The 1st Dental Business Management Conference in the UAE – how did this happen?

By Eniko Simon

The 1st Dental Business Management Conference in the UAE was held in Dubai on Friday 12th June, 2015. I am still amazed and extremely excited about the event – it is unbelievable we actually created this event out of passion, dedication and enthusiasm. The idea was to create a unique event in the UAE that approaches dentistry from a different angle – business management.

I have been working in the dental business for eight years now in the UK and in Dubai as a clinic manager before setting up my business to offer consultancy services and provide business management training, specifically for dentists and clinic managers in the UAE. I could see the great need to provide a conference where we view dentistry as a business. Many dentists leave dental schools and one day they decide it’s time to open their own clinic. Unfortunately, not all of them will have the skills required to be successful. They have the clinical knowledge but lack the business knowledge as clinic management is still a grey area in dental universities.

I carefully selected the speakers to make sure that we covered diverse areas of Dental Business Management. I talked about communication, ethical sales in dentistry and the role of a treatment coordinator. We had Fiona Stuart-Wilson who was talking about how to gain competitive advantage in dentistry. Karl Taylor-Knight was talking about a 21st century marketing approach in dentistry and Dr. Ehab Heikal discussed Quality Control. All the speakers were outstanding – great subjects and great interaction with the delegates.

The positive feedback from the delegates gave the reassurance that it was worth every minute of the hard work that has been put into organising this event. The enthusiasm and engagement from the delegates was extremely rewarding. We did something that had great value. Delegates went home with ideas, tools and techniques that will help them to manage their clinics more efficiently by implementing the new ideas, tools and techniques.

Our goal with this event was to test the waters to see if there is enough interest in an event like this. I have to say we could have not dreamed of a better outcome. The event proved that clinic owners and managers are very keen to gain more knowledge. They do realise how important it is that they manage their dental clinic in a more structured and efficient manner.

We had 35 delegates coming for this event from all over the middle east included Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon and of course from the UAE. We will not stop here – this is just the beginning! We have amazing ideas. We have already started to work on our next conference in 2016 which will be even bigger and better!

In addition, we will be running our dental business management courses and treatment coordination courses in October 2015. We know the need is there. We want to provide support to those clinic managers and owners who have a hunger for the knowledge and who wish to gain competitive advantage in this very competitive market. We want to enable them to manage their dental business more efficiently and effectively.

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The seven essential habits of dental leaders

By Fiona Stuart-Wilson

I t you are running a practice it can be all too easy to get tied up in the day to day activities of getting from the beginning of the day to the end, and forget to focus on a very important key to the success of your practice – yourself. Whether you are new to management and leadership or have several years of experience in running your practice it’s important to take charge of your own development in this area to ensure that you are as effective as possible in leading and managing your team and your practice.

Leadership or management? There is constant debate over the difference between leadership and management. Some would suggest that managers plan, organize and coordinate, whereas leaders are expected to inspire and motivate. In reality in the daily life of dental practice dentists have to do both.

Habit 1 - Think like a leader Successful leaders are critical thinkers; they ask why things happen the way they do. They think about what is going on. Similarly they can see potential opportunities and take advantage of them to benefit their practice.

Habit 2 - Embrace change A hallmark of a leader is not that they keep the practice running smoothly but that they act as an agent of change and improvement. Turn an enquiring mind on how you could do things better and differently, not only in areas which you feel need improvement but also in other areas which are going well. Take a step back from what you are doing day to day and consider to improve the way the things are done. What are the advantages of changing things? What are the disadvantages and are they outweighed by the benefits?

Habit 3 - Be disciplined A hallmark of a leader is the ability to listen. By doing this they can get feedback from others and tap into the knowledge, experience and views of team members.

Habit 4 - Listen actively One of the most important skills for any leader is the ability to listen. By doing this they can get feedback from others and tap into the knowledge, experience and views of team members.

Habit 5 - Embrace conflict and make decisions Managers need to know how to recognise and deal with difficult situations and resolve conflicts, and not simply ignore them in the hope they will sort themselves out. Address issues, communicate with people about unacceptable behaviour or practices privately, objectively and honestly. Part of the role of a leader is to use their judgement and make decisions, and these may not always be popular ones.

