



“What can I do for you?”

By Julie Parker

What can I do for you?” Could this one sentence become the powerful philosophy of your practice?

Effective practice philosophies are those that: clarify what the practice wants to achieve; direct the behaviours of all team members; and set the standards of service to be delivered to patients.

Organisations spend energy and time creating their guiding philosophies, hoping their teams will be inspired by them, remember them and bring life to them. They are then disappointed as those same team members over time revert to default patterns of behaviour.

Team culture, customer service principles and leadership philosophies share a common intention: on the road to achievement of our business goals, how can I have a positive impact on the individual in front of me (whether it be colleague, patient or employee)?

There is value in creating a simple yet powerful philosophy with which everyone can easily identify and engage.

“What can I do for you?” It is simple, relatable and I believe can be embraced as the core philosophy behind all actions.

Let me explain why I think this one line is so powerful.

Consider one’s mindset if they were to pose this question. “What can I do for you?” is a question that is asked when one has an authentic desire to help someone. It portrays both generosity and an awareness that they have the ability and desire to play a role in the other person achieving a satisfying result. Think about the impact of this question in regard to customer service. Imagine your team members interacting with patients wondering what else they can do to help the patient have a more pleasurable experience at the practice. You will hear questions such as, “May I get you a coffee or tea while you’re waiting?” and “Can I make you more comfortable with a neck pillow?”

It’s also a powerful team culture philosophy, encouraging everyone to have an awareness of what they could do to support and assist team members. There would be questions such as, “I’m running early with my patient list and have 20 minutes spare. What can I do for you?” and “I can see you’re running behind. Can I help you with your room changeover?” and “How do you find my training style? Is there anything I can do differently that will assist your learning?”

Imagine the improved results in individual and team performance if the leadership of the practice routinely enquired as to what they could do to better guide and support everyone. Bosses and supervisors will be setting a strong example and also facilitating individual and practice growth by asking questions such as, “Tell me about your experience working at our practice. What can I do to make it better?”, “What can I do to better support you in your role?” and “What do you need from me in order to achieve the specific goal we have discussed?”

“What can I do for you?” is a great leveler. It fosters the thought that we’re all in this together and regardless of whether a particular task is a team member’s responsibility or not, they will step in and help.

I often share with teams I consult to that our actions are driven by our intentions. For example, if we intend to feel unhappy about seeing a particular patient, then we will find fault in every interaction with them. If, on the other hand, we shift to the intention of finding the positive in this patient, then we will see it when it becomes apparent. Our response and behaviour towards this patient are different because we shifted the intention we brought to the situation.

The quality of the practice systems we implement depends upon the intention behind them. For example, it is appropriate to have “productivity” as a key intention when templating the appointment book. The result will address the financial needs of the

practice. However, using “productivity” as the intention behind managing an anxious patient will result in actions of impatience and intolerance to the slow progress made.

The quality of your practice systems will improve if you ensure the intention behind them is effectively aligned with the design of the systems.

If “productivity” intention leads to getting as much treatment done as possible and “efficiency” intention leads to getting all that treatment done in as quickly as possible, then in order to ensure the people involved are properly managed, there must be an additional intention in place. And it is my suggestion that it is the intention of “What can I do for you?”.

Encouraging the philosophy of “What can I do for you” to permeate throughout all areas of your practice will have a substantial and positive effect on your leadership, your team and the experience you offer to your patients. I think it’s a game-changer.

About the author

Julie Parker’s whole career has been devoted to the dental industry, starting in 1987 as a dental nurse. In 2003, Julie became the first non-dentist to buy a dental practice in Australia. She owned and managed her practice in Brighton, Victoria for 10 years. During this time, she more than trebled the turnover and her staff base grew from 3 to 12 members. Julie successfully cultivated a winning team and a winning business. Her business programs on how to accomplish a dream dental business are gleaned from her wealth of experience, intensive education and an inquisitive business mind.

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