There is little resemblance between the healthcare industry today and the industry we worked in 10 years ago. Technology, industrial relations, economic circumstances, legislation, patient care and expectations have all influenced the dental sector and facilitated the changes we see within practices today. Practices continuing to offer the same services, in the same environment, with the same expectations of team contribution today, as they did in the 20th century, would cease to exist. Customer satisfaction is fundamental to business success and that's why the best results are achieved by those practices that create a passion for continual improvement.

Continual improvement
Culture is the shared beliefs and values of a group of people, and in this case that group is your team. Creating any sort of culture within your practice requires the constant reinforcement of a specific message. In the case of continual improvement that message must be that it is OK for team members to regularly review the way things are done, to question why they are done that way, and to ask if there is a better way of doing it. Such an approach doesn't encourage anarchy as some of you might believe; in fact it does quite the opposite. By giving team members responsibility for moulding the practice they develop a sense of ownership that is visible in every aspect of their performance. All the things you had been striving to achieve and implement through a hierarchical, perhaps more dictatorial approach, suddenly begin to happen.

A prime example of this phenomenon is selling. Often just expressing the word within a practice is like committing blasphemy. The notion that selling and professionalism can co-exist is not readily accepted within our industry along with the belief that patients do not welcome being sold to. I would like to dispel that assumption.

Selling is what patients want and demand
Modern dentistry requires a whole new approach. It isn't just about looking and finding problems, it's about asking the right questions, explaining the options, educating and supporting, and offering the most appropriate services— in any other language that is selling!

A survey of patients from practices across the UK indicated that only two per cent were recommended products to use by their dentists and hygienists although 98 per cent said they were interested in being informed. So the patient—the customer—wants to be educated, but their practices were not forthcoming with information, probably because they perceived it