Learning to Look

By Dennis J. Tartakow, DMD, MEd, PhD, Editor in Chief

As an outline for the next few issues, we will begin with “learning to look” at our external and internal environment methodically by (a) considering inductive, deductive and abductive reasoning; (b) applying this thinking to improved information technology, higher education and leadership; and (c) developing strategic and scenario planning throughout these depressing and discouraging times.

No longer will it be business as usual, but instead, we will take the attitude of carpe diem — seizing the day with an opportunity to utilize the dynamics of our intelligence. Leave emotion and fear out of the equation and make the necessary changes to practice within this economic slowdown and discomfort zone.

The first phase of “learning to look” at our external and internal environment involves new way of thinking, which includes three separate but interrelated phases:

1. Induction equals seeing, gathering and collecting data and answering the question: What? (Reason through the details)
2. Deduction equals observing, looking to make value judgment calls and internal editing, and answering the question: So what? (Independent of inductive)
3. Abduction equals reflective, go out of the box for different ways of looking; go far away from traditional thinking, and answering the question: Now what?

Leaders need to walk their talk and talk their walk! It is simplicity on the far side of complexity andhecks the following:

1. What we know we know.
2. What we don’t know we don’t know.
3. What we don’t know we know.
4. What we don’t know we don’t know.

Artemaking, for example can be used to express feeling, uncover social injustice and gain insight into their practice. The philosophy of artmaking for educational leaders of social justice was used as a form of expression to emotionally connect to the heart, body and mind of the educator. The “learning to look” framework teaches us how to look at an item inductively, deductively and abductively.

The first step in the process of “learning to look” reasoning is inductive, and when looking at a problem from an inductive point of view, you are searching out the answer to the “what” of the problem.

The second step in the process is deductive, and the deductive point of view is searching out the “so what” reasoning of the problem.

For the most part, fear and emotion drive the stock exchange during this period of economic slowdown. It’s not that the consumer cannot afford orthodontics, but rather, fear of the unknown guides their thoughts.

Step back and look for yourself. Do your patients make appointments in your schedule? Are new patients calling for evaluations? Are patients coming in for their recall appointments? Are they interested in the orthodontics that you recommend? When do they tell you that they specifically tell you that they cannot afford orthodontic treatment?

Applying the “learning to look” thinking process leads us to information technology, education and leadership. The next few editorials will concentrate on developing a strategy-and-scenario plan, which will be especially appropriate during these discouraging and discouraging times, followed by expanding our vision for “systems thinking” rather than “linear thinking.”

Hope this helps!

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