Systems thinking rather than linear thinking

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

L inear thinking can be defined as simplistic, cause-effect think- ing. According to Ollhoff and Walcheshki (2002), most individu- als think in straightforward, cause-effect and short-term fashion; it is called linear thinking, or attention to content over process.

Understandingly, there is a great deal of reinforcement that must transpire in order to not think linearly. This is because work ethics and patterns typically remain the same. It is difficult to change one’s thinking, especially because most of us are preoccupied with content and objectives taking center stage in our minds.

These interactive patterns can be seen everywhere, and most people think and act on a linear level, considering only the end-point of the content rather than the process. Once we are pressed to consider the process of differentiation including both functions (relationship develop- ment and integration), we better understand our own social behav- iors and with greater appreciation.

Of course, most individuals never associate their learning process with systems thinking, but unconsciously live their lives systematically.

By breaking down the concept of a system and its variations, we begin to identify with our impressions of how this is integrated within our practices. When the system is inter- dependent, all parts of the system can be interrelated with all other parts. Systems can vary, such as: (a) open systems, where the system shares information with its envi- ronment; and (b) closed systems, where the system is self-contained.

Other key concepts in complex sys- tems include (a) homeostasis, where the push of the system is to stay the same; (b) anxiety, where the feeling of dread or inadequacy exists toward a particular issue; (c) differentiation, where you have your own goals and can define yourself, but are still able to stay in relationships, even with individuals of differing opinions; (d) emotional triangle, when two people are in disagreement and draw in a third to stabilize the conflict (This is not mediation, attempting to solve the conflict); (e) forces of together- ness, which is the push to think alike, to reduce creativity and the diver- sity of thought; and (f) identifying the patient, or the scapegoat.

In summation, the most impor- tant thing to remember is to rec- ognize the differences between (a) linear thinking, considering only the content; and (b) systems think- ing, considering the processes and the interactions.

Of course, this is not to imply that linear thinking is bad or wrong, but rather that it is only one level of thinking that is not seeing the big picture of the world and reality that is our environment.

To paraphrase the words of phi- losophers Edmund Burke (1729- 1797) and George Santayana (1863- 1952); “Individuals who ignore history are doomed to repeat it; individuals who study history are doomed to know it is repeating.”

Book review: ‘The Practitioner’s Credo: 10 Keys to a Successful Professional Practice’

By Gregg A. Tartakow, Associate Editor

D r. John B. Mattingly, a practic- ing orthodontist for four decades, was concerned that orthodontic resi- dents and young practitioners were not exposed to what it takes to con- duct a successful practice. Motivated by a sincere commitment and genu- ine dedication to the “new-bees” of orthodontics, Mattingly provides a cookbook approach to the basic principles of office management by presenting the following 10 keys to a successful practice:

• The first key — practice leadership
• The second key — enthusiastic, effective staff
• The third key — practice ethics
• The fourth key — pursuit of excel- lence
• The fifth key — positive practice image
• The sixth key — cutting-edge technology
• The seventh key — working envi- ronment
• The eighth key — essential and non-essential expenses
• The ninth key — marketing your practice
• The tenth key — “Ego”: Don’t get the big head

In addition to these 10 keys, four appendices are used to demonstrate the values of the (a) office manu- al, (b) sexual and environmental harassment policy, (c) exit survey prototype and (d) evaluation and letters related to association [AO] membership revocation.

“The Practitioner’s Credo: 10 Keys to a Successful Professional Practice” is interesting reading, stimulating reflection and an enjoy- able reference source for postgradu- ate orthodontic residents and sea- soned teachers alike; it integrates theory and practice with regard to the art of thinking. The book is quite useful to beginning instructors as well as experienced teachers who are attempting to improve their thinking perspectives or reconsider- ing their approaches to pedagogy.

Several themes are repeated throughout the book, which I think is positive reinforcement.

Information


Image courtesy of Dr. Earl Broker.

Book review: ‘The Practitioner’s Credo: 10 Keys to a Successful Professional Practice’

By Gregg A. Tartakow, Associate Editor

D r. John B. Mattingly, a practic- ing orthodontist for four decades, was concerned that orthodontic resi- dents and young practitioners were not exposed to what it takes to con- duct a successful practice. Motivated by a sincere commitment and genu- ine dedication to the “new-bees” of orthodontics, Mattingly provides a cookbook approach to the basic principles of office management by presenting the following 10 keys to a successful practice:

• The first key — practice leadership
• The second key — enthusiastic, effective staff
• The third key — practice ethics
• The fourth key — pursuit of excel- lence
• The fifth key — positive practice image
• The sixth key — cutting-edge technology
• The seventh key — working envi- ronment
• The eighth key — essential and non-essential expenses
• The ninth key — marketing your practice
• The tenth key — “Ego”: Don’t get the big head

In addition to these 10 keys, four appendices are used to demonstrate the values of the (a) office manu- al, (b) sexual and environmental harassment policy, (c) exit survey prototype and (d) evaluation and letters related to association [AO] membership revocation.

“The Practitioner’s Credo: 10 Keys to a Successful Professional Practice” is interesting reading, stimulating reflection and an enjoy- able reference source for postgradu- ate orthodontic residents and sea- soned teachers alike; it integrates theory and practice with regard to the art of thinking. The book is quite useful to beginning instructors as well as experienced teachers who are attempting to improve their thinking perspectives or reconsider- ing their approaches to pedagogy.

Several themes are repeated throughout the book, which I think is positive reinforcement.

Information


Image courtesy of Dr. Earl Broker.