Raising your game

Any busy dentist knows that keeping up with change and getting on top of your business requires time, of which there isn’t much spare. Simon Hocken offers some time-saving tips

When I coach clients to envisage, ‘raising their game’, be it towards better clinical skills, more business success or more personal fulfilment, their eyes light up with ambition, and at last, I am working with an excited and energised dentist.

Time for change

Dentistry, dental practice and the ‘business of dentistry’ is changing fast. Rapid change always creates many opportunities and the good news for ‘game raisers’ is that your time has come.

What’s more, the public’s perception of dentistry and dentists is changing too. No longer do they see dentistry as being about pain relief, restoring teeth and prevention. Thanks to the media’s (and our) obsession with prevention, their eyes light up with ambition, and at last, I am working with an excited and energised dentist.

There are many opportunities for early-adopters and a lot of our work at Breathe Business in 2008 is around creating new business models for our clients. Some of them are finding opportunities by questioning the status quo. For example:

For many years, dentists who work together in the same practice (as expense sharing partners or associates) have behaved like market stall holders, sharing the cost and benefits of a covered market, while running micro-businesses which effectively compete with each other for patients (and sharing any profit generated by their hygienists). This business model has always been ineffective and is no longer financially successful for the practice owners or robust enough to compete with corporate dentistry.

Free up your time

Some of our clients are becoming interested in the possibility of leveraging their time and their businesses. It is stressful to be the main or even the only fee earner in your business. Going on holiday or even on courses can feel like a rare luxury. Building a business where you are one of several fee earners eases this situation and frees up time for business development and leadership. Changing your role and leaving the fee-earning to your team, so you can concentrate on building your business is another path for the dental entrepreneur. Here are just three examples of clients who are creating opportunities for themselves by raising their game:

1. The dentist who wants to open a new cosmetic practice in a rapidly expanding residential commuter belt adjacent to a big city. She has found some premises in a new retail development (which are perfect) and she is busy writing a business plan, agreeing finance and a lease, working with an architect, an accountant and a branding agency on design, cash flows and budgets, marketing and recruitment, for example. All while holding down her current job as an associate!

2. The dentist who is evolving his leafy suburban London practice from a private, centre of excellence, family dental practice into a practice that still maintains a group of existing, family patients while creating a facility that attracts patients who want complex, cosmetic and restorative rehabilitation. To deliver this, he has recruited a team of specialist dentists who will supply implants, endodontics, periodontics, orthodontics and cosmetic dentistry. We are helping him with his time management, developing unique practice key performance indicators, branding and communications, marketing and sales, motivating his team, for example.

3. The dentist who owns a successful, award-winning general practice who has just hired his replacement. He has given up fee-earning, to concentrate on opening a second practice in a nearby city centre. He intends this practice to become a franchise model so that the successful business can be replicated across the area. We are helping him get the business model and the business plan right, before we help him look for finance and start recruiting his new management team.

These dental entrepreneurs are all playing a bigger game and they will all need strategies and tactics to help them succeed.

Ten steps to freedom

1. Limit the time you spend carrying out clinical dentistry (to a maximum of 28 hours per week) and put a boundary around it.
2. Get up an hour earlier. Give yourself time in every day to think bigger than just the doing and the delivery of clinical dentistry.
3. Take steps to maintain your confidence and self-belief. Avoid people who want to trash your ideas.
4. Think about and audit your unique skills and abilities
5. Decide what other resources you will need (time, people, money)
6. Get up an hour earlier.
7. Find the right people with the right knowledge and skills to help you.
8. Create enough investment/investors.
9. Set a time scale(s) for raising your game and do what it takes to stick it.
10. Make sure that every week you take some action to progress your game.

In my experience as a dentist and as from coaching a lot of dentists, not having sufficient time to stop and make the changes gets in the way of playing a bigger game. Some dentists believe that they sell their time and therefore they spend far too much time carrying out dentistry and not enough time thinking, focusing, planning and implementing. Then, paradoxically, because they are by nature, perfectionists, they become scared to take action because they are obsessed with getting it right.

Once you’re free

1. You may decide to play a bigger game by expanding your clinical skills to meet the new market place in dentistry.
2. You may decide to play a bigger game by leading your business and getting it working effectively and expanding it.
3. You may decide to play a bigger game by changing your business.

Whatever you decide, now is the time for you to get off the dental hamster wheel and play a bigger game.