

Happiness-Centered Practice

By Judy Munroe

Why would a successful health care provider pull down his signs, lock his front door, demolish his reception desk and fire half of his customers? Paddi Lund, an Australian dentist, did it for one very important reason: To find happiness. But what does happiness have to do with business? Or chiropractic care? A lot, especially if you are unhappy and overwhelmed in your practice.

Lund opened his dental practice in 1975 in Brisbane, and like any new practitioner, he was excited when new patients came through his doors, much like a new chiropractor. Lund promoted his business and it grew. As more money poured in, the expenses also started to mount. Lund found he was spending more and more just to keep the animal afloat. At the same time, he was growing unhappy as was his staff. They were all stressed due to the large volume of patients. This may sound strange. How can you be unhappy when you are so busy? Isn't that what we all dream of? The reality of it was the busier they got, the more they had to do to keep their patients happy. He struggled with customer complaints, staff complaints and patients who wouldn't pay their bills.

Then one day, Lund snapped from the stress. Despite the great income, the stress of it all was not worth it. He was determined to figure out what was most important to him. The answer was quite simple. He wanted to be happy. But how? He decided the first step was to surround himself with happy people, including his staff and customers. He wanted a happiness-centered business.

Lund realized that happiness didn't gel because of the expensive luxuries he could afford. His happiness is wrapped around relationships with people. This isn't a new concept in life, but in business and health care it's cutting edge.

MEASURING HAPPINESS AND BEING NICE TO PEOPLE

Lund's journey to create a happiness-centered business led him down a path that included examining emotions and determining what makes people happy. He and his staff created a way to measure their happiness. They started meeting every evening and discussed their happiness. Out of those meetings emerged some simple rules for increasing happiness, and a set of principles for conduct, otherwise known as his Courtesy System. Simply, they are rules for relationships that are centered on basic courtesies.

Rule 1: Speak politely, use a person's name, and always say please and thank you. It's such a simple concept that goes a long way.

The next principles are tough because they require people to stop doing something they absolutely love. People love to gossip, vent or discuss office politics. Whatever you call it, the result is the same. Gossip can infect your practice like a deadly disease. As it goes untreated, it spreads causing more pain and may eventually end in death of relationships and your team cohesiveness. So, here's the next rule:

Rule 2: When you talk about a person who is not present, speak as if he or she is listening to your conversation.

Rule 3: If you have a problem with someone, talk about the problem only with that person, and in private.

If you think these petty personnel issues are best left to your office manager, think again. Negativity can dramatically affect your

bottom line. A staff involved in gossip and negative relations wastes time, stresses other staffers, and worst ... your clients see it. These clients will wonder what's wrong and why you have such an unhappy staff.

THE MARKETING CONNECTION

If your patients get negative vibes from your staff, they will be hesitant or unlikely to make avid referrals, which are the core of your practice's survival. Lund realized this and made some huge changes, reinventing his practice. Some of the changes include:

- Lund developed systems to automate his marketing so that he had a consistent flow of qualified customers who genuinely wanted his preferred kind of dentistry and care.

- He created a customer experience around the dentistry that people actually enjoyed, instead of just barely tolerated as before. This led to a dramatic increase in referrals and a new system to make referrals consistent and reliable.

Now he works half the hours and makes twice the income and is happy to go to work every day. It all began with his simple goal of happiness, and the first step was implementing the Courtesy System.

IT WORKS IN CHIROPRACTIC, TOO

Enter Dr. John Turner, of Roswell West Medical Center (RWMC), just north of Atlanta, Ga. Turner had been running a successful chiropractic practice for more than 20 years when he hit the same wall as Lund. The bigger his practice grew, the



more challenges arose and expenses grew, and he was growing more stressed every day. After a serious injury, Turner took stock of his life and practice and decided he wanted to be happier.

Turner first learned of Lund through Lund's book, "Building the Happiness Centered Business" (Solutions Press). He realized that this philosophy of creating a happiness-centered practice really could work, so he took his first steps in that direction.

