Trust in uncertain times

Changing our behaviour and creating a high-trust environment in the workplace, leads to greater productivity and will help to retain and attract patients, says Dr Elaine Halley

The attributes of a trustworthy individual can be split into four areas, two pertaining to character and two to competency. The first area is that of integrity; meaning you do as you say, you live by your beliefs and values, for example, walk the talk. The second is intent of purpose, in other words, your intention is in alignment with your actions and values, and there is no ulterior motive you keep hidden. This reflects back to the earlier statement – you can't have trust without trustworthiness. If your intent of purpose is not in alignment with the words you are speaking, others will detect it even if they are not entirely sure what in particular they are un-easy about.

In terms of competency, a trustworthy individual must be capable of doing the job, for example, have had the correct training, but also must deliver the results and live up to the level of training with the results actually delivered. The behaviours which demonstrate competency are delivering results, seeking continual improvement, facing or confronting reality, clarifying expectations and holding themselves and others accountable. In the dental profession, we have a requirement to continually update our professional development, and it can be useful to communicate our commitment to education to our patients. For example, in furthering our skills in cosmetic dentistry, we can demonstrate commitment to competency and excellence by joining the British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry and pursuing the Accreditation pathway. Further training that measures our results against high standards is an excellent tool to not only improve our clinical skills but also build trust with our patients.

Winning over cynics

There's a lot we can learn when it comes to building trust with our patients. For example, in case presentation – having examples of our own before-and-after photographs can show how we deliver results. In the same way, testimonials from happy patients provide evidence of our capability and results. This is the fastest way to win over cynics. Clarifying the expectations of our patients lends itself to have a chance of being able to meet them. And don't forget, seek first to understand before being understood. In other words, take the time to listen first. This is exactly what we do when we are diagnosing. If we didn't first listen to the symptoms and expectations of our patients, we would be in danger of misdiagnosing.

Staying commited

The final two behaviours identified in trustworthy individuals, are those of making and keeping commitments, and extending trust to others. Making and keeping commitments no matter how small, is a measure of whether or not you can be counted on. An individual who is overly distrustful can waste a lot of energy double-checking and being suspicious, and this in turn will reduce the trust that is extended to them.

Dr Elaine Halley

Dr Elaine Halley qualified from the University of Edinburgh and has been clinically practising dentistry since 1992. She set up her practice, Cherrybank Dental Spa in Perth, Scotland, in 1995. She lectures on subjects ranging from clinical excellence, to leadership and practice management. Her blend of experience combined with her own leadership of the UK dental community commend her as a proven dental professional with timely insight into the day-to-day and financial operations of a dental practice. Visit www.cherrybankdentist.com.

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