

In business

Jane Lelean tells Moira Crawford why she decided to leave the practice behind to help others deal with the pressures of the profession



FACT FILE

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Jane's career began traditionally enough. Having qualified from Guy's in 1990 and completed her VT in Oxfordshire, she became an associate in a Buckinghamshire practice, which turned out to be a nightmare. 'I felt I couldn't do the work I was supposed to be doing, helping patients in the way I should be. It was completely chaotic, we ran out of materials and there was no communication,' she recalled. One day, she snapped and broke down in tears. 'I had what's called an entrepreneurial seizure,' she explained. 'I decided to start my own practice.'

To start with, all went well. Jane was doing things her way with the materials and equipment she wanted, and enjoying herself hugely, until she realised the practice was in serious trouble. It was the wake-up call she needed. 'I realised I'd made the fatal assumption that because I knew about dentistry, I knew about running a dental business – and I didn't,' she said. So she recruited a business coach, started reading and attending courses, and quickly transformed her practice and her life so that once again she was carrying out treatment she wanted to do on patients she wanted, but the practice was now profitable and stable. She had a good team around her and was doing only three days' clinical work, spending time on the business, and having more personal time.

Where dentists go wrong

She's continued to work with a coach ever since. 'I've been coached now for about 13 years, even though I am one now myself. I know that it's a brilliant experience,' she said. Jane now advises dental practices and other small businesses and, because she's been there herself, can see the classic traps the dentist can fall into. 'At dental school we aren't taught to run a business and often become business owners by default rather than by design,' she said. 'As a coach I bring the knowledge I've accrued and objectively that allows me to help the business owner stand back and see what's important. A constant stream of "stuff" occupies the dentist's time and so most don't take the opportunity to stand back and see what's going on or ask themselves what they want to achieve professionally and personally, and take the steps they need to take to get there.'

The worst errors she sees dentists committing are in terms of finances and budgeting; time management is another problem. 'So many dentists don't use their time effectively.

'They say that if you put a frog in boiling water, it will jump out; but if the water heats up slowly, it stays in and boils alive. I see dentists in a similar position: gradually things build up – more patients, more demanding patients, more pressure – and I can show them how to take the heat out.' Dr Jane Lelean, an accredited coach and former dentist, knows all about the pressures of running a dental practice, because she has learned the hard way herself. She has now trained as a coach and, having sold her dental practice, devotes herself full time to coaching, lecturing and advising businesses and individuals in several fields and all over the world.

Jane Lelean's top tips

- Be clear about what you want and why
- Recognise that if there's a problem in the practice ultimately you are responsible both for the cause and the solution, and you can solve it
- Make sure you have fun doing something outside your work
- Do something honestly and live by your values
- Work with a great coach
- Read *The e-myth revisited – why most small businesses don't work and what to do about it* – by Michael Gerber
- Invest in yourself and your team

They could be more efficient and following on from that they could get their staff doing more. They need to take time to decide what to do with their lives and their practice,' she said. Marketing, too is a challenge for dentists – 'they are great at what they do and want the best for their patients, but they don't know how to communicate that in the patients' own language.' Finally, the cardinal error: lack of leadership. 'Most principals think their job is to be a dentist. In fact their job is as a business owner. If they are to run a business, they need leadership skills. So often dentists run their practice by default, the way I did,' argues Jane.

NLP

While she was being coached and transforming her business, she gradually involved her staff more, delegating and unwittingly developing a coaching culture within the practice – and then she discovered neuro-linguistic programming (NLP). NLP is an approach that recognises how your brain receives and interprets information via your five senses (neuro) and your language patterns internal and spoken (linguistic) influence and control your behaviours (programming). Other people have described NLP as the practical implementation and application of psychology or the 'user's handbook for your mind'.

A friend invited her along to a 'firewalking experience' with the famous US life coach Tony Robbins. 'It was incredible – within three hours 10,000 of us were walking on burning coals,' she recalled. 'He said it was all about NLP and how we can do far more than we give ourselves credit for. It intrigued me that simple changes in the way I thought about myself could have such an impact.' She signed up to learn more, and has become a practitioner, master practitioner, NLP coach and trains trainers. NLP is now an integral part of her work. 'It's so powerful it permeates everything I do,' Jane explained. 'NLP looks at our brains, neurofunctions and the language we use, and how it affects our behaviour. It's about how we represent the world, the voices in our heads, our feelings, sensations and language patterns – what we say to ourselves and what we then do.' One of the presuppositions of NLP is that choice is better than no choice. Jane gets her

clients to see that they do have a choice, particularly useful for dentists, she finds, as they often feel they are trapped without a choice. 'I help them see they do have a choice and that the outcome can be different,' she said.

NLP can also offer flexibility, different ways to approach a situation till you get the outcome you want. 'Often we notice people get stuck in an entrenched way of doing things and it doesn't get them to where they want to be. I'm able to show them alternative ways,' she explained.

Thanks to the internet and the phone, Jane's clients now are based all over the world and include graphic designers, marketing consultants, physiotherapists, doctors, opticians, dentists, the motor trade, banks, financiers, supermarkets and schools, most of whom approach her having heard of her work. She has also worked with a number of image consultants who, like dentists, tend to be small owner-manager businesses, great at what they do but not running their businesses effectively. The work varies from speaking events, group coaching, and coaching face-to-face or on the phone. Jane also spends a great deal of time honing her skills, reading, attending courses, and being coached herself. A typical week for her – and there's not really any such thing – might include face-to-face work, visiting a practice and working with the team, a presentation to a group of small businesses, and a lot of networking.

