But it’s different here
An international perspective on the business of dentistry

By Chris Barrow, UK

As a business consultant, I have been providing training, coaching, and mentoring services to UK and Irish dentists and their teams for the last 23 years. Additionally, I have had the opportunity to work with clients in a number of European and other countries, including Turkey, India, the US, Canada and Australia. I consider myself a bit of a rebel and love to talk about innovation in business and how it applies in dentistry and the wider health care environment.

In this article for DTI I want to take you back to the mid-1990s and my first experience of working with UK dentists, providing team training workshops all across the country. Inevitably, there would come a point in one of those early workshops at which an attendee would raise his or her hand and, instead of asking a question, make a statement that came down to something like “Chris, this is all very good and exciting, but you need to understand that here in [insert place name] things are different.”

Candidates for “insert place name” ranged from the valleys of southern Wales to the West End of London, from north to south, from crowded to thinly populated areas. References were made to cosmopolitan, suburban and rural communities. The speaker would elaborate and suggest that whatever idea I was proposing would fall on stony ground because of the idiosyncrasies of the local population or macro- and micro-economic circumstances.

As a speaker, one learns to deal with such objections and concerns with empathetic listening and compassion, but I gradually realised that, in each of those locations, there were dentists who were just getting on with the job and enjoying great success, because they were either oblivious of or immune to those self-limiting beliefs. Now, do not get me wrong here, if your dental practice is situated in a town where a significant proportion of the population is dependent on one major employer that then closes down, even the greatest optimist and positive thinker would have to take a reality check and respond. Thankfully, such economic disasters are relatively few in number. Most of the time, the aforementioned statements of difference are a self-fulfilling prophecy on the part of the conference questioner.

The caring speaker will try to engage the attendee in meaningful dialogue; but experience shows that, sadly, the critic rarely wants to be persuaded away from his or her unassailable hypothesis. Ringing this phenomenon into the second decade of the twenty-first century, the most frequent use of the phrase “ah, but it’s different here” relates to the digital marketing landscape. Whenever I comment in writing or at a conference on the explosive growth of digital technology, there will inevitably be a listener who wants to tell me that people in his or her postcode are not on the Internet, do not use social media and do not have e-mail addresses. Mirroring my earlier experience, I then meet dentists in the same location who are happily generating digital sales.

A recent internal survey of my top clients (located across diverse geographical and economic locations) revealed the startling fact that almost 66 percent of their website visits were from mobile devices—smartphones and tablets—thus demonstrating that website appearance on a 27-inch iMac screen is no longer as important as how it looks on mobile.

If I now refer back to the international locations in which I have had the opportunity to work, I can think of not one of the listed countries in which I would argue that the situation is different. Perhaps the most notable of these is Pune in northern India, where I was privileged in February to deliver a two-day workshop to 50 dentists from that city and nearby Mumbai. Halfway through the morning on my second day there, an attendee rose to his feet and requested a hand mike and I knew what was coming. “Chris, we have all enjoyed your lecture so far, but you need to understand that here in India things are different,” he said.

I listened, acknowledged and then simply carried on, in the knowledge that Mumbai is now regarded as the health care tourism capital of the world, that technology is influencing society as rapidly as anywhere and that the traditional Indian business model of sole-trader dentists with no name, no hygiene and no associate is rapidly being replaced by dental corporates and retailers, as is the case everywhere. In my original list of countries, there is not one excluded from the information and connection revolution that is reshaping all of our lives.

People are people. The independent traveller of 50 years ago would have commented on diverse cultures. In 2016, the same traveller will comment on similarities, whether good or bad. The global village contains dental patients and they have similar needs and expectations of value. So if you are looking for tips on how to improve your dental business, you now gain a global perspective when observing best practice.

