

finance

Be assertive

Don't get taken for a ride, urges **Geoff Long**

Given the reality of the popularity of dentistry it is no great surprise unscrupulous individuals will seek to take a dentist for a ride. Disparity between the wages of nurses and dental nurses is a telling example of the unpopularity of dentistry and public support for nurses. So it is perhaps not surprising people see dentists as 'fair game'.

Dentists in general practice often describe themselves as isolated, feel out of touch with their colleagues and being rather sensible by nature, are always curious about how they are doing in comparison with others. Against this background is an in built

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factor, no one must know business is anything less than really good.

To be a successful dentist, first and foremost you have to be a nice person, affable and easy to get on with. The trouble is so often the shy and introverted dental personality is taken advantage of by their spouse and trading partners.

Profiteering material companies

I have been to many practice launches over the years where the dental representative from the



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Assertiveness for dentists

- Don't forget to learn to say 'no' particularly to associates and the staff.
- Do remember 'disease to please' particularly with builders.
- Don't be frightened to play off one supplier against another.
- Do say clearly what you want then shut up.
- Don't be afraid of silence.
- Do remember you have the right to respect yourself.
- Don't forget you have the right to challenge others.
- Do remember to be more selfish.

equipment supplier has boasted to me of the lucrative deal he struck with the young dentist saying how much cheaper he could have bought the equipment for if he had tried harder.

You need to be much tougher! Get at least three quotes from companies before you refurbish your practice. Remember the companies are the ones making money in dentistry.

Crafty associates

Some associates are very good at negotiating their percentages up to 55 per cent or even 60 per cent. Often this is accompanied by a veiled threat of setting up next door, or taking patients to another dentist. The former being blackmail; the latter plain theft. Paying the associate more than 50 per cent is the quickest way to the Bankruptcy court.

Opportunist builders

Builders are renowned for overcharging dentists. Costs over run, expensive problems are uncovered, builders go bust with large deposits from dentists. In their 'disease to please' I have seen dentists often pay over £1m to builders for a total financial and business disaster.

So what is the solution? Always appoint a supervising surveyor to deal with a builder. It may cost £3K or £4K but will save you £100Ks in the long run.

Soft on the staff

As a dental principal you will often be isolated and out of touch with your colleagues. This problem is often spotted by your practice staff who make regular requests for excessive pay rises, flexible working and a host of other favours.

The best answer is to say 'no' to any request. You can always negotiate up from that position at a later date.

Dental pimps

Dentistry is one of the most lucrative and high status of the professions. Regrettably this means dentists can sometimes attract 'trophy' spouses whose motivation is somewhat more financial and status driven rather than based on honesty or love.

The result is a spendthrift spouse determined to spend as much of your hard earned money as possible in an attempt to cash in on their 'dental investment'.

We have seen money frittered away on palatial homes, ridiculous extensions, expensive sports cars, horses, boats, private school fees and overseas property portfolios. Overspending spouses combined with a *laissez-faire* attitude from bank managers can land a hard working dentist in millions of pounds of debt. ■

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