



Community Minded = Business Minded.

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PRIME PRACTICE
the dental management specialists

When I was growing up in Sydney's eastern suburbs my father owned and worked in a jeweller's shop about an hour away in a West Sydney suburb called Granville. For the 30 years that he had a shop there he made a point of being part of the community in any way he could. He wrote a column in the local paper for free, he provided prizes for the local rugby club. I always thought that it was one of the ways that my father was being charitable. Much later with the benefit of hindsight and some business experience I realise that it was much more than that...it made business sense as well.

When I first owned a dental practice I quickly realised that dental practices are in the same small business boat as my father's jeweller store. As soon as I started to become involved in the community around me (by making mouthguards for the local rugby team, by organising and participating in school fetes), I very quickly noticed many follow on advantages of this behaviour both personally and to my practice.

1. Social Conscience

Before I get into the business benefits I saw from community involvement I want to make something clear. I am not saying that the only reason you should give of your time and effort to community institutions is for financial gain.

I believe that we as dentists occupy a fortunate place in society. One that gives us respect, decent remuneration and the opportunity to help people out of considerable pain and discomfort. I believe with a position like that comes a responsibility to give back and be altruistic. Especially to the community that keeps us in business. If we don't act on that responsibility, often we will have a feeling that there's something missing. Our social conscience needs to be satisfied in some way and giving back to the community is a great way to feel good about yourself and your place in the business world.

When our social conscience **is** satisfied, we achieve a balance and satisfaction in our lives that cannot be achieved in self interested pursuits alone.

2. Attracting patients

While some very loyal patients may come to you from far away, the vast majority of your dental practice's patient base is going to be from your local area. Your success relies on local people knowing about you and your practice.

Being involved in local community institutions is an inexpensive and rewarding way to market yourself and your practice.

- It gives you extra opportunities to come into contact with potential patients in a non-business-oriented way and a chance to relate to them on a basis other than their teeth.

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- In effect you are sharing an interest and/or a hobby with your potential patient base, which helps with building rapport and establish future topics for conversation.

3. Pulse

The more you are involved in the community the more you become aware of 'current local affairs' in that area, eg:

- anger or excitement about development;
- frustration over lacking infrastructure;
- unemployment;
- cultural tensions

The more informed you are about your area and the issues of the day the easier it will be to communicate with patients and build relationships.

4. Empathy

It's not enough just to be informed about the community you work in. In order to build maximum rapport with your community they need to be able to identify with you. To know that you are one of them. This is especially important in cases like my father's, where he worked in one area and lived in another that was quite some distance away, both culturally, economically and geographically (he commuted about 20 kilometres each way).

The more you participate in the institutions of a community the more emotionally involved you appear and become. This emotional involvement is much more important in rapport building than just being informed, it helps to bridge any other gaps between you and your patients, whether they are cultural or religious etc.

5. Dentists Profile/Reputation

Anyone will tell you that much of your success as a dentist or as any professional lies in your reputation. Not just the reputation of your professional/clinical skills but equally (if not more importantly) in your reputation as a good, approachable and trustworthy person.

Giving of your time and energy to worthwhile causes will automatically increase your profile and personal reputation.

Conclusion

You should never volunteer or give to your community expecting a rich reward. A good deed done with a selfish agenda can be spotted a mile away and can only bring with it negativity.

However somewhat paradoxically if a small business owner gives of himself selflessly and altruistically to their community the relationship becomes karma-like. Whatever bonds you build that connect you to your community will also connect your community to you and whatever positive gain you give to it, it will give back.

Ways that we can get more community minded in our practices local community:

- Make a point of regularly reading the local community newspaper cover to cover
- Contribute to the local/community paper if you are so minded
- Get involved in the local school
 - o I once helped organise a school fete (with many of the prizes being toothbrushes and toothpastes) and found it very rewarding.
 - o I also made mouthguards for a school rugby team.
- Get involved in local
 - o Clubs,(lions, rotary, masons, surf lifesaving)
 - o Religious institutions (church, mosque, synagogue)
 - o Sports clubs
 - o Local politics

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