

# Putting trust at the heart of your practice

**ANDREW D'ARCY**, Managing Director of Practice Plan, discusses the importance of building trust in developing long-term relationships with patients and suppliers. With decades of experience at company director level, Andrew explains how creating these bonds can make managing your practice smoother and simpler...

**D**ENTISTRY is a relationship business – and like all good relationships it should be built on trust. But how do you go about cultivating trust in what is essentially a commercial environment, which some people believe cannot be a level playing field?

To run your practice as smoothly as a possible you need to establish trust on two levels – by being both trusted by your patients and trusting of your suppliers. While many of you will be, understandably, primarily concerned with the former, the importance of the latter should not be underestimated as it will make the day-to-day management of your business so much easier.

On top of that, the two are inter-related. This is because if you are thinking about how best to improve your relationships with patients, the easiest place to start is by reflecting on your relationships with service providers; what makes you trust them?

Regardless of what service is being provided, the crux of trusting someone is that we feel they have our best interests at heart. If you think about your business relationships, how do you differentiate between those you feel are focused on supporting your wellbeing and those who aren't?

One key indicator is probably the amount of contact you have with them. If you rarely see or speak to your supplier, it is unlikely you will be able to have any meaningful relationship. It's also unlikely they will have the full picture about you and your business. We've probably all experienced the frustration of speaking to someone who doesn't know something about our situation that we feel they should – and

would if they had been paying attention.

If you then apply that to your own practice, can you identify areas where there may be gaps in your teams' knowledge of a patient and opportunities to improve the patient's experience? Of course, no one is expecting every member of staff to have encyclopaedic knowledge of the entire patient list, but there are small things you can do to stay up-to-date. For instance, introducing team huddles, regular checks that everyone understands key processes that ensure your patients feel cared for and valued, or a book, where patient updates are recorded and making it mandatory that everyone is involved.

Key to this is investing time to ensure that everyone in the team understands why these measures are important – and involving them in the initial process of pinpointing areas where trust is being reduced or lost. The whole team will then be more committed to devising and implementing the solutions, and ensuring they are successful.

Some trust-building steps can be very simple – such as ensuring eye contact with the patient and introducing name badges – but they are also very effective. This is because they all add to the feeling of a personal connection and feeling valued.

If your patients are met at the practice by someone who makes eye contact, addresses them by name, has their name visible and has some knowledge of why they are there – all these small steps add up to a bigger picture of trust and confidence. They will feel like they are in a safe pair of hands – the same feeling you want

to experience with your suppliers.

It's also important to remember that relationships are reciprocal, they should be a two-way street. If you also put in the effort to maintain contact and build connections you will reap the rewards of, not only being trusted by your patients, but also having a trusted network where you can seek credible, honest advice – or just a friendly ear to listen.

The business of dentistry revolves around the interaction of people – between practice staff and patients, and between practice staff and external suppliers. The stronger bonds you can build, the easier it will be to create a profitable, sustainable practice with minimal patient attrition. ■



## About Practice Plan

Practice Plan is the UK's number one provider of practice-branded dental plans. It has a wealth of business and plan support services, including expert marketing support, and a proven reputation for supporting practices to develop and maintain a profitable and sustainable business.

So, whether you're considering your options out of the NHS, looking to introduce a plan into an established practice or considering switching from another plan provider, it can offer you expert advice. Call 01691 684165 or visit [www.practiceplan.co.uk/dental-plans](http://www.practiceplan.co.uk/dental-plans)

## About the author

Andrew D'Arcy is Managing Director at Practice Plan, the leading provider of practice-branded dental plans. Andrew has more than 25 years' experience in successfully leading businesses at director level.



# Action summary for dentists

Leading dental accountant **GEOFF LONG**, FCA, has some valuable advice for practice owners on retaining 'star' performers post Brexit...

**O**VER the past few years we have seen some monumental changes to the business of dentistry. The new contract, NHS England, CQC, GDS, PDS and the Corporates, seemingly more and more competition and now Brexit. Given the changes that have occurred to date, it is reasonable to assume that there is more excitement (and change!) to come. These are uncertain times for dentists and key members of your staff, associates, hygienists, therapists and nurses, may be tempted to seek employment elsewhere. As a practice owner you need to take steps to retain those key members of staff by reducing their anxiety in troubled times and ensuring that they understand that their contribution is valued.

## The Problem

Your 'star' performers will have the easiest time finding a new appointment – they do not have to wait to find out where their future lies.

Once associates and nurses start looking for another job, their emotional separation from your practice begins, reducing commitment, focus and productivity.

Once an agency knows a star associate is on the move, they aggressively pursue the contract

with new opportunities. Before you know it you have a second wave of departures on your hands, along with all the disruption associated with it!

## The Solution

- Hold a mini-career review meeting. Ask them to review their career progress and their learnings at the practice – invite them to assess their potential and express their aspirations.
- Place them on long-term projects, underscoring that you want them to focus on – and influence – the continuity and direction of the practice.
- Recognise their contribution publicly and privately to underscore your appreciation of their value (for instance, you might consider taking them out for dinner or giving them a token of appreciation).

## Sample Messages To Give Your Dental Team

- "Your contribution is well known and valued and that is going to count in the decision making".
- "Do not forget that your excellent performance ratings are being taken into your account".

- "I would appreciate it if you would talk with me before planning to do anything".
- "While things are not 100 per cent clear yet. I would like you to know that I value your contribution highly".
- "We are looking forward to you playing a strong role in the new practice".
- "There will be new, exciting opportunities for you to grow and develop as the new practice unfolds during the next year".
- "Your life is going to be very interesting, challenging and rewarding for you". ■



## About the author

Geoffrey Long FCA is a specialist dental accountant based in Hertfordshire. Geoff advises on a wide range of dental tax issues and regularly writes for the dental press. Geoff has over 20 years' experience with dentists accounts and is recognised for his proactive approach to dental taxation and business problems. He can be contacted on 01438 722224 or email: [office@dentax.biz](mailto:office@dentax.biz)