



# ESTHETIC TEAM

THE WISDOM OF SHARED KNOWLEDGE



by Bobbi Anthony, R.D.H.

*Bobbi Anthony is the founder and owner of Comprehensive Care Consulting, Inc., in Laguna Niguel, California. She offers a complete range of practice management, team-building, communication, and hygiene consulting services, helping good dental practices build the strategies necessary to become great cosmetic dental practices. Ms. Anthony also presents regularly at Dr. Larry Rosenthal's Aesthetic Advantage Programs in New York, Palm Beach, and London. She can be reached by phone at 949-443-4046 or through her Web site, [www.bobbi-anthony.com](http://www.bobbi-anthony.com)*

## Ethical Sales Concepts

Ask a dental professional how they feel about the term "sales" and chances are you'll receive a negative response. In his best-selling book, *Integrity Selling*, author Ron Willingham suggests that the term usually brings to mind an adversarial relationship in which buyer and seller are pitted against one other—a relationship in which there is one winner and one loser, where the buyer is out-talked, out-maneuvered, and out-smarted.<sup>1</sup> Because honesty and trust are necessary components in the building of relationships (the doctor-patient relationship notwithstanding), it is easy to understand why dental professionals have rejected this approach.

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Still, is there such a thing as "ethical sales" and if there is, how does it differ from patient education? Considering that patient education is a major focus in dentistry, and with more and more optional procedures available, the team's ability to communicate well is perhaps the single most important nonclinical skill. According to Mr. Willingham, "ethical sales" or, as he termed it, "integrity selling," is based upon sincerity and trust; it is the ability to listen, assess, and communicate what is most beneficial for the client. Ethical salespeople guide, through questioning, to determine the client's wants and needs. This requires an understanding of oneself and an understanding of what motivates differing behavioral styles. Through trust, empathy, and understanding, we build relationships in which people feel comfortable making decisions. We have shared values. This implies that a mutually beneficial outcome is possible—that there need not be a winner and a loser. Rather, "win-win" is the intended outcome. If this is the case, it is easy to draw parallels between ethical sales and patient education.

## CONGRUENCE

In his book, Willingham also talks about the psychology of selling. "Many communication and sales courses deal with training on the mechanics and techniques of the sales process, such as scripts and handling objections. These can, of course, be helpful but unless the person is psychologically prepared, these are seldom effective."<sup>2</sup> According to Willingham, they may actually create internal emotional blocks that inhibit sales success. The foundation of psychological preparation is in achieving congruence among a person's core beliefs.<sup>3</sup> He describes five dimensions of congruence:

**View of Selling:** Believes that selling is a noble profession that identifies and satisfies people's needs, and creates value for them.

**View of Abilities:** Understands selling and believes that they have the necessary talents and abilities to be successful in it.

**Values:** Possesses a high degree of internal sincerity, conscientiousness, and honesty that drives their behaviors.

**Commitment of Activities:** Understands the activities necessary for success and commits to diligently doing them.

**Belief in Product:** Passionately believes that their products or services will create value for people over and above the cost.

## INCONGRUENCE

An incongruence of beliefs and values usually results in low productivity, stress, and poor self-esteem. When a person believes that they are doing something wrong, they feel conflicted. Additionally, those inner conflicts may be sensed by clients/

patients, adding to the feelings of unease, and creating distrust.

Incongruence of beliefs and values also occurs within organizations. To create a cohesive vision for a successful dental practice, discussions of shared values must take place. For instance, if a team member believes that there is pressure to "sell" cosmetic dentistry and there has been no value created for the product, no training on the ethical process, and no understanding of the doctor's core beliefs, it could create an internal battle, which could result in stress, ill health, or staff turnover.

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What do patients want... maintenance of health; prevention of breakdown and/or discomfort; a beautiful, more youthful smile? Many practitioners and their teams do believe in the products and services they provide, and are rightfully enthusiastic about presenting them to patients. However, many of those dental professionals will present based upon their own values—what they see the patient as needing. If the dental professional values function more than esthetics, he or she may present only on health or function, when the best approach for that particular patient might have been esthetics or vice versa. Without understanding the differences between people's personalities and without creating a dialog with the patient, it is likely that they may miss the all-important "want" and in the process be ineffective in their presentation, eventually becoming discouraged, and maybe even leery of presenting at all.

Without discussing the values and core beliefs of a practice, there is the possibility of incongruence among team members. A team meeting could be an ideal setting for this type of discussion. It could be helpful for each member of the team, including the doctor, to list their thoughts regarding each of Willingham's five dimensions. Together, incongruities could be addressed and any necessary training defined. This would also be an opportunity to define the core beliefs and values of the organization, thus refining the practice vision and refocusing its members.

Willingham's insights provide us new tools that we might find useful in our everyday communication and in our education of dental patients. They could also help us to refocus our practice vision and values. Additionally, they provide us with an opportunity to rethink the bias we traditionally have had against sales communication training. It is only through an open mind and continual study that we have the opportunity for personal and professional growth. *Atj*

## References

1. Willingham R. *Integrity Selling* (p. xi). New York: Doubleday; 1987.
2. James G. Interview with Ron Willingham. *Selling Power Magazine* January/February:25-28, 2004.
3. Willingham R. Integrity systems. *Selling Power Magazine* January/February:18, 2004.

