

Words of wisdom

Justin Lee Altshuler speaks to **Laura Jamison** about being the CEO of Jamison Consulting and her massive success in improving practices

In my experience with practice management advisers over many years, they all seem to have come up from the ranks of working in a dental practice. Is this your background?

Yes. I started working as an appointment coordinator for the front office for two dentists in private practice. I became engaged in attending as much continuing education as possible with the support of the dentists. We also benefitted from the training and advice of a consultant. The office was designed by Pride Institute (PI) and in time, I was invited to work for them.

At what point did you realise that you wanted to explore a career outside the dental practice?

The two dentists I worked with encouraged me to consult with several younger dentists who were starting their practices. They knew that I could share the systems and verbal skills that had made them successful because I had been a participant in the same training that they had been.

Coincidentally, Pride Institute was seeking a consultant for the state of Florida at about the same time and both dentists knew that it was a great step for me to take. They were kind and generous in encouraging me to move forward, and I did.

Who have been your mentors?

I have been blessed! Let me start with the two dentists I worked for: Dr David Brown and Dr Jim Chmielarski. Then Dr Jim Pride, Dr Peter Dawson, Dr L D Pankey, Dr Frank Spear, Dr Gary DeWood, Linda Miles, Katherine Eitel and several of the women I worked with while with the Pride Institute: Deborah Brunner, Pam Strother and Mary Alwan.

What was your experience like with your very first client?

My first Jamison Consulting client was a group dental practice with two dentists. They had several goals:

1. To implement systems that would improve customer service
2. To learn how to run their practice as a business so that it was profitable
3. To improve their acceptance of treatment presented
4. To grow as leaders.

I was gratified to have an immediate client upon leaving PI and it was a dental practice similar to the one I had grown up in. Both experiences converged to enable them to achieve all of their goals in the three years that I worked with them.

How do you work with a client?

I begin my work by scheduling two days in the practice. A workbook is sent to request information: survey

questions, marketing ideas, practice numbers including overheads, fee schedule, hours of operation, website domain, etc. This allows me to do homework before arriving.

The client is instructed to schedule at least one new patient examination and consultation in addition to a typical day's schedule. While I am in the practice I ask the questions that help me determine why numbers are askew, how systems are operated, what tools employees have to help them, and I will even ask patients about their experiences.

After reviewing what's necessary, I will meet with the dentist first to review my recommendations and a prioritised action plan for their practice. Once that has been approved, we begin a series of training sessions conducted in-office on the subject matter that fits the priorities of the practice. ▶

Laura Jamison is a consultant for dental practices. Her desire to design unique action plans for her clients led to the start of Jamison Consulting in 1992. Since then, Laura has guided over 1,500 practices to new heights. Laura is the founder of www.dentistryhasaheart.com, which promotes a relationship between the dentist and the cardiologist.

I am aware that employees are threatened when they hear that a consultant is coming to the practice. How do you deal with the team members?

I send a survey in advance of my visit. I arrive on time for the start of the day, which shows respect for their work. In that early gathering I say something like: 'I appreciate that you took time to write down your thoughts prior to this visit. Your comments are very helpful. I am here to help facilitate your ideas to fruition because I cannot possibly know everything that there is to know about you and your practice in two days. I need your help.

'Today, let's find time to sit down and discuss your responsibilities and where you grow frustrated. I have enough experience to know that what you are struggling with may have been solved in another dental practice. Sound good?'

There are times when an employee is not a good fit. I have to make recommendations to let people go; it's the hardest part of my job. But the client's results come first. Relationships with the team members are secondary. I enjoy knowing everyone on the team; it's why I work with the team one on one. I am also very approachable and most team members seem to like having me as part of their team.

'It is especially meaningful to me that the readers of *Private Dentistry* remain committed to providing high-quality dental care in a private practice setting.'

Laura's top tips for increasing case uptake

- 1. Schedule all new adult patients on the dentist's schedule.** The dentist should meet the patient knowing their initial concern that has been determined first by the appointment coordinator over the phone. Then spend time building rapport by being the first to ask the patient questions about their concerns and past dental experiences.
- 2. Be curious.** Feedback what you hear. Have the nurse write down what he/she hears. In this digital, techno-driven age, we appreciate when someone is attentive.
- 3. Use visual aids** such as Snap Dental (www.snapdental.com), handheld mirrors and intraoral cameras to show the patient what you are seeing. Use these tools at the end of your examination so that they will want to return to know what the solution is.
- 4. Reschedule the patient to return** if the treatment is more involved than a simple restorative case. It gives you time to collect your thoughts and rehearse how you can present the treatment plan.
- 5. Show photos** during your consultation. Refer to the patient's prior statements and present the dentistry so that it solves the problem that the patient has shared with you.
- 6. Sequence your treatment plan** so that it accomplishes what the patient wants done first (if possible) and then their trust will be gained.
- 7. Offer several forms of finance** to the patient. Many patients without insurance appreciate monthly payments.
- 8. Lastly, what gets measured gets rewarded.** Document your treatment plan presentation numbers and discuss what works and what doesn't.

Is the dentist ever part of the problem?

Occasionally. When a dentist contacts a consultant he/she generally has decided to accomplish certain goals. Typically, the dentist has been in private practice for several years and gets to a point of not knowing how to manage their team and/or run their practice as a business. These are the three main problems I experience with the dentist:

1. The dentist has hired the consultant to 'fix' their team, to work with them, not me
2. The dentist prioritises finances at home instead of investing in their business. I will see them spend large sums of money on houses, cars etc and then be frugal when it comes to employee salaries, investing in technology and continuing education. If the dentist prioritises the business first, the household finances are taken care of. Spouses contribute to this problem. It is hard to sacrifice in the early stages of practice (or in the marriage)
3. The dentist is not willing to spend any extra time working on the management of the practice. He/

she doesn't want to look at the numbers, participate in staff meetings or hold performance reviews. But they are business owners: not running your practice as a business is what got you in trouble in the first place.

What do you do when the dentist is the problem?

I tell him/her that a consulting relationship is not a worthwhile investment at this time.

Laura, thank you for the many words of wisdom you have shared; they will be read with interest by my colleagues in the UK.

I am honoured that you believe that this will be helpful. If anyone is interested in contacting me, I can be contacted via email at jamisonconsulting@verizon.net. My website is www.jamisonconsulting.com. While you are there, I invite you to sign up for an informative newsletter sent twice per month. It is especially meaningful to me that the readers of *Private Dentistry* remain committed to providing high-quality dental care in a private practice setting. [PD](#)