The 10th dimension... the power of ten

Ed Bonner and Adrianne Morris consider the considerable power of persuasion

By mere dint of the fact that we have a professional qualification, it can (for the most part) be assumed that we are competent in our sphere of endeavour. Why then are some of us successful and others less so?

James Borg, an eminent work psychologist, business consultant and development coach believes that the crucial factor may be an individual’s power of persuasion.

We all know people who, regardless of the issue under consideration, seem able to get us to see, accept and even vote for their point of view. We also know others whom we like and respect, but do not have the power to persuade us that we should accept and buy into their ideas. Compare Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, or Margaret Thatcher and John Major, for example.

Now, you may not think this is all that important, but if you think about the number of treatment plans that you have suggested to patients and consider how many of those have not been taken up, you might come to the conclusion that your inability to get others to accept that it is to their overwhelming advantage to ride with you is actually costing you a huge amount of lost revenue.

If you cannot move others, you may remain unmoved yourself. As Borg says: ‘Every day at work – and in your personal life – you come into contact with people who need to understand your point of view, either for you to help them, or for them to help you. Equally, you need to understand their point of view!’ We need to find that magic formula, that, ‘message that attempts to influence people’s opinions, attitudes or actions’.

So, what 10 factors increase our powers of persuasion?

1. Treating people as individuals
   The first big key; unlike socks, there is no “one size fits all” approach that will work for all patients. Some need to be given dollops of TLC, while others want only efficiency, by the same token. Some staff need an authoritarian approach; others thrive under the “I trust you, get on with it” tactic. Successful dentists find the key and then use it to persuade both patients and staff that the surgery is the best place to have their dreams fulfilled.

2. Being a good listener
   The second big key; really hearing what your patients and staff tell you about their problems, rather than simply imposing your solutions on them. Listening to them tells them that you really care, but having heard, it is necessary to act as well. Pay attention to detail – this tells the person with whom you are communicating that you have heard, remembered and valued everything they have said. Paraphrase what they have said, so that they can hear that you have heard them.

3. Avoiding too many options
   We are obliged to discuss all treatment options explaining their benefits and downside, and we should note that we have done so. This said and done, when you actually come down to give them a choice between the two or three best options and emphasise the one you favour most.

4. Positive body language
   Two people in discussion send messages to each other, not only verbally but by their dress, demeanor and posture. You are more likely to trust someone when the words they are speaking are in harmony with their body language as expressed by eye contact, position of arms, activity of fingers etc.

5. Having a good memory
   Ever noticed how impressed someone is when, at a party, having only met them once and that 50 minutes before, you remember their name? Magic! Not as difficult as you think, but it requires concentration and focus – or writing it down. Remembering people’s names, birthdays, where they went on holiday, family details, but most of all what you discussed last time is an essential key to being able to get them to buy into your ideas.

6. Avoiding ‘attention breakdown’
   An example of this might be the scenario where you are discussing something with a patient, the phone rings, you take the call, and on completion you say ‘Right, where were we?’ Remember, it’s difficult to control attention when there isn’t any in the first place!

7. Understand why ‘difficult’ individuals behave the way they do
   Difficult people use strategies to achieve certain objectives for themselves, for example very autocratic or authoritarian people try to persuade you that they are stonger than you and bully you into submission: I understand that you can only come at night/weekends, but I cannot get staff of the quality I have now, it’s difficult to control problems, your treatment will only be painful and it’s going to cost you a lot of money, and I can’t guarantee success!’ Creating fear will send them elsewhere.

8. Using ‘open’ communication
   Instead of saying, ‘You have to floss twice a day’, you could say: ‘I think that it would really be of benefit to you if you could floss twice a day.’ Other useful ‘open’ phrases include: ‘In my opinion...’, ‘I feel that...’. Make the words you use work for you rather than antagonising the patient or employee.

9. Selling the benefits, not the problems
   The message that people take away from a meeting is the one that makes the biggest impact on their minds. By having the treatment now, you will save yourself a lot of money and pain in the future and help keep all your teeth and your lovely smile’, is a better message than, ‘Because you have such serious problems, your treatment will be painful and it’s going to cost you a lot of money, and I can’t guarantee success!’ Creating fear will send them elsewhere.

10. Creating mutually beneficial outcomes
   Stephen Covey was clear that in order to be successful, we need to create win/win results where both parties benefit. It will benefit you not at all when the cost (to you and/or that person) of working with someone exceeds the benefit you or they experience.

Ed Bonner is an owner/dentist of three dental practices, and now consults with and coaches dentists and their staff to achieve their potential. For a free consultation, or a complimentary copy of The Power of Ten e-zine, email Adrianne at alphidogsearch@yahoo.com or Ed on bonner. edwin@gmail.com, or visit www.thepoweroften.com.au.

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