



Frank Carter, Ph.D.

400 Prospect Street, Suite 1A

La Jolla, CA 92037

858-454-2828

peaks@roadrunner.com

Website: peaks-coaching.com

“Make it Easy on Yourself”

by Frank Carter, PhD

In my business and coaching work, the perspective that we take doing metaphorical iconicity coaching is to stress the fundamental differences between people and between the sexes. I am obliged to emphasize the difference between the sexes because the brain naturally performs this task. The following explanation should be considered theoretical, although it is based on well-known concepts regarding brain development and adult functioning, although it is not necessarily a widely accepted perspective.

Imagine that within any environment, such as your office environment, your brain is not a unilateral device that just spits out data: it assesses the world. But rather, imagine your brain as a device that takes information in as well as puts information out. This implies that everything involved in the interface between the dentist and the environment occurs at a level which is bidirectional in nature. This is a fancy way of saying that you're always taking data in and you are always projecting data out. Projecting is the keyword. For this article, we want to focus on what happens when we project data outward.

When the dentist looks at the staffer or the staffer looks at the dentist, they are projecting out their beliefs about what that person is thinking, feeling, about to do and should do. This information about what the other person is thinking, feeling, about to do and should do comes from the memory banks of the person. It is his or hers experience with people “before” he or she arrives in the office that defines what they project onto others and expect in return.

Thus, when working in a dental office, what the dentist believes the staffer is thinking, feeling, about to do or should do is not actually grounded in the moment, but really grounded in the emotional history of the dentist. This history is typically anchored in the past. We're not talking about last night, a week or a month ago. The perspective that the dentist is taking is grounded in the past of one's childhood and their experience growing up as a child with a mother and father.

One of the more frequent words I've heard dentists in practice describe themselves is controlling. The dentist's need to control is very evident to the staffer who finds themselves being micromanaged or being made to feel like they can never do it correctly, and the dentist who goes into work everyday feeling less than joyful about being there. Whereas, dentists have the opportunity to help people, experience new challenges with each patient and make a fine living, for those who are controlling, they feel feelings of discomfort and discontentment every day, because they perceive that they do not have control over the day, interactions with the patient's and interactions with the staff. This is a feeling; it is very strong and it is very real.

Many dentists I have worked with would call this the beginnings of burnout. While it's true that many dentists can tolerate this feeling for the first 5, 10 maybe 15 years of their practice lives, eventually the feeling that they can't go on starts to occur more frequently and becomes persistent. Unable to express the feeling in the office, they bring it home and act out on the family. This is the prelude to real burnout.

I would ask you to consider that burnout, because you can control the environment, is an unnecessary experience that is easily corrected in some cases. When you go to work every day with the belief that you need to control others in order to be safe in the world, this is really a throwback to that bidirectional functioning of your brain. When you project onto your staff your beliefs about what they think, feel, will do and should do, and these beliefs are coming from an unrealistic set of values that were imposed upon you as a child. Typically, there is nothing you can do but play it out, as many do. I would propose that you can begin to re-examine where the beliefs for the need to control and the sense of being unsafe, which comes out in your projected beliefs and behavior, really comes from.

From this realization that it is the bidirectional nature of the dentist's suffering, for some, it's simple enough to change from using the projected beliefs and values to a more reasonable and environmentally congruent set of expectations and values which emanate from general business practices. Here is an example of how this plays out.

Rather than anticipating that the staff won't listen to your requests or won't carry out procedures and protocols as you desire, and that you will pay a price for this lack of control by feeling uncomfortable, resentful and burned out due to their lack of respect for the system you created, it would be easier to change from your projected expectations, which are based on your childhood history, to a current universal set of expectations that work in business all around the world.

It's a simple assumption to recognize that the dentist pays the staff to do what needs to be done in a specific way, because that's the best way to do it. Whether we are talking about the dentist's self-imposed protocol or the practice management consultant's advice on how to handle phones, the ability to expect the staff to do it correctly in return for their paycheck is how you live in the moment and move past the dysfunctional projections of childhood.