

Get in the right time zone

Chris Mayor, from Lily Head Dental Practice Sales, discusses past-, present-, and future-mindsets in relation to our attitudes to change



I often spend years talking to prospective clients about the market, their particular circumstances, and what a great plan for them to exit their dental practice would look like. It's what we do. After all, our advice to clients is to start considering your options up to ten years before you exit.

You can imagine how people are at different stages of their decision-making process. Should I sell? If so, when? What do I want the deal to look like? Do I have the experience and bandwidth to sell it myself and, if not, who am I going to appoint to act on my behalf?

Sometimes, during these conversations, I think I understand the other person's perspective, but then I realise we are not really moving the discussion forward.

Perhaps we are not on the same time zone?

I recently read an interesting book titled *The Anticipatory Organization: Turn Disruption and Change into Opportunity and Advantage* by Daniel Burrus. In it, Burrus provides a framework for creating an organisation that, in mindset and culture, is future-oriented. It talks of focusing on turning change into advantage in order to exploit the future.

In his book, Burrus posits that we all sit on a spectrum with regard to our comfort level with change. This is exactly where our clients are. They are all considering or actively seeking significant change but they are not all in the same time zone.

Burrus suggests that, in general, we fall into one of three personality types. We possess either a past-, a present- or a future-oriented mindset.

Clients with a past-oriented mindset are not comfortable with change. They resist change and would prefer things stay as they were.

Clients with a present-oriented mindset acknowledge that the future is approaching at full speed but tend to view change as an unwelcome disruption rather than a creator of opportunity.

Clients with a future mindset want to jump into tomorrow with both feet as they can't wait to seize upon the opportunities that change offers.

Taken together, buying and selling a dental practice is two halves of an act of change. An act that, by its very nature, disrupts the status quo. So, when I am talking to clients and can sense a reluctance to move forward, what are they actually saying? Are

they really going cold on the idea of selling or are they in a different time zone to me?

Perhaps the vendor knows that, ultimately, time is against them. That their peer group are exiting the profession or planning to leave practice ownership but they have a past orientated mindset. They know that they can't stay where they are. But they're so locked into their comfort zone that they're turning a blind eye to the risks of standing still and putting off change as long as they can.

And here I am, with my future-mindset assuming that any logical person should be excited about the cool things we can do and the future opportunities that we can unlock for them. Instead, they're listening or looking at me like I am a stranger from another planet. So, what do you do?

I could make the decision to park them until sometime in the future. Or, I can apply some empathy to the situation and refocus on their view of the world. When someone has what appears to be a clear need for our services but is frightened of change, what should you do?

First, I have to go back to their time zone. This could mean something as simple as forgoing the virtual meeting where I share

my screen to inviting them to one of our seminars or meeting them at their practice.

I must then confirm their time mindset. I can do that by asking discovery questions that uncover past attempts to change as well as what prevented those from materialising. Listen slowly to their answers and hear what they are saying instead of what I want to hear.

I also need to stay in their time zone. I can ask them what their vision for the business and themselves is. I can even write it down and share it with them. I look for opportunities where our services can help them achieve their vision and objectives and I am trying to connect with them on a human level at a tempo they are comfortable with. I want the client to see a way forward, to develop a shared mindset and establish a trust that will enable me to walk them into the future. ■

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