Turner re-evaluated his staff and began looking for people who embraced his philosophies. He let go of the services that attracted patients he didn't like or were difficult to handle. As he made these changes he was amazed at the impact it had on not only his team, but the type of patients he was attracting to his practice.

The results of these efforts have been similar to Lund's in that he works fewer hours and generates a larger income.

Some of the strategies Turner learned from Lund include:

- Create a story to tell about your business. Many practices fall into a state of professional idealism that sometimes is too sterile and results in patients feeling less than important or that nobody really cares about them. Take the

time to create an experience, not just another visit, each time your patients come for an appointment. Lund refers to this as the "critical non-essentials" to your business. He says if you systemize the little things in business, the big things will take care of themselves.

- Teach your patients to love your business. Educating your clients is the key to creating patients who stay with you, pay you on time and refer others like themselves. Educating patients on the services you provide is critical and is something most doctors do very well. However, showing your patients the human aspects of your business teaches them how to behave. If you educate your patients on your commitment to happiness, politeness and courtesy, you will receive that in return and your staff will enjoy serving them. Lund suggests creating a Welcome Book (with information about what your patient can expect from you) for each patient to start the education process. Display the Courtesy System philosophy to let your patients know they're in a special place.

Creating this higher level of trust at the start is the secret to attracting patients who happily pay their bills and shower you with gratitude and compliments.

CUSTOMERS BECOME YOUR SALES FORCE

The final step is to shape a sales force out of your customers. With the help of a marketing firm, Turner adopted a referral system that makes it an earned honor to refer people to his practice. Most doctors are afraid to ask for referrals and just hope their patients will do so. Lund similarly developed his practice into an "invitation only" situation by which only special patients may refer others to him. He realized that his best patients would refer others like themselves.

Although it didn't happen over night, Turner eventually found that he was soon working fewer hours and generating a larger income.

Ultimately, the secret to creating a happiness-centered practice is to surround yourself with other happy people. Patients enjoy coming to your office where they are treated well by happy employees who enjoy serving patients with care and consideration.

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Café of Life: A Model for Happiness

A chiropractor's skills can leave a person on the table with an experience, one that's much more than a treatment for pain. As much as it might be effective in assisting people to heal from various conditions, chiropractic care was conceived to be more than that, according to Arno Burnier, D.C., who founded Café of Life, a model that creates an environment to practice vitalistic chiropractic.

"It has impacted me by bringing me a greater peace," says Burnier. "For 30 years, I've been deeply connected with the beauty of the profession, and I've had a lot of pain in seeing where it has gone and where it is going."

Burnier developed this philosophy in 1978 while he ran a practice in Pennsylvania that was completely wellness oriented. "It was like a life party every day," he says. "I saw a lot of babies. I was dispensing life."

At the same time, he believed that the profession was departing from the basic chiropractic principles and developed Café of Life to reframe chiropractic in the minds of the public from being medically focused to wellness oriented.

"I designed an entire linguistic and created a new identity for the profession," he says. "For example, most people call the office a clinic. Clinic is a medical term. Instead of using professional titles, I ask our clientele to call us by our first names. Doing so immediately establishes a human rapport rather than doctor/patient relationship with a hierarchy of order. We're not treating patients, we are serving people. They are not even under care. There is no diagnosis, just assessment and reassessment."

Burnier has trained thousands of chiropractors in his philosophies and there are now 120 other cafés based on his model.

He says after chiropractors implement this model, "Their experience is pure joy and bliss and they feel that they are on an endless vacation. It's completely referral-based with no marketing. In this

model, when you completely transform a person or family's life, their loyalty causes them to come on a regular basis and refer frequently."

Burnier keeps his practice entirely chiropractic: no physical therapy, acupuncture or nutritional counseling. He refers clients to specialists for these services to stay entirely focused on delivering an exceptional chiropractic experience.

