S
ould the people who at-
tend our dental practices be considered simply as patients, or are they, like every-
one else who uses any other business, customers as well? The answer to this question is fundamental to your chances of long-term survival as a dentist in practice.

Setting the standards
I am sitting in the lounge of a hotel in South Africa writing this article. It is 6:15am, the time when my mind is clear and there are no disturbances. Then the hotel manager walks in. At 6:15am, I hand over and go out for a round of golf. The boss sets the standards, and everyone else delivers—this is why I come back here every year.

Setting aside for the moment the current recession, think of your high-street bank and consider what happens when you go at lunchtime to deposit your weekly takings. Think of the 10 to 20 minutes you stand in line, watching and listening as a cashier sits counting a mountain of coins from someone else’s deposit or phoning head office to deal with a customer’s query or, more likely, complaint. Then think of your feelings when just a few short months ago you picked up your Sunday newspaper and read that the bank had made billions of pounds in profit that quarter. Then think about the huge bonuses being earned by banking executives. Then think of your feelings when just a few years ago the notion of patient service wasn’t even a twin-
kle in the eye of a medical pro-
ession. Then it was born but moved on, and service encompassed not just excellence in treatment but aftercare. It includes dealing with complaints, or better still, pre-empting them. In short, it is the whole story of keeping your patients/customers satisfied. It is now about supreme customer service.

Supreme customer service is essential in attaining market supremacy over your col-
leagues, and is achieved by re-
defining the role of service within your practice using cut-
ting-edge service thinking. It is about attracting, courting and marrying the customer to your business, establishing a mutu-
ally beneficial relationship, and most important, keeping the customer and avoiding a di-
verse which is costly in terms of lost revenue and goodwill. The desired outcome is to have as many patients/customers as you can manage comfortably who will become loyal, lifelong advocates of your practice and your personal excellence.

My next article will deal with how this can be achieved. □

Supreme customer service is about attracting the customer to your business.