



The system is the solution: The wonderful difference that great systems can produce in your practice

By Julie Parker

A successful business is one that can deliver a desired product or service to its market with consistency and measurability, with an acceptable profit. The path to achieving this consistency and measurability is the design and implementation of systems. Business systems not only achieve consistency of service for your dental patients, but also empower your staff. Systems enable your staff to practice autonomy within their roles and achieve reliable success. Systems also free up the owners' and managers' time because they enable effective delegation to other team members, without compromising on results.

What is a business system?

A business system is a process or course of action that has been designed to achieve a desirable end result. They are the structure that supports you to competently and successfully deliver dentistry to your patients. Of course, every practice has some systems, but without great systems in the right places, there is chaos and chaos within a dental surgery leads to unhappy and confused staff. Chaos in even tiny aspects presents an unprofessional and erratic image to your patients.

Some examples of often-overlooked dental practice systems are:

1. Introduction process for a new patient to the practice;
2. Process that is used when a staff member calls in unwell and unable to work;
3. System for inducting a new staff member;
4. Actively encouraging referrals from your existing patients; and
5. Catching and attracting back lost patients.

Business systems take the random reactivity out of running your dental practice. They enable your team to proceed confidently with thoughtful and considered processes that have been previously designed with the practice's vision and culture in mind.

Getting the right people for the positions in your practice is important. But to effectively support them in their roles and create the environment for them to develop and grow and to contribute the gifts of which they are capable to the practice's success, you need great systems.

Getting started

As discussed in the Julie Parker Dental Management Module, "Successfully Implementing Change within Our Workplace", there are key points to remember when designing and introducing systems to your practice:

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1. Are the systems aligned with your practice philosophy?
2. Are the systems easy to implement?
3. Continually review to ensure they are working!

Ensure all systems are aligned with your practice's vision, culture and values. The building of trust with your team, and with your patients, only happens through the consistent message you present. Your consistent message is not the words you say, rather your actions and behaviour. Behaving true to your stated vision, culture and values will provide your staff with a strong sense of stability and faith,

creating self-confidence and a desire to contribute. This outcome further builds your image and brand to then help you stick out from a crowded dental market. You therefore become “out-standing”.

Systems that are complicated and difficult to implement will not be successful. Great systems need to be easy to access, easily understood by all team members and easy to put into action. If you do develop a system or process that is not gaining the cooperation you need, brainstorm with your team to make it simpler. Albert Einstein said: “Make things as simple as possible, but no simpler.”

I have found that to provide staff members the best foundation to implement a new system you need to:

- Involve everyone in the development of the system;
- Role-play the system to tap in to kinaesthetic learning;
- Resist the urge to have everyone communicate the system in just one way... allow everyone to place their own stamp on it, whilst observing its essence; and
- Follow up at a later date to gain feedback and check whether you can assist in overcoming any challenges the team are having in implementing the system. Once any system has been in place for

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a period of time, it is important to review whether it has been effective or not. It is de-motivating to work at a practice where there are seemingly wasted efforts being spent on systems and processes that do not add enough value. Get the team together and, in a relaxed and collaborative environment, discuss the system:

- Are the staff still implementing it?
- Is the system generating the desired result?
- Is there opportunity to refine the system?

What great systems do you need?

1. THE NEED: Where are you now?

Gain clarity over the situation by first being aware of what you are doing now. How does your practice currently deal with each specific situation? Even if the response is “chaos”, write down “chaos” Write down examples of what has been done in the past and what the resulting situation was.

2. THE GOAL: Where do you want to go?

What is the ideal result you desire? Write down the experience you want the team and patients to have. Be clear and specific.

3. THE SYSTEM: How are we going to bridge this gap?

Moving backwards from the goal, write down what needs to happen physically and mentally in order to achieve the goal? Use the “who, what, why, where” method:

- WHO are the staff to implement;
- WHAT tasks and duties ;
- for the purpose of the goal (WHY); and
- WHERE in the practice is this going to occur?

Then I recommend you consider the mindset needed for the team to use this new system.

For example, the mindset when following the system of calling patients if they fail to attend an appointment may be one of directness and accountability. However, the mindset when seeing a child

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for her very first dental visit may be one of playfulness and fun. Support your team members by providing guidance in all areas of implementing a system.

Finally, hand over the responsibility to your team. Don't micro-manage. By now, they have been instructed on what the practice wishes to achieve with the system. Allow each individual team member to implement the system in their way. Any hurdles will be discovered and managed when you have follow-up discussions. So give them the authority and autonomy to run with it. By doing so, you build their confidence and their motivation. Your practice will be the beneficiary!

About the author

Julie Parker's whole career has been devoted to the dental industry, starting in 1987 as a dental nurse. In 2003, Julie became the first non-dentist to buy a dental practice in Australia. She owned and managed her practice in Brighton, Victoria for 10 years. During this time, she more than trebled the turnover and her staff base grew from 3 to 12 members. Julie successfully cultivated a winning team and a winning business. Her business programs on how to accomplish a dream dental business are gleaned from her wealth of experience, intensive education and an inquisitive business mind. Julie is a Certified Practitioner of Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Time Line Therapy and Hypnotherapy.

Julie Parker Dental Management offers a subscription based program that educates all dental staff in the building and managing of their practices. Members receive monthly audio CD's and workbooks that lead them along the path to personal and team success. All team members, including the dentists, receive Certificates of Completion each month for submission for non-clinical CPD points and inclusion on resumes. Memberships are available for \$395 per month. For more info, see www.julieparkerdentalmanagement.com.au.