Communication ... Understanding learning styles is key to working with others

By Dennis J. Tartakow, DMD, MED, EdD PhD, Editor in Chief Ortho Tribune

Learning how to communicate with one another is the first step in all relationships. All educational programs must adhere to basic principles of learning in order to enhance a student’s educational experience.

It is important for educators and administrators to understand and recognize that not all students use the same learning modalities. For the clinician, it may be helpful for each one of us to recognize which modality of learning serves us best.

Seven learning styles

First, and foremost, be aware that there is a minimum of seven recognized styles of learning for all individuals.

In “Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences” (1993), Dr. Howard Gardner, a respected authority on higher education and learning, established another way of grouping learning styles, suggesting that there are at least seven modalities or intelligences linking our individual styles.

While Gardner’s work encourages the consideration of new and creative ways to educate students, a solid grasp of core modalities apply immediately to everything we do.

Adult learners typically rely on learning modalities that process information at an unconscious level, but the adult may be consciously aware of which modes he or she prefers.

Most learners retain a dominant and an auxiliary learning modality, and access information through all the senses, but generally favor one. We process by visual-sight, auditory-sound, kinesthetic-moving and tactile-touch.

Gardner suggested the following basic learning styles:

1. Verbal and linguistic: Sensitive to the meaning and order of words.
3. Logical and mathematical: Able to handle reasoning and recognize patterns and order.
4. Spatial: Perceives the world accurately and tries to re-create or transform an aspect of that world.
5. Bodily and kinesthetic: Able to use the body skillfully and handle objects adroitly.
6. Interpersonal: Understands people and relationships.
7. Intrapersonal: Possesses access to one’s emotional life as a method to understand oneself and others.

Second, develop better communication skills and lines with other service providing individuals, i.e., fellow dentists, physicians, attorneys as well as a patient’s nuclear family.

Third, gain a better understanding of behavior and interactions between individuals from different cultures.

Fourth, extend respect, compassion, empathy and concern for the needs of others.

Fifth, create an environment to develop greater leadership skills.

Sixth, and last, be considerate of the social justice and human rights afforded to all individuals.

Useful changes in behavior

Learning may be defined as useful changes in behavior by reflecting upon past experience. The past leaves much to reflect upon when contemplating the future.

Today’s answers will lead to tomorrow’s questions. “Tell me and I forget. Show me and I remember. Involve me and I understand,” says one Chinese proverb (source unknown). Hindsight so often provides an individual with a unique opportunity to review and reflect upon one’s experiences.

According to Dr. Wayne Dyer (2004), inspiration is not reserved only for high-profile creative individuals in the arts and sciences, it is for everyone and is the force behind humanity’s greatest achievements.

When the secrets to cultivating inspiration are discovered in every moment of one’s life, that individual will enjoy an unimaginable experience of enlightenment, abundance and extraordinary achievement in an effortless manner.

In summary, do to others as you would do to yourself. One of the most important goals for all educators is to encourage students to become more sensitive to the needs of others.

A top priority for this orthodontist has always focused on developing greater understanding of an individual’s behavior when alone as well as in group interaction.

Sensitivity to the needs of others is of extreme importance and significance, and vital for all medical and dental clinicians: compassion, understanding, empathy and consideration are some of the salient and foremost attributes we all must strive to develop.

References


Group Editor’s Note: Dr. Tartakow’s editorial appeared in Ortho Tribune’s Nov. 2010 edition. DTUS Editor in Chief Dr. Hoexter and I thought it was an excellent way to begin the new year, and we hope it provides you with much food for thought.

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