

It's not rocket science but it might as well be!

When you first established your own practice, what were your aspirations? Did you know how you wanted your practice to look, to feel, what your customers would experience when they first walked through the door, during their months of treatment and at the conclusion of their journey? Whilst you may all have had very different visions, I guarantee that not one of you envisaged providing a poor patient journey through poor service delivered by disinterested, unskilled or de-motivated staff. We all want to achieve a profitable specialist practice - the problem is how we go about it.

Two basic truths

There are two basic truths when it comes to business:

Firstly, your *business needs customers* because *that's where the money comes from*.

Secondly, your *business must attract customers not just through* the provision of products or services but through the whole *experience* of dealing with you - the practice.

According to Stephen Covey in his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, effectiveness is a function of two things: what is produced (the golden egg) and the capacity to produce (the goose). The basic premise is that you must nurture the means of production in order to maintain the supply. In your case, the means of production is your team and through nurturing the team your potential golden egg will be realised.

It ain't rocket science

Let's now take two scenarios and decide which is more likely to attract, retain and generate custom:

Scenario 1

Busy, but ineffective practice with too much focus on increasing the bottom line but not enough on staff training, motivation and rewards, leading to inefficiencies, high staff turnover and general malaise.

Scenario 2

Systematic and productive practice, staff and orthodontist training high on the priority list, customer-focused environment with passionate and motivated staff.

The correct choice is obvious so why are very few practices actually delivering it!

Identifying the ideal scenario is easy: creating and maintaining it in real life is the difficulty!

What's in it for the customer?

As a business owner your primary objective is to generate a profit, and that must begin with converting more patients to the practice and to private treatment but patients will only pay private fees if they can see a value in doing so. How is their experience enhanced by taking the private route? How does it differ from the NHS path?

Patients will not take the private path if:

- they remain patients without choices rather than customers with alternatives
- they are kept waiting in reception rather than relaxing in the patient lounge
- they are kept at a distance rather than be invited to fully participate in the process

And why should they!

Leading your team

So we're back once again to the customer's experience of dealing with you: the patient journey, as I like to call it. Every person the patient meets on their journey must leave a lasting, positive mark. The problem is it can only be achieved by fostering an environment where everyone is trained, motivated and given the tools and authority to use their initiative.

Steve Ballmer, Microsoft Corporation CEO says: 'Empowering your people will empower the entire company.' It's powerful stuff! It works!

A customer-focused culture is founded on passion! Passion about the work you do, passion about working and serving the public, passion about beautiful smiles ...

You must all value your customers and show it! Whilst you can't force your team to value all the patients, you can instil in them the benefits of valuing job satisfaction, practice success, and personal development, and you can lead by example through showing that you value them and are passionate about their contribution to the practice's success.

What example are you setting?

I visit and speak with many practices and I am always amazed at how many practitioners are focused on the desire for more private patients (golden egg) but who don't see the link between that desire and their commitment to their staff (goose).

Some of the regular comments I hear include:

- Our orthodontist doesn't allow us to attend training courses or conferences.
- We cannot make room in our timetable for 'practice training' days.
- We do not have staff meetings at our practice because they are a 'waste of time'.
- My team is not interested in attending any meetings. I have offered but they won't come.

In my experience as a member of a team and a facilitator of positive team culture, I know that any individual who feels valued, who is developed and who is trusted to use his initiative will in turn be more productive, more passionate and more prized as an employee. And because he feels valued, he will go to extraordinary lengths to make the customer feel the same way too.

Therein lays the goose that produces your golden egg!

Lina Craven, Dynamic Perceptions Ltd. ©