Do leaders and managers have the same characteristics? No, they do not!

The Sceptic presents

The case for... and against... Procrastination

Apathy

We would have invited you to the next meeting of the Apathy Society but it has been postponed indefinitely. Apathy is the polar opposite of productivity, and its hallmark is not getting things done—putting them off as long as possible. Which is procrastinating. An obviously undesirable characteristic. People who procrastinate don’t make decisions quickly, if at all. They do not believe in the maxim ‘never put off till tomorrow what you can do today’. They believe rather that the longer you delay, the more clarity of vision will be afforded to you. They believe that big problems today will become smaller problems tomorrow, even smaller next week, and will probably have disappeared completely the week after. They work harder at finding excuses not to do a job than actually doing the job. They are the despair of all about them, the kind of children who drive parents crazy, the kind of staff who get poor references. They are daydreamers and ditherers.

Do something!

When should ‘don’t just stand there, do something’ become ‘don’t just do something, stand there’? When there is no obvious reason for doing something. When there is the risk that doing something will cause more harm than good. Consider the world four years ago: Saddam Hussein was still in power, a dangerous violent, vicious despot ready to destroy the world with his weapons of mass destruction. ‘We must do something’, screamed the moral majority, so they did—they invaded Iraq, toppled the despot, and created turmoil in the process.

We dentists, when unsure what to do, should do nothing. We should procrastinate. We should say to the patient ‘I cannot see an obvious cause of your problem, and therefore I cannot see an obvious solution. There are things that I can do, and each of them has consequences. If I don’t do anything, then there may be other consequences, which I will spell out for you. What would you like me to do or not do?’ There is always one thing you must always do and that is to have a good reason for not doing anything, especially if you need later to justify your lack of action (inaction). Inaction may be procrastination but may not be the same as apathy; it may be the same thing as sensible or prudent caution.

A case study

Consider the following case: a patient, Miss M, attends with a severe toothache. Only problem is she doesn’t know which tooth it is coming from. ‘I think its top left somewhere, but it could be the lower, I’m not sure.’ You examine; no cavities, no visible cusp fracture, no negative response to thermal testing, nothing untoward on x-ray. So what do you do? Extract the tooth? Which one? Fill it? Which surface? Prescribe antibiotics? Probably—that’s what most medical professionals do when they don’t know what else to do. What are the consequences? Possible relief. Possible allergic reaction. Possible anaphylaxis (very unlikely). A high risk of sensitisation to the antibiotic, and possible susceptibility to superbugs.

By doing nothing and explaining why, the pain may possibly resolve, may possibly get worse, but either way will probably present with a clearer picture. They only thing certain is that doing the wrong thing is worse than doing nothing.

Are you for or against procrastination?

Email jury@dentaltribune.uk.com and let us have your views.