

Ensure 2010 is not another Groundhog year



By Dr Phillip Palmer BDS

The best thing about January and February is that with it comes the beginning of a whole new year, which offers a host of new opportunities.

It presents the chance to create a new mindset, and the occasion to renew your commitment to making the most of your career, your relationships, your strengths, your team and your practice. There is no better time to ask yourself “What are you going to do to make 2010 better than 2009?”

Most dentists will find that at some point in their career, each year starts to look a lot like every other year. Each patient starts to remind you of another patient: each occlusal filling even reminds you of a similar occlusal filling. Even a crown preparation or implant gives you a sense of déjà vu. Frankly, dentistry can get a little repetitive after a few years. Many dentists say that this is the cause of high depression rates in the industry, and for many, it can cause a departure from the profession to look for greener pastures.

However, if approached with the right attitude, dentistry can be a wonderful and rewarding lifetime career. It’s really up to you to make of it whatever you want. There are ways to recapture your enthusiasm and energy for dentistry in the coming year:

1. You can learn new clinical skills. You weren’t born with the skills that you now have. You learnt them. You spent years at university doing basic sciences, and then years subsequently honing your skills to get where you are now. A little more time spent learning new skills could pay big dividends and not just the monetary kind. You could learn about:
 - how to replace and restore implants
 - how to do orthodontics/ invisalign
 - neuromuscular dentistry
 - the intricacies of sleep dentistry

2. You can learn business skills: Don't you wish you had a handle on the business side of your practice?

- How you can get leverage or passive income from your practice
- Systems for best use of the potential of a hygienist
- Becoming more financially intelligent with regard to your practice
- How to analyse your key performance indicators

3. You can get your team taught new skills, which can change positively the way you work. (how is this different from the next point?) Having your team upskilled in the areas of systems and procedures to deal with every aspect of the practice will provide you with more time to spend on your own goals/ education. Your team could probably learn:

- Better phone skills to ensure that each phone call is treated with the value it represents.
- Front office skills including best practice scheduling to help create an ideal day every day.
- HR skills, like hiring, interviewing, conflict resolution, how to do effective pay and performance reviews.
- Skills to elevate the role of the Dental Assistant so you can use them to their maximum potential

4. Learning new communication skills will give you the biggest pay-off of all. Most people start talking in the first couple of years of life and never learn the subtle nuances of language and the psychology of saying things in the most effective and influential way. Learning advanced communication skills will help you to better:

- manage your team
- deal with family and personal relationships
- prevent misunderstandings in your personal and business life

- get the most out of your patient interactions and relationships- thereby leading to better explanations of treatment options to a more receptive audience
- be a leader of your practice (even previously-poor communicators can become effective leaders)

There are many ways to learn better communication skills. These range from basic toastmasters courses in public speaking to far more sophisticated options. Speak to people who have done these types of courses, and rarely will you find anything other than 'raves' about the results.

Are you just going to allow this year's issues and problems to be a copy of last year?

It is time to set new year's resolutions again. Are you going to allow this year's resolutions to be a rewrite of last year's?

Or will you do something about it.