In our last article we discussed the notion of the patient as customer, and of delivering excellent customer service in practice. Creating superior patient/customer service has to start with the right approach from the top. The focus which you, as practice leader need to develop is that the intention of every employee should be to have every patient/customer eager to entrust their dental care business to your practice. If the practice’s employees are going to say and do the right things and behave in the proper manner towards all patients and colleagues, management needs to be equipped to provide them with correct guidance.

Establishing market supremacy

Although only one of us can be the best, every one of us can strive to be the best. The road to service and market supremacy (and why would you want to settle for less?) starts with pleasing one patient/customer at a time. This approach is what defines Starbucks whose stated strategy is literally to delight its customers one cup of coffee at a time, and then to repeat this with each successive customer experience. Starbucks strives for excellence – however, it’s important to understand that. Although excellence is a necessary condition, it is insufficient. It does not in itself guarantee superiority over one’s competition. Superiority, and by extension, supremacy, has to be built one moment at a time, one experience at a time. Each interaction with a patient has to better than that offered by your colleagues in the area, and this requires never-ending improvement so that each successive customer experience is better than the last one they enjoyed at your practice. Enjoyment at a dental practice is possible if you and your staff have the correct focus and in order to continuously reset the benchmark to which you aspire you need to have a holistic approach to service.

A holistic approach

To achieve supremacy one has to appreciate the interconnectivity of the fundamental concept of service – every employee, every department, every system, every action has to be interconnected. Think what happens when your marketing approach has brought in a new patient who requires extensive periodontal treatment. Think how this patient is sweetly welcomed by your receptionist, seduced by your modern surroundings, charmingly made to feel at home by your nurse, brilliantly diagnosed by yourself, treated with skill by your hygienist, and then made to wait four weeks for a treatment plan by your visiting periodontist. Then remember that the level of service offered to that patient is the culmination of all the actions made by all the people at your practice and that this service is only as good as its weakest link. Then think what Anne Robinson would do with the weakest link, and take action – retrain, or replace.

Your mission

The level of service you offer will be defined by how you see yourself, and by redefining your purpose in society. If you see yourself as a skilful dentist able to deliver restorations, and you see your purpose as alleviating pain and preventing disease, that’s a start but not sufficient. If you understand that your ability to deliver those excellent restorations is not dependent on technique alone but is a function of a much bigger picture, only then will your mission be fulfilled.