



Jane Lelean presents the first in a series of articles that will provide a simple blueprint to improve both your business and your lifestyle

If you were to build a house, you would initially start with an idea of what you want it to look like. You would ask an architect to draw the plans to ensure that it is feasible and then build the foundations prior to building the house. In this series of articles, I am going to guide you through some simple practice management techniques that will ensure that your dental practice is like a well-planned house built on solid foundations.

Why be in charge?

You probably became, or want to become, a principal because you believe, on some level, whether it be clinically or in terms of patient care, treatment options, staff recruitment and retention, quality of materials or financial stability, that you could do a great job, perhaps in a different way to those for whom you are working or have worked in the past.

Think back to dental school; how much business skills training did you receive? And since qualifying, how much business skills training have you undertaken?

For most of you, the answer to both these questions will be 'none' or 'very little'. So how, without any business skills training, will you be able to run the practice you imagine better than someone else?

Many dentists fall into the trap of thinking that because they understand the clinical

aspects of dentistry, they automatically understand how to run a business that offers clinical dentistry. Unfortunately, many dentists experience the consequences of running a business without the necessary skills; the repercussions often include:

- Poorly performing teams
- Staff failing to carry out the duties expected of them
- Financial challenges
- Insufficient time to do all that is expected of us
- Dissatisfied patients or staff
- Lack of patients requiring the work we are offering
- Feeling the practice is running us rather than we are running the practice.
- Challenges in personal relationships, health or finances
- A feeling of being overwhelmed.

Does any of this sound familiar? It is very common for dentists to feel frustrated, overwhelmed or confused as to how to resolve their challenges.

A common pattern for dentists looking to solve their challenges is to do more of what they know how to do, so more clinical dentistry or more clinical courses.

Be honest – are you now providing implants because you think that they may help you solve the problems that you have in your practice?

Building your clinical skills is always a great first step, but to achieve true success you need to do more. Einstein's definition of insanity is to do the same thing over and over again and expect a different result.

I would like to suggest that if you are currently experiencing challenges in your business or fear that you may do so in the future, now is the time to do something different, so that as well as embracing development of your clinical skills, you learn some business development and leadership skills.

Understand what you are developing

The first step, along the lines of the house developer, is to come up with the idea for what your practice is to be like. Useful questions to consider are:

- What is the purpose of your practice?
- What is the value of your practice?
- What does it mean – your practice?
- What is essential in your practice?

It will be more useful for you to have someone ask these questions of you, and to keep asking you to clarify your answers until they too have a clear understanding of why you currently own or are thinking about owning a practice. It is generally true to say that until you can answer these questions with the specificity and clarity that someone else

needs to understand why you are doing it, it is unlikely that you truly understand yourself.

Get clear about the details

Once you understand what you want to do and why, it is time to draw up the blueprint. This is done by following the wisdom of Rudyard Kipling's poem in the tale of *The Elephant's Child*:

*'I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who.'*

Again, clarity and specificity is essential – an architect's drawing is not full of approximations and possibilities; it is specific and accurate plan.

While you are answering the 'what', 'why', 'when', 'how', 'where' and 'who', it is useful to consider the details in terms of what you and others will see, hear, feel, taste and smell when it is complete. Another useful way to check that you have sufficient clarity about what you are seeking to achieve is to write it all down and give it to someone else; if they can create the practice of your dreams exactly from your description you have enough detail.

Share your vision

Now that you are clear as to why you are building your practice, and what it will be like, share your vision.

As I visit practices and help the principals build, develop or reinvent their businesses, one of the most common problems I encounter is the lack of a clear or shared vision. You will only be able to create the practice of your dreams if you have a committed, skilled team alongside you. For this to happen you must share your plans, in much the same way that the architect must give the builder the blueprints if the house is to be built to the correct specifications.

Whether you are considering becoming a principal for the first time, developing a practice you already own or just making a change to one aspect of the business, it is essential that you:

- Think first – to understand the motivations behind change
- Define – be clear about the specifics
- Discuss – share your vision to create the reality.

In the next issue I will provide an overview of the roles of the dental practice owner. **I**



Dr Jane Lelean is an experienced general dental practitioner and business coach and trainer. Jane ran her successful mixed practice in Buckinghamshire for 13 years before setting

up her business coaching and training practice, Healthy and Wealthy, specialising with working with dentists and other small business owners in the UK and Ireland, the rest of Europe and as far away as Australia.

Jane has much experience dealing with the changing climate and regulation within the world of dentistry and assists her clients in taking full advantage of the opportunities that others may consider as problems.

Jane is the only dentist in the UK and Ireland to hold both a dental qualification and an accreditation from the International Coach Federation (ICF).

If you would like to discuss any of the issues Jane has raised in this article, you can contact her by email at jane@healthyandwealthy.co.uk or by phone on 01296 770456. Alternatively, you can contact her via her website at www.healthyandwealthy.co.uk.