

What makes a dental entrepreneur?

Many types of dentists go to make up our profession. Each has different career pathways, goals, hopes and aspirations. They all have different work ethics, drive and ambition.

So too, are there many personality types, but it seems to me that there is often a common trait amongst successful dentists – and that is entrepreneurship.

To be successful in dental practice you often also have to be a successful entrepreneur. So what does that entail? I believe there are seven characteristics

1. They are willing to do what it takes to be successful.
2. They want to provide the best aesthetic dentistry that they can for their patients. They have made a determined effort to focus on aesthetic dentistry and strive for continued learning in this field. All this needs a five-year plan, goals and a vision of the direction you want to take your practice.
3. They are not scared of swimming against the tide to achieve their goals.
4. They can move out of their comfort zone into new territory. Most dentists hate change. They like the comfort of knowing which techniques work best 'in their hands'. That brings comfort, but the truth is that dental technology is rapidly changing and one has to keep up. There is excellent research on the latest advances in aesthetics, and it is important to read widely to understand these new areas. But it takes strength to find the courage to head for new horizons – to embrace and invest in new technology, and take the challenge to leave your comfort zone. It can be a steep learning curve but it is worth it!
5. They embrace the 'entrepreneurial spirit'; the clarity to see new opportunities when they present themselves or the skill to find new

solutions to dental problems. They look at new financial models for their dental business and look at new ways to deliver aesthetic dentistry to improve patients' lives.

6. They have a clear vision about the future of their business and work hard for a long time to succeed. Malcolm Gladwell calls this the 10,000-hour rule, arguing that successful people have had the luck or the vision to spend 10,000 hours in their particular field, honing their skills and gaining experience. The Beatles played for eight hours a night (whereas music concerts normally last two hours) during their early career in Hamburg, easily notching up 10,000 hours playing together as a group. Equally, this level of dedication is what it takes to perfect many skills in dentistry – such as creating beautiful direct composite restorations, for example. Although it may look easy, there are so many aspects to consider when undertaking these biomimetic lifelike restorations – they demand a combination of technical skill, artistic ability, and sound knowledge in a host of areas. Acquiring thousands of hours of experience shows what does and doesn't work, what happens when things go wrong and how to avoid these things from reoccurring. It is a fact of life (and aesthetic dentistry) that you learn more when things go wrong than when everything is smooth sailing.

7. Moments that add up to a lifetime (Hopkins 1982): how much time do we spend over the course of our career waiting for the curing light to set the composite? What do you think about during those 20 seconds? What happens if a patient cancels at the last minute and you have a spare hour on your hands? Do you celebrate and have a coffee, catch up on a million emails or spend the time planning? Successful entrepreneurs use their spare moments wisely



and utilise this time to plan the next stages on their professional development.

Over the next year we will feature different dental entrepreneurs to highlight the vision and innovation that has seen them make a major contribution to. I hope you enjoy this issue, which contains the work of many such luminaries.

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