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The following is a review of some of the misplaced efforts and energies that my clients have brought to our coaching sessions. I will provide an explanation, but this explanation is offered as a general perspective and guidance device. Each client is unique and therefore the solutions are uniquely suited to the client and the circumstances.

Psychological barrier #1: time. It is not possible to do more in the time that I have.

As a dentist, the only limiting factor to making unlimited amounts of money is time and energy. Once you have the skills and the license, it is easy to convince yourself that the more time you have, the more money you could make, and therefore, time is your enemy. This is not true. A person can always do more with the time that they have. Leveraging your time is a basic axiom of business; however, believing that it is not possible to do more in the time that you have is a limiting belief, predicated on limited energy, and actually a psychological barrier.

There is always a way to do more. It's just that the way to do more may not be consistent with your personality and your temperament. Believing that you should be able to do more is not the same as being equipped to do more. Believing that you should have no limitations is a debilitating thought frequently expressed by those who are dissatisfied with their life. Here is a truth: it is always possible to do more in the time that you have; however, if you model the behaviors of people who are too different from you, your brain will refuse the challenge by not providing the energy necessary to leave your comfort zone and your stress levels will rise.

Psychological barrier #2: patient quality. If I see more patients in less time, my quality will suffer.

It is consistent and intuitive that one's ability to perform a task has an optimum rate of performance. Any deviation from the optimum makes us feel uncomfortable. Being human, we have a comfort zone for our performance, and when we go either too far below or too far above that comfort zone, it does not feel right. Trusting your feelings is something that we inherently do, because our feelings tell us what is normal and are used to guide our performance and our thinking. Thus, moving out of your comfort zone triggers negative beliefs and thoughts, such as my quality will suffer.

The belief that your quality will suffer is a defense against changing something familiar to your brain. Processing 10 patients in an hour verses six patients is not about your skills and hand eye coordination. It is really about your staff, your preparation, staff preparation and your confidence to move from patient to patient and still smile. Those dentists who have a barrier to working on more people often have a secondary agenda in the background which guides their patient quotient. Doctors who take great pride from their interaction with their clients demand from themselves that they spend time with their clients. Those dentists who take great pride in their technical abilities want to connect with as many projects as possible. As long as the patient care is excellent, the doctor gets what he wants and the patient gets what they want. There is a deeper issue behind this limiting belief: needing sufficient client contact to feel good is a different type of dentist than needing sufficient production to feel good. They are different people.

Psychological barrier #3: trust. I can't trust my staff to do (delegatable) tasks, so I have to do everything myself. That is the only way that the treatment will be right.

While school can teach you all about the technical requirements of dentistry, and the technical details about running a business, school cannot teach you or even influence the fact that running a business is about getting along with people. You must be able to have positive interactions with your patients, staff, consultants, vendors and your family. Talk to any professional athletic coach and ask them how to build a team and they will tell you the same thing: we look for individuals who want to be team players.

Any time, a dentist finds himself with the inability to trust their staff to do delegatable tasks, the dentist has created their own psychological barrier. The dentist is responsible for team performance. Dentists who choose people for reasons other than the ability to do what they are told are creating their own psychological barrier. Acknowledging why you hire the people that you do will force you to account for the level of distrust that you experience. Hiring the wrong people creates a psychological barrier to greater production by generating a self-imposed anxiety.

Psychological barrier #4: insufficient energy. I can't run from room to room all day; I don't have that much energy.

If you meet a dentist who loves what they do for a living, they never complain about running out of energy. This is because their energy levels are constantly being rejuvenated. They consume energy running their business and then they rejuvenate their energy from the experience of helping patients, making money, and providing for their family. These dentists sleep very well.

Dentists who do not have enough energy to get through the day consume energy during the work day because they are ambivalent about their career, go home and consume energy as they protect themselves from their family due to ambivalence over intense family obligations, and as a result of their chronic sense of fear and vulnerability, they do not sleep well; and, the cycle continues the next day. Thus, they never rejuvenate the energy that they consume at the office. Eventually, these feelings cannot be suppressed and a negative outlook begins to become a daily frame of reference. Believing that you cannot run from room to room is as much a belief as it is a reflection of your genuine energy levels. Without rejuvenating either emotionally or physically, you cannot move your production to the next level of growth.

Professional barrier #5: I am the only one; my patients only want me, not a staff person working on their teeth.

Leveraging your time and leveraging your facilities is the next level in production optimization. Once you are fully occupied, the challenge is to occupy the time of your staff. Believing that you are the only person that can do something is part of the unhealthy need to maintain control. There is a healthy sense of control and then there is the need to control predicated on a sense of fear. Those dentists who tell themselves that they are indispensable are really fulfilling a self-image that helps them to feel that their life is meaningful and purposeful, when in fact they have doubts.

Relinquishing control can be emotionally very challenging for some and invigorating for others. Since the trip to the dentist is emotionally draining enough, sometimes patients are grateful for the reprieve[I did not understand this part. Is the reprieve from not seeing the dentist, just the staff person?]. Differentiating between your self-interest and those of the patients is another psychological barrier created by the dentist. The facts will continue to be that some patients prefer the doctor and some are more accepting of your staff doing simple procedures. It is a simple matter to ask.

In conclusion:

The psychological barriers that keep dentists from achieving satisfaction with their careers are a combination of beliefs and emotional truths. Believing that you can't is tantamount to not. If you believe you can't and you try, you still won't make it, and if you do, you will not be able to sustain it. Correcting your beliefs is often about putting the pieces of your life in the right order. Sometimes, you can model the behaviors of others and work through the emotional discomfort until the new level of production feels comfortable. Committing to a process and giving yourself permission to review it in six months is a reasonable policy. Sometimes, there is a need to correct your deeper emotional truths. Sometimes you may be aware of them and sometimes you may not. Continuing to challenge yourself to do better when you are emotionally unprepared will simply drive you deeper into despair.

Psychological barriers all feel the same to the brain, but the solutions require different behaviors. If you have read the books and attended seminars and still wonder why these feelings of discontent are happening to you, the answer is “discontinuity.” Something is not matching up. Finding a level of honesty with yourself is the first step towards eliminating psychological barriers, optimizing your practice and your life. [How does one do this? Perhaps an example or a story would be appropriate.