

Robert Watson, Principal of Dollar Dental Care outlines his reasons for on-going investment in his practice

I have always believed that if you don't value yourself, you can't expect anyone else to.

In no way is this down to arrogance on my part, but rather to the firm conviction that dentists should value the time and effort they have put in to learning their craft and create an environment in which their skills bear fruit. In short.....value yourself and stamp your identity on your practice.

I would always advise my colleagues though, to see investment as an on-going process. Set targets for yourself and your practice, but make them realistic. I am wary (and always have been) of 'quick fix' solutions to anything. I like to plan ahead, but allow for the unexpected.

Setting targets

Accountants and other professional advisers will want you to give yourself turnover and profit objectives. And I have no argument with that. But they sometimes believe that simply by stating figures, they will somehow happen. Of course, they won't; you have to develop the means of delivering those results. When I launched Dollar Dental Care way back in 1985, I set myself some demanding goals.....some short term, some longer term. Investment in achieving those goals has been a continual process, but always on a planned basis and never on a whim or an impulse.

Essentially my targets were these:

- to set the bar high and be demanding of myself. I had to recognise that my standards would set the tone for the practice
- never to stop learning and to encourage those with whom I worked to do the same
- to look at my strengths and commit to improve them and to look at my weaknesses and try overcome them
- always to enjoy my job and to create a practice in which this would be evident both to staff and patients
- to have a working protocol that would avoid stress. A smile isn't simply something we should offer patients. It should be on **our** faces too.

These were never intended as quantifiable objectives. Rather they have been measuring sticks for our progress.

Golden rules

It's one thing to be bright eyed and bushy tailed when you launch your practice. But to be successful you need to maintain that initial momentum. From years of experience I would say that there are some fundamental rules that you have to apply if you want to get and stay ahead.

- Wherever and whenever, invest in the best you can afford. Bear in mind the best doesn't always mean the most expensive (more on this later)
- Choose and use suppliers who can demonstrate that they understand dentistry and take the time to appreciate the way you do it
- Believe in yourself but avoid complacency. Attend (relevant) courses.
- Continually reappraise and reassess your business. Monitor its progress
- Keep your practice tidy and uncluttered so that work flows
- Keep up to date with technology but don't be afraid to admit if you need explanation. Stay objective when it comes to evaluating the benefits any new technology will actually bring
- It should go without saying, but focus on the needs of patients. Be prepared to take the time to listen. If you make them feel rushed, don't be surprised if they rush off to another practice

Suppliers

I think every dentist will agree that much of what we purchase for our practices will come under the heading of a commodity. In which case it makes good sense to buy as cheaply as you can (whilst of course taking into account such considerations as delivery and so on).

But when it comes to choosing a supplier whose input will be directly related to the way your practice works, my opinion is that you should be far more demanding. I worked with Gavin Willis of Paradigm Design Solutions a good number of years ago and still work with him today. Quite apart from his ability to design practices and surgeries, his knowledge of dentistry is head and shoulders above that of any of his competitors.

Gavin listens and understands the way I work. He designs accordingly. He and his company put themselves out for me and I value that.

So we're back to where we started.....talking about values.

Dollar Dental Care has grown considerably since we launched. I am proud of this, but equally proud of my profession. I think that if you believe in yourself you will want to invest in what you are creating. Be passionate about what you do and work with people who share your passion.

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