

This issue, **Jane Lelean** presents the tale of a dentist whose business philosophy was firmly entrenched in the clinical aspects of dental practice

In the last article I discussed the three aspects of our personality that are influential when we set up our own dental practice. By now you will have identified with one or more of these roles to varying degrees. Over the next few articles I will describe practices that have been built by allowing one of these personalities to take control. When reading these tales you will probably identify your own challenges and recognise how you can avoid the pitfalls.

We have already established that a dentist would not provide clinical work without initially investing in training and working with a mentor, and yet the vast majority of practice owners set up a dental practice, which is a business, without first developing the appropriate business skills or working with a business coach or mentor.

In the previous article I identified the three personalities within each practice owner as:

1. The clinician
2. The manager
3. The visionary entrepreneur.

It is the dominance or balance of each of these that will determine the relative success of your practice.

In the next few articles I will help you to explore how you can predictably ensure yours is a thriving practice by achieving the appropriate balance of the three personalities. I will tell you stories about several clients that will enable you to understand some of the pitfalls of setting up your own practice.

Each of these stories is an amalgamation of several clients with similar characteristics and names have been changed to protect their identity.

Richard's story

Initially I will be looking at a clinician-led practice. To illustrate, here follows the story of a practice owner called Richard.

When Richard went into practice on his own, it was the clinician aspect of his personality that made the decisions and drove the project. You will recall that the clinician likes to be doing clinical work, and is best



Running your business: a clinical view

at this, and so Richard designed his practice so that the focus was on the clinical side of things, giving him the freedom to practise dentistry in the way that he had dreamed of practising.

When Richard set up his practice he was full of excitement and optimism, because he felt he was providing the team with the opportunity to carry out the clinical work to a standard they had not been able to achieve in a previous practice.

Richard felt he was free at last to attend more clinical courses and put all that he learnt into practice with his patients. Many

of Richard's patients loved the attention he was able to give them, the availability of quick appointments and the time put aside for explanations as to what he was doing and why. Much of the information he gave them went right over their heads – they did not understand (or want to know) the technical aspects of what Richard was doing for them – and yet they loved his enthusiasm. They could see he was well qualified – he had all the certificates to prove it.

Richard was happy. Granted, he was working very long days – treatment planning in the evenings, writing letters at the weekends,

and checking radiographs before surgery. Lunchtimes were non-existent because he booked in extra patients, and there were myriad other things that needed to be done.

In the moments in between all the clinical work he was doing, Richard managed to find time to do the accounts, recruit staff, do the ordering and anything else that cropped up. Richard even found time to tend the garden at the practice and redecorate the new surgery. Richard was so busy he was going to have to start to run a second surgery; he had heard other dentists ran two surgeries at a time and he was sure he could do it to.

So, Richard was working 12 hours a day most weekdays and most weekends. He was up with the larks and going to bed with the owls but he did not mind as he was doing the dentistry he wanted to do.

But then Richard became unwell. He really should not have been at work and yet the patients had to be seen, the accounts needed to be done and the stock wouldn't order itself. There was no one else to do it, so he pushed himself. Then Richard got really ill and was not physically able to get out of bed.

As he lay there, he considered his first year of business and realised he had not had a holiday, he had missed his child's first

Christmas play, and he could not remember the last time he took his wife out for dinner and did not worry about all the work he should be doing.

As Richard reflected on his practice, he realised that in setting up on his own he had not acquired the freedom he craved. Richard was working for his business harder than he had ever worked for before and yet still didn't have time to live. His physical health had suffered, as had his emotional health, the health of his family and other relationships.

Richard had created a monster. He had thought he owned his business but in the end his business owned him. Was it worth it?

Richard decided enough was enough and he had to make a choice. Should he close the practice before it completely destroyed his health, his family and other relationships, or run the business differently?

Richard's challenge was that he still loved dentistry but he just didn't realise how different running a successful practice was to being a great clinician.

In the next article we will be looking at how Karen ran her practice. She approached it from a different angle to Richard. Did she make the right decision?

If you are a principal and can identify

with Richard, or are considering becoming a principal and don't want to make the same mistakes, jane@healthyandwealthy.co.uk will be delighted to help. **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 in 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 regulations within the world of dentistry and assists her clients in taking full advantage of the opportunities that others may consider to be 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. If you would like to discuss any of the issues she has raised, 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.