Setting the standards

I am sitting in the lounge of a hotel in South Africa writing this article. It is 6:15am, the time when my mind is clear and there are no disturbances. Then the hotel manager walks in. At 6:15am. He comes up to me and greets me by name (there are 200 people staying at the hotel). He asks what I am doing awake so early, and after a brief explanation, I ask the same of him. He replies: ‘If things don’t start right they don’t go right. My job is to see they start right – and then when my deputy arrives at 8am, I hand over and go out for a round of golf.’ The boss sets the standards, and everyone else delivers – this is why I come back here every year.

Setting aside for the moment the current recession, think of your dental practice and consider what happens when you go at lunchtime to deposit your weekly takings. Think of the 10 to 20 minutes you stand in line, watching and listening as a cashier sits counting a mountain of coins from someone else’s deposit or phoning head office to deal with a customer’s query or, more likely, complaint. Then think of your feelings when just a few short months ago you picked up your Sunday newspaper and read that the bank had made billions of pounds in profit that quarter. Then think about the huge bonuses being earned by banking executives. Then think how you felt when you read that the same bank was pleading for Government bale-out money. Until a few years ago the notion of patient service wasn’t even a twinkle in the eye of a medical professional. Then it was born but was rooted in the idea that if you delivered quality in what you did (excellent diagnosis, excellent professional) you were delivering patient service. Today, however, the bouncing ball has moved on, and service encompasses not just excellence in what you do. ’Keeping patients happy while waiting in your waiting room.’ Suggestions ranged from providing daily newspapers and current magazines to playpens for kids to serving coffee and doughnuts. Then I put my hand up and asked: ‘Wouldn’t it be better not to keep them waiting at all?’ Two hundred pairs of eyes burned me for even considering such a ridiculous concept. The question went unanswered. It still does. Yet there is an answer, and the answer is: ‘Think beyond the excellence of what you do.’

‘There is only one boss. The customer. And he can fire everybody in the company, from the chairman down, simply by spending his money somewhere else.’

Sam Walton, founder of Wal-Mart

Supreme customer service is about attracting the customer to your business, establishing a mutually beneficial relationship, and most important, keeping the customer and avoiding a divorce which is costly in terms of lost revenue and goodwill. The desired outcome is to have as many patients/customers as you can manage comfortably who will become loyal, lifelong advocates of your practice and your personal excellence.

My next article will deal with how this can be achieved.

Ed Bonner

Ed Bonner has owned many practices, and now consults with and coaches dentists and their staff to achieve their potential. Adrienne Morris is a highly-trained success coach whose aim is to get people from where they are now to where they want to be in clear measured steps. For an expanded version of this article, or to subscribe to The Power of 10 e-zine, contact Ed Bonner at bonner.edwin@gmail.com or phone 07766 601758. If you would like to discuss anything about this article, feel free to phone or drop an email to Ed or Adrienne (alplifecoach@yahoo.com).

About the author

Ed Bonner

Dental Revolution

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Setting the standards

Part one: patients – or customers?

should the people who attend our dental practices be considered simply as patients, or are they, like everyone else who uses any other business, customers as well? The answer to this question is fundamental to your chances of long-term survival as a dentist in practice.

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