“Practice management is a full-time job”

An interview with dentist and author Dr Michael Young, UK

Dentists who want to manage their own practice are faced with a reality that Dr Michael Young knows. The former dentist from the UK recently published his experiences in a book entitled Managing a Dental Practice the Genghis Khan Way, which was awarded the Bookseller/Diagram Prize for Oddest Title of the Year. DTI Group Editor Daniel Zimmermann had some questions for him about his book, the importance of planning and applying business tactics to dental practice.

Daniel Zimmermann: Dr Young, your book recently won the Bookseller/Diagram Prize for Oddest Title of the Year. It is now ranked with previous winners, such as The Big Book of Lesbian Horse Stories and American Bottom Archaeology. Were you surprised by the nomination?

Dr Michael Young: Actually, I didn’t even know that such a prize existed. I was even more surprised when I won. I must thank my editor, Gillian Nineham, and all of her team at Radcliffe Publishing in the UK for having had faith in my initial draft manuscript, and for letting me stick with the title.

What inspired the title and was your book planned this way from the beginning?

I figured that I wanted my book to be different, and calling it How to Manage a Dental Practice wasn’t going to make it stand out from the crowd. From the outset, I had this idea about a dental practice being managed in a very direct, hands-on, almost ruthless way because that was how I eventually managed my practice. So I came up with the idea of Genghis Khan.

In the West, Genghis Khan is considered to be a dictator and brutal conqueror. Why did you choose his name as main inspiration?

As you can imagine, I came across mostly negative perceptions of Genghis Khan and his military campaigns. However, tucked away amongst all the bad press, there were some positive perceptions of him. His military strategy fitted nicely with the Genghis Khan I had in mind. He seems to have operated a meritocracy-based system, acknowledging and rewarding the skills and attributes of his soldiers. Rather than keeping them in the dark about what he was planning, he explained his strategy and challenged the plan of attack, positioning, directing, and other professionals, to find as many people, both dentists and other professionals, to find out as much as I could about how to manage, before, not after. I would plan, which is what I failed to do all those years ago. I was thinking in a practice as an associate and one of the other associates announced that he was buying a practice. At around the same time, another dentist I knew told me that an orthodontist friend of his was working evenings in another practice and that this practice was up for sale. Without thinking of any of the things he urged my readers to do, two months later I found myself the owner of a practice in a city I knew very little about. I had not talked things over with my wife. I didn’t have a business plan, I hadn’t researched the market and, worst of all, I didn’t stick to a budget. I was lucky though because along the way I gained a new wife, a very business-minded woman, who changed the way I thought and made me realise how important it was to manage my practice professionally.

Your career in dentistry spans over 25 years. What are you doing at the moment and what are your plans for the future?

I now think of myself as a writer and author, so I spend much of my time writing, fiction and non-fiction. I’m also currently waiting for the results of the final module I took this year which means studying with the Open University in Milton Keynes in the UK. I’ve been studying with them since around 1998.

Actually, there are plans for a second book. It will be a sort of sequel, as it will be offering advice on running a practice in a practice in a much greater detail and depth than I covered in Managing a Dental Practice the Genghis Khan Way. I am also interested in the use of social networking sites as a way of doing a new business and promoting a business.

Thank you very much for this interview.