

OUT of the BOX

by Wm. J. Schlotz, D.D.S.



Many who know me know that my thought processes stray far from convention more than rarely. Some even claim that my mindset (far too) easily swerves "outside the box". My long-standing dental office confidant and beloved assistant, Melanie, sizes me up more crisply, "Doctor, you're never *IN* the box". If this preamble, testimony and disclaimer are news to you – Welcome as a new reader to my column.

So now you know why, today, I'm taking a stab at a subject with watching-paint-dry type potential— The management of the practice of dentistry. Any self-respecting, conforming DDS-type essayist with instinctual boundary constraints- that's repetitive to be sure- would understand that this topic, especially for lay public consumption, deserves, as my father was fond of saying, "a wave off". Seems I'm in my comfort zone. Off we go.

Traditionally, practicing dentists have had to choose, essentially, between 2 philosophical paths as the basis for the treatment and care of their patient base. The 1st route is an attention-to-detail, *High-Quality Conventional Approach* to patient care. The 2nd direction aims toward a *High-Volume, Discount Plan Approach*- ala HMOs -resulting in the progressive, speed-dentistry practices in vogue today.

Wet fingered dentists typically gather round at seminars in exotica and studiously listen to practice management gurus make their case as to which path, or style, is best (read: turns a higher profit). Off subject here for a second, let me tell you, there's nothing quite like a grouping of dentists under one roof. The electricity is as no other.

Anyhow, aware of his/her own personality and constitution, the DDS chooses a style. Implementation strategies, directives and orders are given and, as obediently as a private saluting a staff sergeant, the office follow through is realized. Voila, a practicing dentist is born.

Here's my style assessment (my wife loves when I critique styles). Speedy, discount style of dentistry carries with it the advantage of reduced fees- at least initially- with the trade-off of an undeniably more error-prone and highly invasive style of treatment. The high-quality style offers the benefit of fewer mistakes, albeit, coupled with higher costs. Sadly, it too has an inherent and blatant disrespect for the conservation of tooth structure, a.k.a. Minimally Invasive Dentistry.

Although not really evident today, my firm belief is that there is a 3rd direction, *off the reservation* if you will, available to dental health providers today as a direct result of astonishing technology advancements. This is our office's chosen route and, and in a nutshell, its principles are the careful selection of, and training in, technology, enabling dentistry to be performed faster, easier, better and less expensive.

This practice management style trail has already been blazed. It's called Lasik Eye Surgery and its remarkable benefits of a renewed vision coupled with plummeting costs are worth emulating to be sure. Dental sightings of this style, though, are rare. Melanie... Seems I'm perched in my usual spot – On the outside looking in.

Keep a Smile On: It looks good on you!

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