Profit with integrity
Glenys Bridges on rules, women and relationships

For 2011 the Girl Guide movement has placed female empowerment centre stage. They are focusing upon enabling girls to develop into confident women, able to fulfill a valuable role in both society and the workplace. In dental workplaces, the role and influence of women has developed significantly over the last 20 years. In the past, what was perceived as the “feminine” ability to nurture and to be empathetic were considered to be weak or trivial. Whereas today, the softer skills in managing teams, leading, mentoring and developing trust among clients are of make-or-break importance.

Carol Gillian’s book, In a Different Voice (1982), reports on a time when women were struggling to find their place in the workplace. She describes how the ability to be empathetic, to listen and the tendency to put people before results were not valued. Gillian discovered that men and women played differently as boys and girls. These games led to normative behaviours later observed in the workplace.

Teamwork is a core value of all successful dental teams. Teams need built-in soft skills such as communication, listening, and rapport building. What we have learned over the last 20 years is that by combining ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ traits we create a longer-lasting and more profitable work environment. Here are some of the ways combined gender traits play a role in modern dental teams:

1. Teamwork is now the norm. Teamwork calls on skills of leadership, mentorship and development of trust.
2. Mentoring and Coaching programs are becoming more widely used. Their success has led to practices developing formal mentoring programmes and coaching processes for all new employees.
3. Practices are making more use of self-assessments to help people learn more about their strengths and weaknesses. (See www.strengthsfinder.com)
4. Win/Win leadership approaches are becoming more popular. In the past the goal was ‘we win/you lose’. In fact the kind of manager who got results regardless of the people s/he left behind was admired. Today, we search for consensus and opportunities to build relationships through win/win.
5. Social Consciousness. Many organisations and companies look beyond their products to the impact of that product on the community and the planet. Being environmentally, internationally and socially aware is an essential aspect of ethical practice.

Feminine traits have set the pace for a workplace that no longer eats people up, but welcomes them as individuals with a heart and soul. The rules have definitely changed. Now with increasing pressure on all dental professionals to strike an ethical balance between masculine traits (such as competitiveness and profitability) with feminine and the scene is well and truly set for meaningful teamwork – a bi-gender approach results in profit with integrity.