

# Universal truths

Sim Goldblum reviews the basic principles of running a successful business.

I hope you had a relaxing summer and are ready for the comprehensive spending review, the real plans for NHS dentistry and the fate of primary care trusts, strategic health authorities and GP commissioning (excluding dentistry), not to mention the potential new and improved timing for CQC registration.

In May, I wrote about the consistent application of five key points, to ensure your practice performed the way you wanted it to, and I was reminded about these the other evening as I watched

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an episode of *Mary, queen of shops*. For those who've never watched this series, Mary Portas, a specialist retailing expert, visits various businesses that are not as successful as their owners would like and she spends a few weeks working with them. In this particular episode, she was called in by a hardware store in southern England. What's this got to do with dentistry, you may well ask? Well, here are some comparisons.

**Key point 1: Have a clear vision.** The owner of the store started off in



● Target your potential customers in a way they recognise.

DIY/hardware, but drifted into adding lots of unrelated products (including pets and gifts). Now he has lost clarity of what his purpose is.

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**Key point 2: Have a clear timeline and milestones.**

The owner of the DIY store's adviser gives herself only a few weeks to diagnose, recommend and implement change, but it will take several months before it's clear whether the changes are going to ➔



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be successful.

You should decide when you need to have any changes you are considering in place, and proving to be effective. This could be a few weeks for a new marketing programme or several months for a surgery addition or improvement.

**Key point 3: Have a motivated team that buys into your vision.**

The staff at the hardware store were not a team, and were neither knowledgeable or interested in DIY. The cashier was trained to demonstrate tools, enjoyed it and became really enthusiastic. Creative training and involvement turned the group around, but they were often led astray by the owner who changed his mind about his direction.

Do you have a team working with you to achieve common goals, or individuals doing a job and who are not interested in what happens each day as long as they get paid each week or month? Talk to your team, get them to buy in by sharing your vision and show them what success will look like for them. Encourage them to pursue a career, not just do a job and pull a 'sickie' when they can't be bothered coming in.

**Key point 4: Have the right number or the right type of customers, who value you and your team's services.**

At the hardware store, customers only visited for small purchases, preferring DIY warehouses for major purchases as they needed advice along with correct goods. Therefore the store needed reorganising with extra services added that met local customer needs.

Do your patient research to find out what they think of your

service, and what they would like you to offer. Repeat the research sufficiently to track changing demand driven by the market-place, your competitors, and patient expectations.

**Key point 5: Market your practice to the right people in the way they recognise.**

The hardware store researched local customers' main DIY requirements and offered personalised advice and product selection/delivery. It reorganised the shop to clearly segment product offerings, and modernised the shop-front, changing window displays regularly.

Once your research is done, are you contacting patients new and old the right way (appropriate social networking websites, email,

Twitter, Facebook)? Do patients know what you offer or are they going elsewhere for treatment?

Six weeks after Mary Portas' first visit to the shop that didn't know what it was had been, redefined and reinvigorated. Whether it maintained its new momentum and became successful will no doubt be the subject of a new series.

What the programme demonstrated for me was there are some universal truths about running any business and that once the five basic principles are in place, persistent and consistent dedication to them and making them the heart of your practice's culture will position you very well to take advantage of all the changes that the new politics will throw at you. ■

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