

Eleven tips for success in your dental clinic

Part I: SWOT analysis and loyal patients

Author_Dr Anna Maria Yiannikos, Germany & Cyprus

_During this journey towards business growth and educational development with this new series on tips for success in your dental clinic, I am going to explore various factors of our success and professional development as dental practitioners. I will share with you the knowledge I have gained within the past 24 years of managing and evolving my clinic, so you can be one step ahead and avoid the mistakes I made, starting with the first tip: know yourself, which entails acknowledging your mistakes. It is an extremely useful and sometimes painful process.

How can we really learn the areas in which we need to improve ourselves (clinics) and in which we are advanced? The answer is through the use of an essential tool we ought to use every six to 12 months, SWOT analysis. With this tool, we will be able to discover and recognise our strengths and weaknesses as both dentists and individuals, as well as identify opportunities for and threats to our clinics. Let us analyse this a little bit further.

_Strengths

What do you consider as strengths, as your competitive advantages in your dental clinic?
Do you offer a large variety of services that fulfil your patients' needs?

Can your patients find you and book an appointment easily with your clinic?
Is your clinic characterised by high-technology and do your patients appreciate this?
Is your dental clinic in a convenient location, allowing your patients to find you and reach you with ease?

_Weaknesses

What are the areas that need improvement at your dental clinic?
Are your payment options inflexible?
Do patients have to wait for more than 5 minutes for their appointment in the waiting area? Is the clinic decoration old and out of fashion? Should you change it?

_Opportunities

What are current social, financial or other trends that you could benefit from? For example, the demand for invisible braces for adults could be useful for an orthodontist to explore. The general dentist could consider including an aesthetic treatment based on the latest trends, such as whitening or restoration with white aesthetic material.

_Threats

Is there anything happening in your environment that could be detrimental to your clinic? For example, a larger and newer clinic is to be opened in the neighbourhood or an existing competitor clinic is installing better technological equipment than that in your clinic. Other threats include political and environmental ones, such as an unstable political situation.

As a conclusion, it is evident that performing a SWOT analysis for your dental clinic will allow you to be proactive in your marketing strategies, since you will have the information necessary to develop effective strategies for the promotion of your clinic.

The second tip of this article is realising the importance of having patients who are not just satisfied but loyal. In order to understand the significance of this, let us explore the major difference between these two categories.

_Satisfied patient

A satisfied patient is one who comes to the clinic for treatment and is not unhappy with the treatment or the service provided, but when a friend, a relative or a colleague proposes that he or she visit another dentist would do so. Such a patient too would not refer the clinic to others or tell others about your good treatment.

_Loyal patient

A loyal patient, however, is one who will spread through word of mouth what a wonderful dentist you are, and what a brilliant scientist, advising others to visit your clinic and promoting your well-being. This is a patient who comes to your clinic regularly, is appreciative of your treatment and demonstrates this.

It is important to understand that we do not deliver a service in isolation, but as part of a culture, the culture of our clinics through the experience that our patients receive. They do not expect us to be the best just in our health care industry. We have to be the best, period. Our patients will not compare us only with other dentists but with all the services they receive and have experienced, such as in a hotel or a restau-



rant. Our competitors are anyone with whom our patients can compare us. People have expectations regarding how they should and want to be treated and these become the standard by which they judge their experiences.

When nothing in particular about an experience stands out, this indicates that one was merely satisfied. It takes something memorable to turn an ordinary experience into something special. Dissatisfaction comes from something bad that one experienced and remembers; loyalty is created through memorable things that happened that one did not expect. If our treatment is not memorable, why would patients continue coming to us?

Another essential question is how do we establish the areas in which we are lacking and in which we should improve our clinics to increase the group of loyal patients? The answer of course is nothing but obvious: by asking. We can obtain patients' opinions through satisfaction surveys.

Several studies have highlighted the growing impact of patient satisfaction on the business success of dental clinics. In a more recent study, those patients surveyed cited being unhappy with their dentist as being their main reason for changing dentists.

