

Can You Spare Some Change?

Transform Your Life and Your Practice

"I hate change!"

We have all overheard this comment and maybe even said it ourselves. But in these times more than any other, the ability to adapt to change is a primary indicator of emotional health and physical well-being. Change is critical to the health of a business as well. If we sincerely want to provide high-quality patient care, all dentists and dental team members need to develop a positive attitude toward change. John Kotter, a Harvard Business School professor, said it well: "Mastering the ability to change isn't just a crucial strategy for business. It's a necessity for health. And it's possibly the one thing that's most worth learning."

After years of coaching, I have observed sighs, rolling eyes, and verbal resistance to change from both dentists and team members. For some people, the mere suggestion of change brings an immediate and common reaction: "It won't work." In fact, this response can become habitual in an organization. I wonder if Swiss watchmakers wish that they'd had another opportunity to change their viewpoint.

For generations, the paragon of timekeeping perfection was a Swiss watch—intricate mechanical marvels heralded for their accuracy and beauty.

But around 1960, there was a paradigm shift in wristwatch technology. Quartz crystal timekeeping technology was introduced, allowing watches to be made cheaper, smaller, and substantially more accurate than the traditional Swiss timepieces. Swiss watchmakers rejected the new technology, stubbornly clinging to the rules of traditional watchmaking that had served them well for centuries. In the end, the new technology was picked up by foreign competitors, such as Seiko, and the center of the watchmaking industry moved out of Switzerland to Japan. The irony lies in the fact that the creator of quartz crystal timekeeping technology was Swiss—unfortunately, his countrymen saw no use for the radical change and, as a result, lost 70 percent of

their stake in an industry they once dominated.

Dentistry is inundated with technological change and patients' ever-rising expectations about the customer service that we provide. Technological change in clinical and administrative processes alone is significant even without the training needed to improve our interactions with our patients and one another. It's overwhelming sometimes to consider the work needed to keep up, even in an organized, updated practice. If you and your team members are able to improve your attitude and your ability to master change, then everything else will improve, too.

Habits are subtle tendencies in behavior that are repeated on a regular basis. How you respond to change also can become a habit—sometimes a bad one. The steps below offer ideas on how to respond to change in a more positive and productive manner.

1. When presented with an obstacle or new idea, first take a deep breath.
2. Stop your mind from thinking about the past, and refrain from immediately forming any negative thoughts about the idea or the presenter of the idea.
3. Listen well and ask questions. Why would you consider the idea? How will the idea benefit you, your patients, or your team?
4. After listening, make inquiries to be sure that you completely understand the idea.
5. Share your concerns while also commenting on the positive points of the idea.
6. Ask for feedback.

If you hold back on the emotional response until after you have completed these steps, and you are open to change, you are likely to make better decisions for your practice and your life. Change is important, and it can be positive. Look back on some of the changes that you have made in your life that have brought you great benefit.

Times always change. People always change. It's the one thing that you can count on. ♦

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Lorraine Guth is a professional speaker and consultant, as well as president of Motivations by Mouth. She conducts management consultations for dentists in both the United States and Canada to improve communication with patients and team members and to improve treatment compliance. She can be reached at 636.257.2066 or at lorraine@motivationsbymouth.com.