can sometimes be nice but at other times I want my bed! Although it is exhausting, while I am performing my job I am simply buzzing on adrenaline.'

Laura insists that the challenges of having her own business are outweighed by the rewards: 'The most rewarding thing for me is to see practices change and grow and to see team members now working as a TCO and enjoying it to the same extent that I did. Giving people job satisfaction is amazing, after all the TCO role is a win for the patients, the team, the practice, the dentists and the TCO! I love what I do.'

When Laura does get some down time, she relaxes by turning off her computer and settling down in front of a film with Glyn or going out to eat. 'Unfortunately as soon as I do switch off I often fall asleep very quickly,' she says. 'I used to be a night owl but am now an early riser!'

### THE KEY TO SUCCESS

'Relationships are key to anybody's success,' says Laura. 'In a dental practice you will be successful if the team have good relationships and the practice has them with the patients. When I left my job I was overwhelmed by the pedigree and volume of people in the dental profession that rang me and said to me "Laura how can we help you."'

'I quickly learnt that this was because of the relationships that I had with these people. I am the type of person that always wants to help others and now it was my turn to be helped. I am lucky to have worked with lovely people so far; the dentists and the dental teams as well as other companies.'

When asked if she has a message for *Vital* readers who are considering their options and future careers in dentistry, Laura emphasises the importance of being positive, building solid relationships and surrounding yourself with successful people. Furthermore, she says: 'My advice on taking advice is that although

## 15 REASONS TO PLACE A TREATMENT COORDINATOR (TCO) IN YOUR PRACTICE

1. Return on investment (ROI)
2. TCOs take 90% of non-clinical dentistry off the dentists
3. Enjoyable fun role for the TCO
4. Increased practice revenue
5. Increased case acceptance
6. Higher ROI for all future marketing expenses
7. Ensures customer service is to an outstandingly high level
8. Will ensure referrals from patients increase
9. CPD verifiable training
10. Option to train a minimum of two people for staff cover so the system never fails
11. No additional cost to the practice - you can use current staff
12. You can offer complimentary consultations with no effect on your hourly rate
13. You can advertise this service
14. A TCO is a unique selling point (USP)
15. A TCO is great way to attract nervous patients - a huge patient market!

(from [www.laurahortonconsulting.co.uk](http://www.laurahortonconsulting.co.uk))

you are given plenty of it (I was and I was very grateful) - you do not have to take the advice. Go with your gut instinct because you know what is right for you.'

Laura is going to take a well-earned break from her hectic schedule by spending some time focusing on her other ambition - travelling the world - this December, with a trip to Thailand. No doubt she will come up with another innovative business idea while she's lying on the beach!

To learn more about Laura's company and the role of treatment coordinator, see the boxes throughout this article.

*Laura will be holding a series of one-day workshops with Medenta ([www.medenta.com](http://www.medenta.com)) on the treatment coordinator role in 2011, suitable for all dental team members. For more information on this and to download Laura's recently launched free App for the iPhone, go to [www.laurahortonconsulting.co.uk](http://www.laurahortonconsulting.co.uk).*