

## *Riding the Wave of Change* What Got You Here; Won't Get You There!

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My many years of coaching dental professionals have taught me there is one primary talent that impacts a dental practice's ability to achieve whatever growth and development goals it may have. This talent is your team's ability to continually make positive changes (adjustments) in the way you do things. Creative ideas require action in order to turn them into results for your team, your patients, and your practice.

In theory, it's simple to understand and accept the concept of "CHANGE." But when it comes to actually doing things a little differently and breaking free of existing habits, people often struggle or simply remain stuck by reverting back to familiar activities. Why does this talent elude so many work environments? Why is it so difficult for people to break free of existing routines to implement new ways of operating and serving customers? If change is so vital to our professional success, then why do teams actively resist it so strongly?

The answer lies deep within the complex inner recesses of our primal brains. Within our minds we have two opposing instincts that are constantly competing for our attention. The first instinct is to find our greatest comfort and safety in the familiarity of the known because human beings are creatures of habit. This causes team members to want to hold onto familiar routines and procedures at work. At the same time we have a somewhat conflicting emotional need for variety and stimulation in order to feel excitement and passion in our lives. This can

only come from the pursuit of new ideas, new learning, and strategies. The first instinct is necessary for survival in the wild animal kingdom; unfortunately it has little use for us in our business world. In fact its presence in the workplace can be quite counterproductive. This primal characteristic is why so many offices today find themselves stuck and unable to mobilize the critical mass of people required to implement something new, better, or different within their practice.

It is important to realize the very successes that got us where we are today will eventually become the shackles that impede us from further growth in the future. Habits become shackles! Even your good habits will eventually imprison you if you hold onto them for too long because the world around us is evolving so quickly. To break free of our ways, we must develop the habit of "leaving the familiar behind." We must continuously break free emotionally and psychologically from stagnant activities. Our ability to thrive in a world of continual change requires that every member of our team develop the skill of "normalizing the new." If you want to get to second base, you must be willing to take your foot off first base. In his book, *If It Ain't Broke, Break It*, Robert Kreigel states it this way: "In the face of accelerating change in every area of our lives, the conventional thinking that guided us in decades past is outdated. It is now clear that conventional wisdom that worked in the calm seas of the past won't work in today's turbulent, rapidly changing environment."

Experienced dental teams who hold onto outdated systems, approaches, and philosophies will tend to run into more and more roadblocks as time goes on. If the ice is melting and you've still got your skates on, you will become less and less effective and more and more frustrated over time. Resisting change is like driving your car but insisting on looking into your rearview mirror to steer it. This approach is dangerous in life and in business; it renders you out of control since you are not acting in accordance with the realities of the changing terrain ahead of you.



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The following are simple but effective tools you can use for keeping your practice un-stuck and on the cusp of innovation:

- 1 Have creativity meetings that are focused on enhancement rather than fixing problems.
- 2 Research an innovative new idea. Present it at team meetings. Discuss, customize, and implement it.
- 3 Attend courses and implement new ideas.
- 4 Read journals and implement new ideas.
- 5 Explore new ways of doing things that are already working well in your practice.
- 6 Poll your patients to find out how they are thinking, feeling, and changing ... and make necessary changes.
- 7 Poll each other to find out what is working, what isn't, how everyone feels—and make necessary changes.
- 8 Adopt a business philosophy of never being satisfied with the status quo.
- 9 Explore new ideas with curiosity ... and not through your defensive, self-preservation mechanisms.
- 10 Modernize the look and feel of your practice décor.
- 11 Become technically proficient and offer the most up-to-date clinical services.
- 12 Find a mentor, and consider becoming a mentor. (Teaching others is the highest form of learning.)
- 13 Become involved in a study club. Network and learn about other people's approaches to practicing dentistry and running their businesses. Customize and implement some of their ideas.

Many of us find change difficult, so we drag our feet and avoid it at all costs. We tell ourselves that we like our routines and approach to life just the way they are, and that becomes our justification for inaction. Why rock the boat? Yet life gets stale and we yearn for growth and newness. In order to embrace change, you must change the way you look at change. Move away from the panic and fear that grips you. Change is an opportunity to create something new for you and your practice so that your life at work becomes more fulfilling. How wonderful is that?

It takes a tribal mentality for a group of people to simultaneously embrace a new idea and implement it into their daily routine. If we are to thrive in the 21st century, it will be up to everyone to become flexible and disciplined towards new strategic ideas. Resistance to change is nothing more than people's way of justifying their usual ways of doing things. I would urge you to become used to change, because it's inevitable.

Condition your team to have a bias towards action. Get stuff done! Don't just talk about it. Do it! Explore new things ... take risks ... run towards your fears. And most importantly; be excited about it! Involve everyone in the decision-making process. Trust their opinions and respect their feelings, but keep moving forward. Keep exploring your horizons; and remember, as Eric Hoffer said, "In a world of change, the learners shall inherit the earth, while the learned shall find themselves perfectly suited for a world that no longer exists." Choose the path of continuous creative innovation and you will experience the full joy of our wonderful profession of dentistry.

Remember: What got you here; won't get you there!  
Happy Dentistry!



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## QUOTE-WORTHY

*“To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often.”*

*– Winston Churchill*

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*– Larry M. Guzzardo*