Habit 6 - Motivate others Good leaders notice the little things. They also influence people in a positive way. When members of a team or indeed an entire team lose their drive and passion for what they do, an effective leader can detect a flagging team and energize and motivate individuals to regain their passion for what they do. This means taking time to value and recognize people’s contributions to the practice.

Habit 7 - Use a mentor Leadership can be lonely. Good leaders recognize too that they don’t know everything. Many identify and learn from a mentor who can help them develop their ideas about management and work through their leadership issues. Mentors will not tell you what to do but should help to motivate and empower you to identify your own issues and goals, and explore ways of resolving or reaching them.

Influence not authority The renowned management author Ken Blanchard, tells us, “The key to successful leadership today is influence, not authority.” Great dental practices are ultimately made great the people who work there, by sound leadership and motivated staff who are enthusiastic about their role and their contribution and keen to get on with the job. If you want to improve your leadership skills and influence your staff to take your practice to the next level, the more you develop these habits listed above, the more successful as a leader you are likely to be.

About the Author Fiona Stuart-Wilson is Director of UMD Professional, a leading provider of management qualifications in dental practice and a consultant in dental practice management.

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The Ten Commandments of Customer Service

By Ehab Heikal

The People aspect of business is really what it is all about. Rule #1: Think of customers as individuals. Once we think that way, we realize our business is our customer, not our product or services. Putting all the focus on the merchandise in the services our clinic offers, leaves out the most important component: each individual customer.

Keeping those individual customers in mind, here are some easy customer service tips to keep them coming back!

1. Remember there is no way that the quality of customer service can exceed the quality of the people who provide it. Think you can get by paying the lowest wage, giving the fewest of benefits, doing the least training for your employees? It will show.

2. Realize that your people will treat your customer the way they are treated. Employees take their cue from management. Do you greet your employees enthusiastically each day; are you polite in your dealings with them; do you try to accommodate their requests; do you listen to them when they speak? Consistent rude customer service is a reflection not as much on the employee as on management.

3. Do you know who your customers are? If a regular customer came in to your facility, would you recognize them? Could you call them by name? All of us like to feel important; calling someone by name is a simple way to do it and lets them know you value them as customers.

4. Do your customers know who you are? If they see you, would they recognize you? Could they call you by name? A visible management is an asset. At some clinics, the picture of the entire clinic team is placed near the reception stand or in the waiting area, in full view of the customers. The manager is easily accessible and there is no doubt about “who’s in charge here”. You have only to beckon to get a manager to talk with you.

5. For good customer service, go the extra mile. Include a thank-you note in a customer’s Rx or invoice; send a birthday card; clip the article when you see their name or photo in magazine or newspaper; write a congratulatory note when they get a promotion. There are all sorts of ways for you to keep in touch with your customers and bring them closer to you.

6. Are your customers greeted when they walk in the door or at least within 30-40 seconds upon entering? Is it possible they could come in, look around; and sit down without ever having their presence acknowledged? Could it be that’s because Sam Walton (CEO, Walmart) knew this simple but important gesture is a matter of respect, of saying “we appreciate your coming in,” having nothing to do with the amount you pay?

7. Give customers the benefit of the doubt. Proving to him why he’s wrong and you’re right isn’t worth losing a customer over. You will never win an argument with a customer, and you should never, ever put a customer in that position.

8. If a customer makes a request for something special, do everything you can to say yes. The fact that a customer cared enough to ask is all you need to know in trying to accommodate him/her. It may be an exception from your customer service policy, but (if it isn’t illegal) try to do it. Remember you are just making one exception for one customer, not making new policy. Mr. Marshall Field was right when he said in his famous statement: “Give the lady what she wants.”

9. Are your customer service associates properly trained in how to handle a customer complaint or an irate person? Give them guidelines for what to say and do in every conceivable case. People on the frontline of a situation play the most critical role in your customer’s experience. Make sure they know what to do and say to make that customer’s experience a positive, pleasant one.

10. Want to know what your customers think of your clinic? Ask them! Compose a “How’re We Doing?” card and leave it at the reception or waiting area, or include it in their Rx or invoice. Keep it short and simple. Ask things like: what it is they like; what they don’t like; what they would change; what you could do better; about their latest experience there, etc. And if the customer has given their name and address, be sure to acknowledge receipt of the card.

Remember that the big money isn’t as much in winning customers as in keeping customers. Each individual customer’s perception of your company will determine how well you do this and that perception will depend on the level of customer service you provide.