“In order for a business owner to be an effective leader, he or she must delegate”

The idea that in this day and age dentists can keep the business side of the practice in-house is considered by some as no longer possible.

In this interview with Dental Tribune consultant Andrea Greer re- flects on how dentistry has changed, the most common business mis- takes dentists make and what can be done to improve business educa- tion for dentists.

Andrea Greer has over 25 years of experience in dentistry and since 2013 has worked as a dental consultant and speaker. In an interview with Dental Tribune Online, she shares some of her experience and ideas about the business side of the industry.

In what capacity have you been working within dentistry?

I like to say that I fell into dentistry by accident! After moving from Washington state to Colorado without a job; a friend asked if I would be interested in training as a dental assistant, and I jumped at the prospect of a paycheck! I fell in love with dentistry and immediately started prerequisites for hygiene school. Eventually, I transitioned into office management and then software training and light consulting. Ultimately, in 2013, I achieved a long-term goal of becoming a full-time consultant for a well-re-pected national firm in the U.S. In January this year, I struck out on my own as a consultant and speaker, and I am loving it!

How do you think the business of dentistry has changed over the last two decades?

In a hundred ways! When I was practicing hygiene in Colorado, implant dentistry and integration of practice software and electronic health records were the frontier we were navigating. At that time, running a dental prac- tice from within was completely manageable, and we had all the time we needed to stay on top of the systems we had in place. However, with time we have seen technology, student debt, patient ex- pection, science, materials, em- ployee expectation, insurance, regulations, marketing, connectiv- ity and work–life balance shift in drastic ways. I don’t believe it is possible for a business owner to expect to keep it all in-house any longer. It is costlier, and there is a greater chance of mismanage- ment. I believe that, in order for a business owner to be an effective leader, he or she must delegate and outsource tasks and systems in the practice.

You have met with many dentists over the years. When it comes to the difficulties of running a business, have there been any recurring issues?

In so many practices, there is a lack of general understanding of putting systems in place and then creating a culture of accountable- ness. Basic leadership skills are missing from our education sys- tem, so when a business owner is challenged with controlling the chaotic schedule or helping his or her team understand how to an- swer the phone, or even making sure that the money owed to the practice is collected, he or she does not know how to train and moti- vate the team to accomplish these tasks. And it is never just one thing! There are always multiple systems out of place and lacking, and it becomes overwhelming for dentists to try and implement suc- cessfully—they just want to prac- tice dentistry! Eventually, chaos ensues, and all the systems fail. That’s what I usually hear from a dentist.

How do you think practice owners would be best served in under- standing what it means to run a business?

I believe that there is a huge need for more business exposure in medical and dental education.

I have heard it said that the dental curricula does not allow time for business education, although some have shared with me that this is an excuse to avoid change. Can a single semester (which is still not enough) of basic dental practice business be so difficult to carve out? Or what if business courses were re- quired as prerequisites for dental school? Help students understand basic economic principles for the self-employed, human resources do’s and don’ts, etc. That would be a great start.

What are some of the most promi- nent business mistakes you have seen dental practice owners make over the years?

Waiting too long to ask for help. Often, the excuse for the new business owner is budgeting, and I completely understand that. However, carving out the means to pay for help early on will save the business owner so much money, time and heartache down the road! I have been around some of the best people in dentistry for decades—consultants, speakers, teachers, and business figures in general. All of us have many, many testimonials from clients who recognized the benefit of early on and help within a few years of starting their businesses and have been successful in imple- menting what they have been taught. And yet they often say they wish they had contacted us sooner. Just like decay is easier to fix when it is small and doesn’t hurt, hiring an outside source early to help you determine what to put in place and how to do that will be the best investment in yourself and your business.

Dental practice owners make a huge amount of mistakes, and possibly the biggest mistake is that the dentist does not understand the overhead.

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For someone who might be strug- gling with the business side of the practice, what would your advice be?

Seek education from reputa- ble sources. Connect with people who have been in the industry for many years and are successful. Receiving advice from someone who has experience can provide you with the solid facts and training needed to improve your business and the adage “you get what you pay for” still rings true!

Thank you very much for this inter- view.

About: Andrea Greer has been working in the field of dentistry for over 25 years and since 2013 has worked as a consultant and speaker, helping a number of prac- tices and dentists improve their business and reach new levels of success.

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