



Creating a Process for Discovery

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“Your dental office should look more like a learning organization than a purveyor of goods and services. Go study people and the way they learn!” These were the penetrating comments Dr. Bob Barkley made to me in the late ‘60s, and I have been routinely placing them in my crucible ever since. Ingredients have been added along the way through experiences with Carl Rogers, Don Clifton, Chuck Sorenson, Henry Tanner, Avrom King, patients, friends, and colleagues.

It is now clearer to me that the best learning occurs when you or I make discoveries for ourselves, and the Process of Discovery needs to be a strategy in a learning organization. A dental office, which is striving to be or become a Tier IV model, functions best when all the people in relationship experience discovery and learning.

Learning is a given. It happens, just as change happens. The real question is do you drive learning and create change, or do you just let them happen. What is not a given is whether you will adopt learning as a part of your organization’s way of doing business.

Can you harness the process and make it work for your organization? Before that can happen, learning has to become a strategic choice. You have to decide that learning is strategic, that it’s connected to “doing dentistry.” Learning is both an individual experience and a collective experience with patients, staff and self.

The Doctor as Teacher: We have often heard the admonition that, in Latin, “doctor” means “teacher.” Too often, we have thought that means “to teach and tell” others, as in Oral Hygiene 101. I am sure you have heard yourself and/or your dental hygienist or assistant being very eloquent on the subject. But does this represent education – true learning? Just what do good teachers do?

The Greek understanding of the word teacher reveals the ability of a person to move someone else to another point of view – in other words, the strategy of influencing behavior through an exper-

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ience. It would then follow that, as doctor/teacher/influencer, our role is to uniquely create discovery experiences for patients, staff and ourselves – experiences in which learning “bubbles-up” for the participants. We are to create a strategy of discovery.

Wait just a minute. This becomes an internal struggle of role confusion. Who am I? As a dentist, I am a fixer of teeth, a fixer of what is broken – not! Rather, I am a facilitator of health. I am a leader who is willing and able to influence behavior--my own and others. I am a leader who creates individualized discovery or learning moments that facilitate growth. Such learning moments can be simply getting someone’s attention, cleverly arousing curiosity, gently developing ownership of a present condition, tactfully refocusing attention to the pertinent subject, courageously inviting response, and skillfully negotiating an action plan.

As we continue to develop a practice, those who choose a uniquely individualized, relationship-based, values- driven, fee-for-service style, will find it helpful to be values-driven or choice-driven when it comes to their strategy for discovery.

Creating individualized learning experiences for patients, staff and self... rub that around for a while in your crucible, and see just what you discover! Have fun thinking through these steps. You are proactively creating your future desired practice.