



The many heads of business

Jane Lelean explores the roles of the clinician, the manager and the visionary entrepreneur, and how this fits in with the businesses of dentistry

Dentists become practice owners for many reasons and these include:

- Feeling that we are unable to do the style and quality of dentistry we want to do working as an associate
- Feeling that we could earn more money if we worked as our 'own boss' rather than for someone else
- Frustration with how our current practice is run and a sense that we could do it better
- We are offered to buy-in or to buy the practice and it seems foolish to say no.

Why did you become a principal, or are you thinking about becoming one? In the first

instance, dentists generally become principals because they want to have a dental practice that offers high quality dentistry, rather than wanting a business.

As a dentist you have spent many years, much energy and thousands of pounds developing and honing the skills that make you a great dentist. You would not dream of placing an implant without first learning how to do it from an expert and then placing your first few under the tutorship of a mentor. Yet I am always surprised as to how many dentists become practice owners without any consideration to the new skill set that they

will need or without finding a business coach or mentor to ensure they are able to learn the necessary skills to run a really profitable and efficient practice.

What I have come to recognise from the work I have done with my clients and studying the work of Michael Gerber, which has inspired this series of articles, is that when a dentist chooses to become a principal it is not one person who wants to start a practice, but three:

1. The clinician
2. The manager
3. The visionary entrepreneur.

Each of these three personalities within you wants to be the boss of the new practice and does not want to work for anyone else.

The challenge is that each of these aspects of you wants something completely different from your new practice and this establishes a conflict. Let's look at each in turn.

The clinician

The clinician is the doer, delivering the treatment that is going to pay all the bills, including your wage.

The clinician is happiest when he or she is doing dentistry, placing implants, negotiating root canals, placing brackets and straightening teeth. As a clinician you can only treat one patient at a time (even if you are running more than one surgery) and so you like to control the flow of patients. In this role you like to think about the clinical and technical work and how you can do more of it. As a clinician you want things at the practice to be done your way and are probably very suspicious of change; if you are to consider change, it must have good evidence to support it. You like things done your way, because it works. In essence, the clinician thinks about methodology.

The manager

The manager is the planner in you that creates order and predictability. When setting up a new practice, the manager likes to pore over catalogues, designing the perfect surgery, deciding on materials and where it is all going to live. The manager wants things to be neat and orderly.

The visionary

This part of you is the dreamer – the energy behind any change. This aspect of you lives in the future, continually imagining things as different, bigger and better, with little consideration as to how it will become a reality. The visionary loves change and yet strives to control events and everyone around them to ensure their dreams reach fruition. The visionary in you is often intolerant of things not happening immediately, and of those around you who don't embrace the dream in the way you do.

The conflicts

Imagine yourself split into three separate entities to see how these clinician, manager and visionary roles have the potential to result in conflict and confusion. To help you appreciate the realities of trying to follow your dream in a balanced way, read on to get an idea what might go wrong if an internal struggle ensues.

Each of these roles has valid and vital skills that are necessary to set up and sustain a successful practice

Clinician – visionary entrepreneur

The clinician in you just wants to get on and provide great dentistry your way and does not understand why the visionary can't accept that everything works well. The clinician resents the time taken in 'pointless' conversations wanting to improve on what works well already.

The visionary entrepreneur can see opportunities and threats before they arrive and is frustrated by the clinician who seems content to carry on working in a manner that may bring the business to an end. The visionary entrepreneur sees the clinician much like the band who continued to play while the Titanic was sinking and develops disrespect for that way of thinking. The clinician becomes an obstacle in the way of the visionary entrepreneur achieving their dreams. Meanwhile, you know that but for the clinician part of you, none of the bills would be paid.

Clinician – manager

The clinician is very happy in the surgery and does not understand why the manager has to organise things that already work perfectly well. The clinician cannot see how all the form filling, systems and compliance that take up so much of the manager's time actually improves the clinical care. The manager is an irritation to the clinician when organisation dictates how the clinical work is done; the clinician just wants to do it his or her way.

The manager is equally frustrated by the clinician, who is so focused on the treatment that they do not appreciate that it is only as a result of the manager's ability to organise that they have a stream of patients and materials that allows the work to be done. The clinician ultimately becomes something else in the practice that the manager has to organise.

Manager – visionary entrepreneur

Often, as far as the manager is concerned, the visionary entrepreneur creates problems; the manager seeks order, calm and stability while

the visionary entrepreneur wants things to be changing and developing.

To the visionary entrepreneur the manager can seem like obstacle, finding fault or reasons why a new plan cannot be implemented or will fail. The visionary wants to think big and is frustrated by the manager's way of thinking. Meanwhile, for the manager, who wants to organise everything, the clinician and visionary entrepreneur become problems that must be managed to achieve some degree of order.

Valid and vital skills

Each of these roles – visionary entrepreneur, manager and clinician – has valid and vital skills that are necessary to set up and sustain a successful practice. Regrettably, when most us set up a practice the balance between the roles is generally 10% visionary entrepreneur, 20% manager and 70% clinician, and this limits the potential level of success for your practice.

Over the next few issues of *Implant Dentistry Today*, I will show you what happens to a business that is dominated by each of these personalities.

In the meantime, I invite you to consider which of these roles you most closely identify with and how the challenges you are currently experiencing in practice are a result of you failing to harness all three aspects of your personality. **I**



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