Our goal is to discover what the most important factors for patients are in order to foster their loyalty, as well as determine the areas in which we are underperforming in order to improve ourselves and the treatment we offer our patients.

The two tips provided in this article are a good start for all dentists in order to begin the improvement and evolution of our clinics, as well as ourselves. In the next part, I will offer two new tips that will reveal opportunities and potential of your dental clinic. Until then, remember that you are not only the dentist in your clinic, but also the manager and the leader._

contact



Dr Anna Maria Yiannikos
Adjunct Faculty Member of AALZ
at RWTH Aachen University
Campus, Germany
DDS, LSO, MSc, MBA

dba@yianniksodental.com
www.dba-aalz.com

Kurz & bündig

Im ersten Teil der Serie "11 Tipps zum wünschenswerten Erfolg in Zahnkliniken" werden die ersten beiden Ratschläge vorgestellt, um Anfängerfehler zu verhindern und langfristigen Erfolg zu erzielen.

Der erste Tipp stellt eine intensive Auseinandersetzung mit dem Praxisinhaber selbst, seinen Fähigkeiten, Schwächen und Stärken dar. Dafür ist eine sogenannte SWOT-Analyse erforderlich, die alle sechs bis zwölf Monate erhoben werden sollte und Chancen sowie mögliche Bedrohungen sowohl für Zahnarzt als auch Privatpersonen aufzeigt. Diese werden wie folgt angerissen: Als Stärke wird der Wettbewerbsvorteil einer Praxis definiert, wie beispielsweise einen Service, der die Bedürfnisse der Patienten berücksichtigt. Oder ob Arzttermine einfach und schnell gebucht werden können. Schwächen stellen in der SWOT-Analyse verbesserungswürdige Felder dar. Dazu gehören zum Beispiel die Wartezeit der Patienten im Aufenthaltsbereich trotz Termin und das Design einer Zahnarztpraxis, in der sich Patienten wohlfühlen sollen. Chancen bilden Neuzeitentwicklungen, wie Social-Media-Trends oder auch finanzielle Vorteile, die zum Erfolg der Praxis beitragen. Bedrohungen berücksichtigen äußere Einflüsse, die sich negativ auf das Praxismanagement auswirken können, wie zum Beispiel ein Kollege, der eine neue und größere Zahnklinik nebenan eröffnen möchte. Aber auch eine instabile politische Situation mag erfolgshindernd sein.

Der zweite Tipp ist die große Bedeutung, nicht nur einen zufriedenen, sondern auch loyalen Patienten zu haben. Ein zufriedener Patient hat keinerlei Beanstandungen, allerdings wird er auch nicht unbedingt wiederkommen, sollten Freunde oder Bekannte eine andere Praxis empfehlen. Der treue Patient allerdings wird gleichzeitig den Zahnarzt an Freunde, Bekannte und Kollegen empfehlen und die Arbeit des Zahnmediziners zusätzlich enorm schätzen. Letzteres ist besonders erstrebenswert.

Dazu haben diverse Studien belegt, dass Zufriedenheit oder Missfallen der Patienten eine enorme Auswirkung auf den Erfolg einer Praxis haben. Ziel ist es also, die wichtigsten Faktoren zu erkunden, loyale Kunden zu generieren und gleichzeitig herauszufinden, in welchen Bereichen es sich zu verbessern gilt.

In der nächsten Ausgabe werden zwei weitere Tipps analysiert, die Chancen und Potenzial von Zahnarztpraxen aufzeigen.

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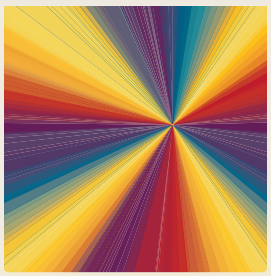
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contact Mr. Leon Vanweersch | email: vanweersch@aalz.de

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