

Choosing A Successful Practice Learning Experience

by Barb Jacobucci, M.Ed

Educational
Outcome

Why?

John has been your patient for five years. He has mentioned his snoring problem to you on previous visits. “Doctor, my snoring has gotten so bad lately and it is really disrupting a peaceful night’s sleep in my house. My wife said that it was time to do something about it. I’ve done some research and there is an oral appliance I heard about. Can you help me?”

This isn’t the first time a patient has wanted to have this conversation with you. You have been hearing comments amongst your colleagues, your staff is talking about it and you are reading about it in trade publications. You have decided that now is the time to educate yourself and provide a solution for your patients.

Once you have made the decision to pursue a new educational experience, where do you start? Who is the authority? Where do you find a quality educational experience? Will the experience match your style and meet your needs? The questions can be overwhelming.

Growing your practice is top of mind for you every day. Making the decision to add new learning can be a challenge in time and commitment. As you contemplate educational choices for this or any other need in your practice, there are questions you can ask to find the educational resource with the solution that best fits into your practice.

1. Why?

The first question you should ask yourself is whether the professional and educational development that you are considering aligns with your practice mission and goals,

and does it improve your patient care. If the answer is yes, the next question is potentially the most important. It always starts with “Why?” If you want a treatment, product, or service to succeed in your practice, it is important to start with asking “Why?” Why do your patients want or need this treatment? What is their emotional motivator? What is their desired outcome? Your patients will take action based more on their greatest desire, than on a detailed reasonable statement of the treatment benefits. With a solid “Why”, you are ready to proceed.

2. Educational Outcome

Now that you have clarified your why and established the need, define the educational and learning outcome that you wish to achieve. Is this your first step in educating yourself on a topic, or are you wanting to complete a learning experience ready to introduce the new method to your team and begin immediately to implement it into your practice?

3. Research and Reviews

You have many resources available to you to support making your educational decisions. You are holding (or viewing online) a powerful resource in *Dental Sleep Practice* magazine. This magazine and other professional resources are treasure chests of valuable information. These resources provide you with current information, keep you up-to-date on the latest information, and expose you to like-minded professionals and peers.

Reach out to your peers, staff, consultants, study groups, and online forums for

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references and recommendations. Past experience with their chosen instructional methods can help you in making decisions based on the elements that are important to you. Review how they measured the results, the quality of their educational experience and their outcome.

Don't forget to review your past educational experiences and resources. Do any of these resources provide you with the additional education and information that you are seeking?

Evaluate and review your resources. Do you have the time and dollars to commit to bringing the educational results to your practice? Does the cost associated seem reasonable given the benefit you will receive (remember your Why)?

4. Instructional Method

Evaluate your educational options, and determine your most effective learning environment and personal preference. Do you excel in hands-on workshops with active involvement from the participants? Do you prefer seminars or lectures? Consider e-learning, webinars or distance learning options, if available. Also review the educational options available from your professional associations and conferences.

Other considerations for choosing an instructional method are:

- Cost of the program and evaluating what is included. It is important to consider the amount of time away from your practice, your study time, travel time, and what members of your staff will be attending.
- If there are multiple sessions, how often do they meet and what is the typical length of each?
- What is the format of the training? Is it geared toward a small group, large group or individual instruction?
- Does the training include demonstrations, theory, and practice? Will you be conducting hands-on exercises to enhance the learning experience? Are new technologies applied that will assist in your learning experience?
- Is the training conducted on-site or off-site?
- Are the learning outcomes clearly stated? Do they indicate specifically what you will be able to do as a result

of the program? This element will help you determine if the educational offering is a broad overview course or an in-depth program.

- Determine if the educational offering meets the need as established in your Educational Outcome review (Step 2).

5. Instructors Credentials


If you have chosen a structured class environment, review the instructor's credentials. Instructors take an active part in your learning experience so you are relying on their skills as an expert and a professional. Is the subject matter an area of expertise for the instructor? Is the instructor a trusted resource and informed professional? Do their qualifications lead you to believe that a meaningful program and instructional experience will be delivered?

6. Follow-up, Implementation and Instructor Support

Another important consideration is how quickly you will be able to implement the new skills into your practice. Will you be provided with the materials, support and guidance on how to effectively bring the new skills back to your office? Will support be available for implementation beyond the initial training?

Determine what learning community you will receive from the educational experience. From collective learning and community support, will you leave with a wider personal learning network?

And finally, revert back to Step 1. Not only does it start with why...it ends with why. As you are participating in your educational experience, remember your Why and your patients Why. During John's next visit, you will be able to say "YES, John, I can help you!"

Follow these steps and you will walk away from your educational experience saying "That was a great choice!" 

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