

Recession Proof Your Practice! *Professionalism*

By Cathy Jameson

John and I were both raised by wonderful parents who grew up in the depression and during World War II. John's father was a member of the United States Army. My dad was—and will always be—a United States Marine. Both sets of our parents were raised by hard-working people who labored long, hard hours to put food on the table. However, there was never a lack of love. They may have only eaten bread and milk for supper, but grace and a giving of thanks was a part of every meal—and every day. Our parents carried that into our childhood homes—and John and I have carried that into our own home—and into our business even now.

My father is a practicing architect. My mother was a school administrator. John's father was a working rancher and his mother a vocational home-economics teacher. They lived and breathed professionalism in every encounter, every situation—and with every person. Whether they were at their place of employment, at school activities, church functions, or civic responsibilities, they treated all people with professionalism, kindness and grace. They practiced the "Golden Rule"—"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you".

Why this long personal introduction? Why this subject? How does professionalism relate to "Recession-Proofing" your practice? There has never been a time when professionalism, care and attention to detail have been more important. Courtesy in each interaction with your patients may determine whether or not a person comes to you, stays with you, says "yes" to treatment and refers to you.

In these changing economic times, it is imperative that each of you focuses on doing the best you can do—and that applies to each person on the team. Each person can make or break a relationship with a patient. Every patient is critical to the health and well-being of your practice. Each person—each patient—each encounter.

Review your systems and ask yourselves, "What are we doing well?" KEEP ON DOING THOSE THINGS. Then ask yourselves a more critical question, "How can we do everything we are doing a little bit better?" It's the little things that make the big difference. When you improve each of the systems within your practice—even slightly—the accumulation of

improvements will make a substantial difference in the practice as a whole.

The Younger Generation

Being a professional in all that you do will help you to attract and retain quality team members. This, perhaps more than anything else, is critical to the stability and development of your organization—your practice.

There is much conversation at dental meetings, in articles and books, and in the today's professional management literature regarding the changing work ethic of people in the workforce today. There are those who believe that the younger generation is more interested in what they are doing for the weekend than what they are doing at work in the present moment. There is much conversation regarding the lack of effort put into producing an excellent result.

However, we have not found that to be true in our own organization (at Jameson Management) and, while the data shows a difference in work style, research has *not* shown a difference in work ethic or values. We have team members who range in age from 23 to 62 at Jameson Management. We would not say that any one person works harder or puts in more effort, energy and commitment than another. We have awesome young people who have excellent work ethics and who put 100% into their responsibilities. So, it's difficult for me to hear people of my age category claim that "the younger generation" has little work ethic.

People—no matter their age—are looking for more than a paycheck in today's workplace and this includes the younger generation, too. People are looking for fulfillment in their position. Talented people will come to an organization, be productive there, and stay there if they are challenged, and if they find fulfillment in the work itself. While past generations held tightly to excellent work ethics, they were also driven by the need to put food on the table in very difficult times. The generations who are in the workplace today have surpassed this survival mode, for the most part. Certainly putting food on the table is still a motivator, but finding fulfillment in the workplace is more and more of a motivator since survival needs are usually met with excess being available. It has been said that today's worker usually earns more by Tuesday afternoon of the first week of the month than their grandfather earned in an entire month. Peter Drucker calls today's worker the "Knowledge Worker"—a person who owns his/her skills, which are transferable to many businesses. The Knowledge Worker of today can pick up his/her skills and move quite easily.

And so, as leaders, each of you wants to find and employ talented people who will put forth the necessary effort and commitment to help your practices/businesses to grow and thrive. You must create a healthy work environment where the grass is not greener anywhere else—where people will come, be committed to your vision, and stay. Creation of this environment starts with the owner, leader, CEO—you.

So, be a professional. Be a leader for your employees. Do the following.

- (1) Do what you say you will do.
- (2) Let people be able to count on you.
- (3) Lead by example.
- (4) Be honest.
- (5) Lead from a place of integrity.
- (6) Be gracious. Treat others with respect and courtesy.
- (7) Honor your teammates, your patients and your colleagues.
- (8) Think of others first. Give. In the giving is the ultimate of receiving.
- (9) Speak from a place of kindness. Think before you speak. Are your words coming from a place of love or hatred? Kindness or cruelty? Will your words help or hurt? Are you paying attention to what you are saying? Do you care?
- (10) Let the clarity of vision for your ultimate purpose shine through all that you do.

Be a role model. If you expect your team members to behave in a professional manner they must see you modeling that behavior. If you do not follow through; if you do not show respect for others; if you do not live each and every day with a positive attitude; if you do not exemplify joy, passion and energy in and for your work-how can you expect the people who work for you to do or be any more than you?

If you don't return phone calls; if you don't honor your colleagues; if you do not do what you say you will do; if you are not professional-how can you expect your employees to be professional?

Your Practice: A Reflection of You

Your practice will always reflect you—the owner, the CEO, the leader. What kind of a leader are you? Are you proud of yourself? Or, can you honestly say that you have room to improve and are willing and able to do so? The effort put forth to live a truly professional life will bring you to a place of fulfillment, peace and joy—the ultimate reward for work well done. Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus say, in their book, Leaders: Strategies

for Taking Charge, “Managers are the people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right things”.

At the end of the day, will your colleagues say that you did what you said you would do? Will they say that they trusted you? Live a life in which you are proud of yourself and proud of what you do—each and every day. Work at developing a healthy sense of self-regard. It is from this place of caring for yourself and loving yourself that you will be able to reach out to others with an even greater ability to care and to love.



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