



Laura Horton discusses the aspects that are key to improving or developing your self-confidence

Laura Horton has worked in dentistry for more than 15 years and is passionate about treatment coordination, business and team development. In 2008 Laura left her full-time practice management role and began working with dental practices to help them successfully reach their true potential. To find out more about Laura visit www.horton-consulting.com.

It is human nature to experience moments of self-doubt, but often those moments can become frequent occurrences, leading to lack of confidence that is present in everyday life.

I spend most of my working life improving the confidence of dental professionals to enable them to meet their goals in their careers. I am rarely asked to actually help people with their confidence, most want to up-skill, which in return will help them – I always point out that this is always the end goal!

Self-confidence is key to your success and shows in many ways from your body language, how you speak and so on.

If a patient that you have been seeing every three months for more than a year is not making an improvement and needs

more complex periodontal therapy with you, are they going to trust you if you do not come across as confident as they need you to be?

Patients need to put their trust in you and if you do not control the conversation and explain in a confident manner it will cause them to have moments of doubt.

Setting a goal

This is always the first stage and key to improving your self-confidence. Goal setting allows you to set yourself targets, and measures how well you have hit them.

There is a well-known tool for goal setting called SMART. For this example, a person has a goal to build rapport with patients:

S = Specific

This requires detail – what exactly do you need to do and how will you know when it is complete?

Using the medical history form or patient details in a practice’s software I will ask at least two questions relating to their address or occupation. After I have asked each question I will paraphrase and ask them one further question, for example:

- Question one: I see you live in the town, how long have you lived here?

Patient: Not long, only a year.

Hygienist/therapist: One year, that’s lovely, how are you finding it?

- Question two: From your notes I can see that you are a doctor, what area do you specialise in?

Patient: I’m a GP

Hygienist/therapist: A GP, that’s wonderful, whereabouts are you practising?

M = Measurable

How will you know that the goal meets your expectations?

Writing in the patient’s notes the facts that you have learnt will allow you to know that the goal is measurable.

A = Achievable

The goal you set yourself cannot be too far out of reach otherwise if it is too hard to make happen then you will become de-motivated.

Setting a goal to ask two questions is achievable, if I gave an example of asking 10 questions that may feel overwhelming.

R = Relevant

This should answer why the goal should be in place.

The goal is relevant as you need to build rapport with your patients to build trust and to motivate them.

T = Time bound

When will it be done?

The goal can be can started the next day and reviewed at the end of each day.

There is another great saying that I really love: ‘A goal without a deadline is just a dream.’

Achievements to date

I often ask dentists to write down their achievements to date, type them and print them too!

When you are having a moment of self-doubt you need to be able to look at your list of achievements in an instant. Let us start at the beginning...

- Where did you begin your career, as a dental nurse?
- How many hours of evening classes and home study do you estimate you completed to gain your qualification?
- When you decided to apply to be a hygienist or therapist what additional skills or courses did you undertake?
- Did you take your radiography qualification? Oral health education qualification?
- Did you have to re-take GCSEs or A-Levels to meet the entry requirements?
- Again, note how many hours of evening classes and home study you completed to gain your qualification?
- Next is the full time dental school course – how many hours did you complete?
- What diploma did you achieve?

By listing your achievements up to the point of qualifying by answering these questions you will now see how hard you have worked and how committed you have been to become a hygienist or hygienist/therapist.

But as we know it doesn’t stop there!

How many hours and how much have you invested to maintain your registration?

After each achievement it is a good idea to highlight in bold the time and the financial commitment that you have made. Finish totalling up the hours and fees and highlight again.

Hopefully this gives you a sense of achievement and reminds you of all your hard work to date.

Print this out and keep it in your purse/wallet – that way whenever you have a moment of self-doubt you can easily remind yourself what you have achieved.

Identifying your strengths

Another well-known tool in business is a SWOT analysis. This is where you look at a situation and note down the strengths,

weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

While it is always a good idea to identify your strengths, ignoring weaknesses and opportunities and not identifying the threats will leave you without a clear vision for your development.

Let us look at an example:

Strengths

- Committed to providing the best clinical advice and care for my patients
- I work Saturdays and often come in early or late to see patients that can’t fit in my diary
- I’m great with children
- I love nervous patients.

Weaknesses

- Shy
- Lack confidence when talking to patients
- I do not speak up during meetings or express my ideas to improve patient care
- I do not like talking about money with patients when they need more complex work.

Opportunities

- To carry out more comprehensive periodontal therapy on our patients that need it
- Build the hygiene department and do an extra day a week
- See more children for treatments to save our dentists time
- Have more patients on membership so they find dentistry affordable and come as frequently as recommended.

Threats

- Patient numbers drop as they do not see the value in my appointments or seeing me
- The practice takes on a new hygienist instead of increasing my days
- The practice doesn’t know about my therapy skills and takes on someone else to see the children.

When you start this exercise you should always start with your strengths, however many people find this a hard task as it is not in our nature to ‘blow our own trumpets’. My advice is that if you do not do this first then please ensure you have as many strengths as you do weaknesses when you move onto that section.

Once you have completed this task the next step is to look at moving the weaknesses and opportunities (some items will be both weaknesses and opportunities) into your strengths and use the SMART goal setting technique to do this.

Essentially, what you are doing here is creating your own self-development plan.

Positive thinking

The power of the mind has to be recognised. I wouldn’t describe myself as

Laura’s top three books for positive thinking:

- **The Law of Attraction** by Michael Losier
- **The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People** by Stephen R Covey
- **Flip it** by Michael Heppell

Four key focus areas to help you to become more self confident:

- **Setting a goal**
- **Confirming achievements**
- **Identifying your strengths**
- **Positive thinking.**

Self-confidence is key to your success and shows in many ways from your body language, how you speak and so on

very spiritual, however I know that ‘what you think will happen, will happen’.

If you focus on a patient, thinking that you are being nosey for asking about their occupation, then that is the outcome that will occur.

Henry Ford famously quoted: ‘Whatever you think you can or think you can’t, either way you are right; and I strongly agree with that.

There are many books on positive thinking and goal setting, here are my top three: *The Law of Attraction* by Michael Losier, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R Covey, *Flip it* by Michael Heppell.

Once a month read a book of this type and you will soon be on your way to being a confident DCP. **DH&T**