They just aren’t interested
Alun Rees discusses some reasons as to why you may be ‘short of work’

H
igh on the list of problems I hear when working with a practice owner is that they are “short of work”. If these are the just the ones that have chosen to work with me then it’s reasonable to assume that the problem is widespread and, from what I see, affects all sorts of practices whether full time

The little phrase “short of work” can cover a multitude of reasons and my first job is to find out what it really means. Being a coach means that I ask questions (lots of questions) and these are some of the answers that I get.

“They (the patients) aren’t interested.”

Really? Or do you just presume that? Scratching the surface I find that because a patient wasn’t keen on an elective procedure five or more years ago it is presumed that they aren’t interested.

But what of the “old” (now there’s a derogatory word if ever I heard one) patients? Familiarity breeds contempt, has to be worked at during every visit; whilst it may be routine for the dental team, it is a very special event for the patient. After all nobody leaps out of bed in the morning and shouts out “Fantastic! Off to the dentist today, I do hope I have a problem that’s a real challenge to them.”

Our traditional attitude of putting the words “just a” before things doesn’t help either. Saying “just a” check-up or “just a” scale and polish for instance, although meant to reassure the patient, can also reduce their importance to the patient. “if it’s just a then it’s not important, is it?”

So how do you keep working at the patient relationship?

Every couple of years treat them as if they were a new patient; re-discover what they want from you and what they want for their own mouth. Have their expectations altered since you last had your fact finding talk with them? Has all that marketing that you and everybody else have spent hard earned money on had some effect? You’ll only know if you ask; and by asking I don’t mean plonking the same old tired “smile check” in front of them, where the first reaction is like that to a familiar menu in a burger joint: “I know what’s on it so I don’t need to look.”

Get somebody else in the practice to talk (but what I really mean is listen) to them, this isn’t the place to extol the virtues of treatment coordinators, care nurses or whatever the fashion is calling them this year, but their use as a lis

People will only do business with people they know, like and trust. That means that the relationship has to be worked at during every visit’

‘Familiarity breeds contempt and dental practices don’t escape from this; just because you know them clinically through their notes and x-rays, doesn’t mean they know you’

With the words “You only have one chance to make a good impression” ringing in our ears we make sure that every avenue of choice is explored for the new guests in our practice.

Talk to your patients to gain their trust.

Not every patient has trouble parting with their money.

People want to buy things that make them happy; in dentistry that might be the knowledge that their teeth will last until the patient’s health and quality of life? If not then the patient will know, the team will know and you will end up hating what you are doing.

Avoid discounting, however tempting it might be, it’s a slippery slope that leads to frustration and no practice or individual can stay healthy by trying to offer treatment to patients at a price that doesn’t make a profit - it’s a simple law of nature. A loss leader is still a loss.

Finally are you trying too hard to “sell”? People have an aversion to being “sold” anything but those same people are eager to buy benefits. They want to buy things that make them happy; in dentistry that might be the knowledge that their teeth will last until the patient’s health and quality of life? If not then the patient will know, the team will know and you will end up hating what you are doing.

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Still “short of work”? 

With this solid foundation, Alan went on to launch two practices in the space of just 15 months, a challenge in the toughest economic conditions. After years of hard work Alan finally sold his hard-won, hard-earned business in 2005. Alanins’s latest passion is helping dentists and their families by giving them a strong understanding of what others go through to build a successful practice. He has seen many different approaches and learned his own lessons in the real world. Alan now runs Dental Business Partners to offer specific and specialised support for dentists, by dentists. He has served as a media representative for both the BDA and BDHF and is an authority consulted by the media and has worked with Sky TV and various radio stations. Raised in South Wales, Alan has family roots in West Cork where he spends as much time as work allows. In other spare moments he runs three lovers in Limerick and Laois, real ale and music as relaxation. www.den-

Author info

Alun Rees trained at New-
castle University, and started his career as an oral surgery resident, before working as an associate in a range of differ-

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