The 10th Dimension – the power of 10...

...a series of articles by Dr Ed Bonner BDS MDent, Sloan Fellow London Business School, practice coach and development consultant

The importance of induction

Induction can be defined as an introduction or initiation, or the act of carrying these out. Unfortunately it is observed more often in the breach than in the act, and with good reason. It takes a great deal of thought selecting a person to fill a vacancy, but not enough to ensure that a smooth, comfortable process is established and entry to the practice is a smooth, comfortable process. Is it sufficient to say, ‘Welcome to the practice, I hope you will be happy here – if you have any problems, give me a call?’ I don’t think so!

I’ve recently read a management handbook called Excellent Employment, but regrettably the author fully bears out my point. More than a hundred pages are dedicated to the selection process, and then a hall page to induction, which, even if the ultimate in brevity, is worth quoting in full: ‘Once you have found your amazing new recruit with the fabulous attitude and all the skills you required, don’t abandon them. Finding great people is only a small part of the employee equation; you have to find a way to retain them. Think back to those times when you took on a new job. Was there an induction programme or were you just left to work things out for yourself? Were you given a buddy or mentor, someone to look after you during that first week or so, or were you left to get on with it alone? Did anyone sit with you at regular intervals during your first three months to tell you how you were progressing, or were you left to guess?’ That was it.

Very good, but only a hint of a taste, let alone even one course of a meal.

Who needs induction?

All of the following should be subject to an induction programme:

- Full-time, part-time, and temporary employees
- Those returning to work after a lengthy absence
- Temporary staff
- Work-experience students (with these, one should do a risk assessment with school or education authority)
- External contractors such as builders
- Purpose of induction
1. One should never assume levels of competence in respect of key subjects, including infection control, health and safety, personal protection, managing radiation, and managing emergencies
2. Effective integration
3. Retention of new staff
4. Creates opportunities to communicate and establish policies and procedures
5. Demonstrates who is responsible for what, sources of advice, and lines of responsibility
6. Demonstrates the mission and vision, and values and principles of the practice
7. Creates an understanding of organisation culture
8. Assists with ‘managing’ attitudes and behaviours
9. The induction period ensures the new employee to learn quickly whether he/she wishes to remain in the job
10. By complying with legislation, which a proper induction process obliges one to do, the risk of litigation and prosecution is significantly reduced.

Structuring induction

Pre-employment: starts with offer-of-employment letter; involves learning, enables preparation; health & safety policy statement;

Initiation and employment on probation: One should appoint a competent ‘buddy’ to mentor the newcomer, who should also be encouraged to shadow other employees. Induction includes a specified probationary period during which the new employee has a formal opportunity to learn enough about the practice in order to become a fully-functional member of the team in the shortest time possible. It begins with assigning the ‘new’ employee the responsibility of becoming familiar with the practice manual (assuming this exists!). The purpose of the manual is to provide the foundation and principles on which the practice is established and defines the boundaries or scope of its operations in all its policies and procedures. During this period the employee will learn the likes and dislikes of the employer and other members of staff and also of the patients.

Post-probation: this is based on periodic reviews – are aims and objectives being achieved?

Lack of induction leads to:
1. Lack of understanding and responsibility
2. Low motivation
3. Low morale
4. Increased complacency
5. Ineffective, inefficient and unsafe work practices
6. Failure to work to full potential
7. Mistakes leading to accidents
8. Unnecessary practices leading to ill-health
9. Employees leaving, leading to increased recruitment costs
10. Risk to protection of patients.

It is apparent from the foregoing that proper induction of members of temporary and permanent, full- and part-time staff is an essential part of the process of successful employment, and is ignored at one’s peril. □

Part of the content of this article follows the approach of Jane Bonehill, a former dental nurse who now runs DenMed, and I would like to thank her for allowing me to refer to her methods.

Information via the written word

The fourth in the new managing information series of articles, by Dr Ed Bonner

I’m writing a skill required by your average dentist in practice? Not really. If one doesn’t have the necessary skill, one can buy it, but it don’t come cheap! Being able to write decently however is a great gift, and used intelligently, can be invaluable in disseminating information. At its best, we need to be able to write up our treatment plans in a legible and coherent manner so that our patients will be encouraged to take up the treatment offered. Briefly in this respect is a talent most under-valued – it is not suitable for us but for others who might later access it and comprehend exactly what we have done, what was said, and what might have gone wrong. Failure to do is probably the most consistent finding in negligence cases.

Creative writing is a boon in marketing your practice, whether via brochure, leaflet, website, advert or advertorial. Here again, your average dentist gets lost up his own fundamental as the tries to include every last detail within a limited space: trying to pour a quart into a pint bottle. One should heed the words of one of our most illustrious playwrights, Alan Ayckbourn: “A common mistake in beginners is to be so obsessed with content that they are in danger of creating something to heavy to move anywhere!” If you remember nothing else from this article, do not forget that if you expect your patients to spend more than a couple of minutes reading your brochure or website you are probably being wildly optimistic, as probably am I thinking that you are still reading this article.

If I cannot say what I want to say in 600 words, he it in an article, website, or brochure, I run the risk of being a bore. I spend more time filtering out superfluous words than writing them in the first place. Not everyone is or should be a comedian, but a touch of humour never goes amiss, especially when dealing with as serious a subject as dentistry! The length of sentence should vary: long sentences mixed up with shorter ones make a taster salad than sentences of uniform length.

What is important however is the message you are trying to sell to your reader or patient. The writing technique I employ is the same as that which I apply in my consultancy, The 10th Dimension: distill everything essential into no more and no less than 10 points. Some might wonder why I do this and the answer is simple. From say, 25, at other times you might struggle to find 10 points of importance out of this short, a highly disciplined and creative way of disseminating information. To illustrate the point, I have highlighted each important word or phrase in the above text. □

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