



Staying Positive

Plastic surgeon Mrs Elena Prousskaia highlights her key tips for building a happy working environment

Like all practitioners, even undergoing training requires tremendous dedication and years of hard work, often leaving one with little time for anything else other than studying and working. Once you achieve the keenly desired training post, it takes approximately 10 years before you become a consultant. At that point, it's fairly common for people to look back and reflect on all that they've missed. This is not to bemoan my position: I love my job and consider myself extremely privileged to be able to conduct this work. But it's worth setting the record straight about the road we all take to get here, and the ways we try to stay on track once we've done so. For myself, I'm careful to spend time doing a number of things to stay happy and healthy so that I continue to enjoy the profession that I spent so long training for. In this article I will briefly outline some methods that you can employ to try to maintain a positive approach to work.

Passion for your vocation

I believe that the best people in any profession are the ones who emote pride and professionalism and really love what they are doing. If you're doing what you love, there's no need to look at the clock; you're completely in the moment and focused on the task at hand. One of the great things about the medical profession is that many people share this sense of a greater purpose. We're here because we want to be – so that puts all the hard work into perspective. Various issues can, however, affect motivation for your job; from working too much, to problems at home – these issues can stretch from simply a difficult day, to a long period of disillusionment with your profession.

If you are struggling to maintain passion in your work, think about the aspects of your job that give you greatest pleasure and try to set aside time to ensure that you are regularly able to enjoy these. For instance, if you see one of your most loyal patients will be visiting your clinic, you may wish to schedule in an extra 10 minutes to the appointment so that you can catch-up before the treatment. This works to both remind them how important they are to you, and to allow yourself dedicated time to enjoy a less formal interaction with a valued customer who truly appreciates your time and skill.

Have a genuine interest in your patients

When I started my career, I was very technical during conversations with patients. Retrospectively, that seems like a very sensible approach, but can come across as cold. Past medical history, examination, and treatment plans are obviously crucial topics of discussion and we are all limited in our time as clinics can regularly be overbooked. The more I've adopted this approach, and engaged my patients as real human beings, the more rewarding I've found these professional relationships. For instance, when my breast cancer patients come for their first consultation to discuss reconstruction, they are understandably very stressed. Asking about their interests is as important in some respects as asking about their medical history. I enquire about their favourite hobby, if they love cinema or gardening. Suddenly, the atmosphere in the clinic changes; it feels human and enjoyable, and makes the working day a little more interesting. Of course with many patients on your client list you cannot be expected

to remember every detail about each one. Ensure that either you, or another member of staff, are adding key notes to the patient file that can be checked before appointments, to show that you have taken an interest in them.

Surround yourself with positive influences

This can be difficult, but this is crucial in order to create a working environment that is as stress-free as possible. Consider arranging a short staff meeting each Friday to share good news; perhaps you've hit a sales target, a member of staff has been promoted, or a new treatment has been proving popular within clinic. Make it one person's responsibility to collate any patient feedback from the week and to share this with the rest of the team. I'd suggest checking this yourself first for any complaints or issues that are best dealt with on a private basis. Not only will these meetings help you to appreciate the achievements of your business, but by encouraging the whole team to share in these successes, you will help to boost team morale.

Delegate and teach

Learning how to get the best out of every member of the team and how to delegate and teach can bring enormous joy to daily life in the clinic. It's also important to remember that delegating tasks can save you time in the long run to concentrate on other aspects of your practice. It is certainly not about working less; teaching is hard and stressful. Of course it involves enormous responsibility, and that is why when you reach a senior position, you have to be capable of taking this responsibility and dealing with it appropriately. The best part of my day can be when I teach a technique to someone and feel their gratitude and appreciation. Think about the particular strengths of each member of your team and discuss with him or her whether there are aspects of their role or the wider business that they would like to explore further. Then come up with a plan to make this happen, including a realistic time frame based on your availability and achievable goals.

Compete only with yourself

Most people would recognise that my specialty is highly competitive. My personal rule is that if I compete, it is only with myself. Consider the following; how can I become better tomorrow than I was today? How can I perform this complex procedure with even better outcomes for my patients? Constantly comparing yourself to others within your specialty can lead to a great deal of anxiety,



which can easily leak into home life if it is not handled properly. Benchmarking success is about seeing a big picture and enjoying the view rather than looking at what others are doing. I am a strong believer that if you are good at what you do, no matter how many people there are doing the same, there will be a place for you in the market.

Whether you work alone or in a team, it's important to look outside of your practice to build a wider support network within the industry. Being able to call upon the expertise of other practitioners in a similar position to yourself, can provide a great deal of support in good times and bad. Attending professional meetings and joining membership associations are good ways to create key contacts.

Spend a lot of time on education

Throughout your career you should continue to prioritise education, training and professional development and consider; how can I become the best I can be? What new skills, including non-clinical ones, are going to enhance my practice, the way I work with others and the way I approach day-to-day

tasks? Learning a new skill will not only help your business to continue to grow, but can also serve to re-ignite passion in your work.

Handling difficult situations

Having to manage a patient complaint or deal with a tricky situation with a member of staff can be extremely stressful. To me, dealing with a difficult situation is about honesty and respect. The capacity to work well with others is not about being weak or keeping your head down. It is about being there when problems occur, talking to people and being humble enough to apologise if it is your fault. People will like you because they feel safe with you, because they know they can count on you and feel that you care. Building this type of reputation can be extremely difficult in our highly stressful and demanding jobs, but once you get there, you suddenly find yourself surrounded by people who smile and say thank you for your hard work.

Keep levels of care to the highest standards

This final rule is simple and crucial; be fully present in the task that you are doing at each moment. We all have busy lives and

having a million worries on your mind is human. When I am with a patient, however, I obligate myself to forget about outside concerns and try to concentrate on doing my best right here, right now. I always advise my juniors that there are no small details in our profession. Acute attention to every single detail before, during and after treatment is key not only to a good result, but also to having a happy patient. And what else can make your day better than a patient attending the follow-up with a huge smile, expressing their appreciation for your care and the treatment that has changed their life? High levels of care can also reduce the risk (and stress) of complications, and ensure the patient comes back time and time again.



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