

Balancing act

Laura Horton explains how to balance your patients' happiness with your practice's wellbeing

It can be easy to get tied up in the mechanics of running any business, from thinking about marketing to looking at balance sheets and pricing plans – it's enough to keep any business leader's mind occupied throughout the working week and beyond.

However, a preoccupation with the 'business side' of a practice means you can forget what is at the heart of everything you do: people. Whether it's your patients or your staff, people are the driving force behind every decision you make, and forgetting that can mean you lose your focus on the key needs of your business.

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To ensure people stay at the forefront of your mind, it's important to spend time speaking to them and getting to know them. Unfortunately, this doesn't just mean the ones who are easy to deal with and always give you the answers you want! Patients who are awkward or rude have views and opinions that could help you, as could the members of staff who are difficult or unreliable.

The most successful brands in the modern world show a deep understanding of the people who use their products and service. Whether it's a beauty company, an estate agency or a coffee shop – if they know what matters to their customers, they are able to target their products and marketing to suit that profile.

The same applies to businesses of all backgrounds – but how can you do it successfully?

Keep up to speed

Begin by working out why people care about you and your dental practice. What do you offer that matters to them? When your practice was established, the first issues to be addressed probably included who its target customers were and how it would deliver its services.

Just because your practice is now more established doesn't mean you can stop thinking about these questions – and, more importantly, thinking about how to convince potential patients that you offer just what they need.

However, it's important to get the approach right. Start with your patient, not with your dentistry, and work out what they want or need that will help you stand out from other practices – then how to show them that you can deliver it.



Personal touch

Look at successful brands and the relationship they have with their customers. The best-known brands are often part of huge, international businesses – yet they manage to create a sense of loyalty and affection among their customers.

The key is to create a feeling of personal service and build a link between you and your patients. An interaction with any business is an experience for the customer, so it's important to make sure it is a positive one. If they feel like they are just one in a long line of fee-paying 'customers' visiting your practice, why would they return?

On the other hand, if you remember things about them, ready to discuss again at the next appointment, or if the receptionist makes eye contact and engages with them, and if they get some benefit out of repeat visits (a discount scheme or special offers, for example), they are far more likely to be loyal and think of you as individuals they like, rather than a faceless corporate entity they don't care about.

Change is good

People may love your practice when they first became patients, but that won't last forever – unless you keep reminding them why they love you.

If they were initially wowed by your great customer service, by their fifth or sixth visit, the novelty will have worn off, so you have to find a new way to impress them.

Similarly, a smart new reception area will give a fantastic impression of your practice to begin with, but as tastes change and natural wear and tear takes place, it will not have the same impact and something new will be needed.

Don't allow early success to tempt you to be complacent – keep changing and innovating to make sure your patients keep loving you.

Remember your employees

Looking after employees is just as important as looking after your patients. You can have all the brilliant ideas in the world to improve your customer service, but if your staff don't feel involved or connected to your plans, they will never work.

Simple steps such as putting profiles of all your team members on your website, to holding regular staff meetings for them to contribute their ideas, will create a team of dedicated, supportive employees who share the same vision and ideas as you – and will do all they can to make sure that vision becomes a reality for your patients.

Heart of the matter

When you begin thinking about what your patients want from you, and how to show them that you can offer all they need, it can be difficult to know where to begin.

However, by following these four simple principles, you will be keeping people at the heart of your practice, taking simple steps to show them just how important they are to you. There isn't any better message a practice can send to its patients than this – and, in the end, that is what will build loyalty and keep patients coming back to you time and time again. [PD](#)



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