I have visited and worked with the best in all of the countries listed and found that no nation is behind the curve when it comes to innovation in the business of dentistry and we can all learn from each other. Except, of course, in your place—it’s different!}

Chris Barrow is the founder of 7Connections business coaching. An active consultant, trainer and coach to the UK dental profession, he regularly contributes to the dental press, social media and online. Chris Barrow can be contacted at coach.barrow@7connections.com

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Eleven tips for success in your dental clinic

Part II: CAPS & CLIMB

By Dr Anna Maria Yiannikos, Germany & Cyprus

After the last issue of laser international magazine of laser dentistry, we have begun a new journey with our brand new series “Eleven tips to gain desirable success in our dental clinics” In this publication, we are going to continue exploring different parameters that can reinforce our success and professional development as dental practitioners. Today I will share with you the knowledge I have gained within the past 25 years of managing and evolving my clinic so you can always be one step ahead and avoid mistakes I have made in the past.

The third very important tip that I am going to share with you today in order to be and remain successful at your clinics is how to regain your power.

We learn a lot of things during our studies in the dental schools. We learn how to make the best fillings with great contours and biocompatible materials; how to treat a tooth that needs a root canal therapy, but most probably buy unnecessary things or even forget the things that we went in the beginning there for. My point here is that when we decide that we need to hire an employee we should know upfront what we are looking for, otherwise we might make mistakes that will cost us money and time!

Let’s have a look now what does CAPS stand for:

- **Capacities**: The mental and physical abilities required to do the job. How smart and how strong (physically capable) must the successful applicant be?
- **Attitudes**: such as customer service, orientation, team-player, reliability, honesty, willingness to follow rules, problem-solving, loyalty, safety consciousness, ability to follow through—Imagine having a receptionist who, although she is doing the job without a mistake—complains about everything all the time. Is that a person that you would love to have as part of your team?
- **Personality**: traits such as competitiveness, assertiveness, attention to detail and sociability—Also search whether the person will manage or her personality to get the job done, since as social scientists declare about 60 per cent of our personality traits are inherited and most of them are set by age nine. In other words—personality can’t be taught and it doesn’t change much over time.
- **Skills**: Expertise required to do the job—Skills are the easiest job requirements to identify. We could do that by asking the candidate to perform certain tests. For example, if we are trying to find a receptionist we could ask her to translate an article, or through role playing to check how she responds in certain scenarios.

Have always in mind the quote ‘we hire them for the skills but we fire them for their attitudes’!

So finally we found our A-star employees and now what do we have to do in order to keep them?

The fourth very essential tip of today’s article that I would love to share with you is the different ways that we can use to retain our A-star employees.

Apply CLIMB to retain your team! Now let’s explain a little what does exactly the acronym CLIMB stands for.

- **Challenge**: Studies have shown that the main reason that our employees resign is that they are dissatisfied with their tasks. That’s why we should give them challenging duties to accomplish. And what will the result be? They will feel useful and they will find it difficult to leave from a job that offers them different and unique experiences.
- **Loyalty**: Be human with your employees and do not be afraid that you will lose your power. Show interest in their problems and lay back in times that they cannot handle any more pressure.
- **Investment**: Invest time and money to them so they will feel appreciated. During my lectures I get regularly the question that we reward them by giving them bonus and still they are not motivated enough, what shall we do? My answer here is that you must renew your reward system regularly. Sometimes you can give them cash (as bonuses) or maybe you can offer them other kind of incentives, like buying them a free trip for vacation on Christmas, for example. Research has proven that the more powerful and effective incentives are the ones that are specific, tangible and non-cash.

Also please remember to ‘reward not the best in sales but the best’ A major mistake that we usually do is to only reward the ones that bring money to our clinics. Instead we should reward the best in our practices, the ones that are completing their tasks in excellence unconditionally to what this task is.

- **Measurement**: Conduct a fair performance appraisal every six months.
- **Building**: Demonstrate your commitment to them by showing them opportunities of career development.

During the next issue we will analyse two new tips that will reveal new opportunities and potential of our dental clinics. Till then, remember that not only are you the dentist in your clinic, but you are also the manager and the leader.

You can always send me your questions and request for more information and guidance at: dba@yiannikosdental.com or via our Facebook account.

Looking forward to our next trip of business growth and educational development!