'The beauty of coaching is that it's an approach – you don't need to know the nitty gritty of the business you are working with,' she said. However, her own experience as a dentist has given her a special insight into that area, and she specialises in coaching dental practices, enabling them to achieve success in all aspects of running their business, from leadership, through to finances, time management, customer services and building a great team. 'Coaching is a journey, it's seldom a quick fix,' she explained. It can allow us to transform things rapidly but there's the whole gamut of training in all aspects of the practice. Most clients stay with her for the long haul, though sometimes she's asked in for a single session, for example on conflict management. 'Once they've had that, they often ask for help in other areas,' she added.

Health coaching

A different part of Jane's work is health coaching – 'fantastic because it's pure NLP,' she said. 'One of the presuppositions of NLP is that the mind and body are one system, so that if we take that presupposition to be true, we discover that the signs and symptoms of an illness are messages from clients' 'inner wisdom' that they are ignoring, so a nagging headache, for example, may be your body telling you something.' Jane is then able to show the client how to start finding out what that message is from their inner wisdom, and as they start to address it, the signs and symptoms disappear. Sometimes these are a metaphor for what is going on at a psychological level, for example, eczema may be an indication that something is 'under your skin' and irritating you. Jane has worked successfully with patients with chronic

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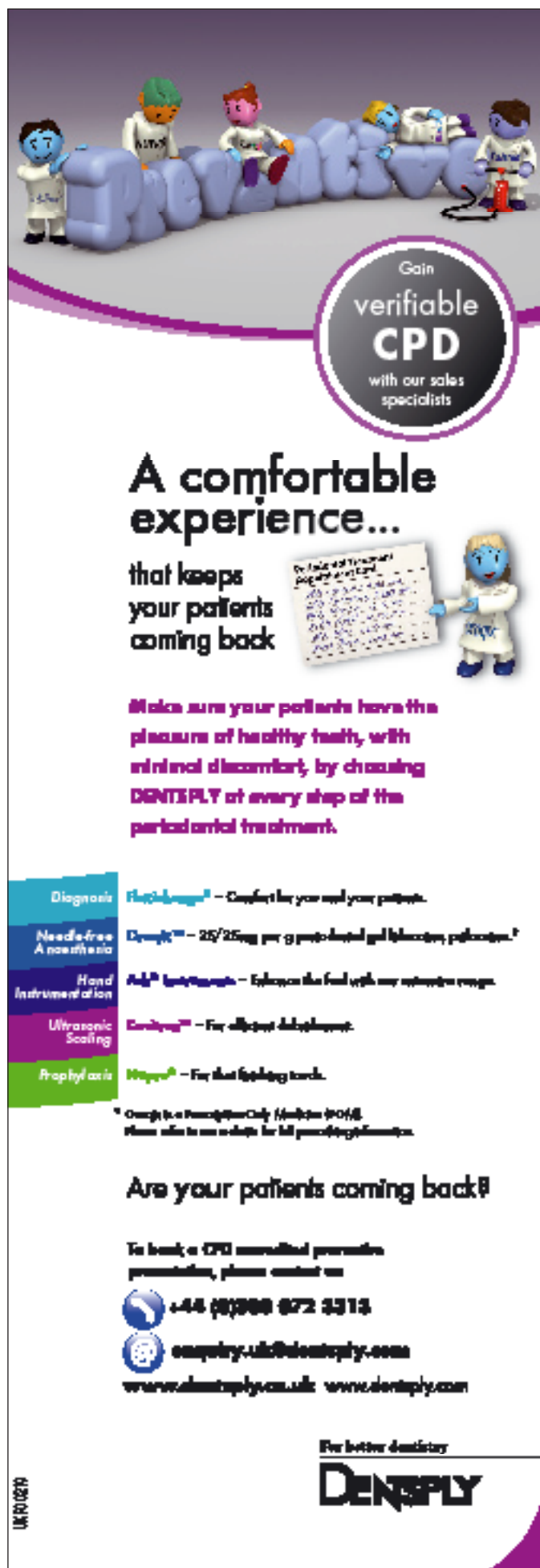
conditions including diabetes, Sjogren's syndrome, hypertension, eyesight disorders, as well as trauma patients, and has had some dramatic results, including a client who was suddenly able to walk again after a riding accident. 'There's a psychological component that when we begin to acknowledge a problem, we are able to start to get well, and also use the body's natural defences to heal itself,' she said.

Turning points

Best decision? 'Employing a business coach,' says Jane. Another really good move was to utilise free days, focus days and buffer days to enable her to spend time on her business, create a strategy from deciding what she wanted to do, and how she was going to get there. Involving her staff more was key to moving forward and ultimately into becoming a coach herself.

Her worst error, looking back, was probably a dentist's classic. 'I didn't know the difference between delegation and abdication of responsibility. I thought in the early days I was delegating, but I was abdicating responsibility by handing over the running of my business to someone else. I didn't have a structure so I was still at the helm.' Jane had a steep learning curve. Having given away all responsibility she then had to claw it back and for a long time was reluctant to trust anyone else with responsibility within the practice. 'I had to learn to involve other people to take on what I didn't need to do and to build in a reporting structure,' she explained. On the plus side, experience has taught her some valuable lessons. 'I have learned to trust my instincts, which are generally correct, and to take more time off. I found when I did less dentistry my practice actually became more profitable. I started working smarter not longer, organised my day differently, and taking time off has meant my batteries were recharging and there was space in my life to be more creative.'

When Jane finally took the leap away from dentistry into full-time coaching it was a risk, but one she's very glad she took. All her experience – both as a clinician and as a business owner – has come together to enable her not only to change her own life, but that of her clients. And she is having a ball. 'I have so much fun it's unbelievable. I love dentistry, but I don't miss it.' **PD**



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