

# What makes a winner?

Self-confessed learning junkie, **Dr Shameek Popat**, winner of Private Dentist of the Year 2010, describes his roller coaster journey



I graduated from Guy's Hospital many moons ago, did my VT training in Watford and got my MFGDP (UK) in 1998. The obvious next step was to buy my own practice, which happened in 2002 and it's been a roller coaster ever since!

I found a nice mixed practice in the beautiful village of Chorleywood. I saw the potential of building it up and realised that I could be very happy making Chorleywood my home. Over the last nine years I have worked hard to establish Rosebank Dental Practice and carve a niche for myself in the area. I started developing my skills through further education and attended many courses to further my skill base.

I believe in the old adage that 'knowledge is power'. The more we know about our field, the greater the difference we can make in our patients' lives. Along the way I have met various inspirational people who I have aspired to and also many of my contemporary peers, who have all played a part in shaping my dentistry that I practice today – mentors like John Kois, Ken Harris, Frank Spear, Didier Dietschi, Larry Rosenthal, John Cranham, Ian Buckle, and Pascal Magne to name a few.

These are just some of my esteemed colleagues that I have had the pleasure to learn from and work alongside. These guys are what I call shortcuts. They make my learning journey effective and efficient. I call them my grandmasters as they help me become a chess player rather than a chess piece. It is this constant need to be able to fulfil my appetite 'to be the best I can' that drives me to continue furthering my skill base. This is the reason I continue to feel passionate about dentistry, and my work.

## Rosebank Dental Practice

Rosebank is a fully private practice with three treatment rooms, practicing comprehensive dentistry that involves all fields of dentistry. We have various specialists working at the practice so that all patients can be treated in familiar surroundings with a team that they feel comfortable with.

In recent years, the practice has been totally refurbished and looks beautiful. It is a pleasure to come to work in a nice environment with a really lovely hardworking and loyal team that I am really proud of.

I believe in the 'raving fan' concept. So whenever a new member of staff joins, I insist that they read the book *Raving Fans* by Ken Blanchard.

I would like to believe that the essence of the practice is that we provide world-class dentistry to all our patients in a happy environment. It is important to me that we have 'happy patients'. Happy patients become advocates for your business and inadvertently help build your business. We have worked hard at Rosebank to achieve this. I am glad that I have fantastic patients and their testimonials help reinforce my belief that we are achieving our mission. In fact, many of our patients have, over the years, become friends.

It is also crucial to my way of working that not only the patients are 'happy' but so are all the team at Rosebank. I was completely humbled by some of the testimonials my team wrote about me as part of the entry for the award. A

'The vision is really about empowering workers, giving them all the information about what's going on so they can do a lot more than they've done in the past.'

Bill Gates, co-founder of Microsoft

happy environment builds a positive culture, which in return means a better experience for all – staff and patients alike. It is really fulfilling to feel appreciated and valued for everything you put into a practice whilst still maintaining the precarious role of principal.

In terms of patient care, we have embraced the five principles of another very successful business – Starbucks. We believe in the 'five ways of being':

- To be welcoming. You only get one chance to make a first impression
- To be genuine. You need to listen and connect with your patients
- To be considerate. Understand your responsibility to others less fortunate than yourself and for your community
- To be knowledgeable. Invest in yourself and your team to offer the best expertise and knowledge available
- To be involved. Encourage a 'yes, I will' attitude in yourself and your team.

This practice philosophy has served us well at Rosebank. As a team, we are all clear of what expectations there are, and each and every member of the team takes this responsibility seriously.

### Another dimension

I am a course junkie! I am just about to complete my ninth and final module at the Kois Centre in Seattle. It gives me great pleasure and satisfaction to be achieving this.

I am a firm believer that you should have mentors. Someone who inspires you, teaches you, motivates you and encourages you. John Kois has helped me achieve that and, hopefully, made me a better dentist.

I have also started teaching as a senior instructor for CCADS (California Centre of Advanced Dental Studies), which is a new and exciting thing for me. It has taken me into a new area of dentistry – that of sharing my knowledge and skills with others. I have

discovered that this is hugely rewarding and a great learning experience as well. It also gives another dimension to my passion for dentistry.

## Entering the awards

To be honest, I did not actually enter the Private Dentistry Awards myself. Although Private Dentist of the Year is one of the most desirable awards to win, I could not actually write about myself and enter the award. Out of complete frustration at me, my wife (with the help of my team) decided that she would nominate me for this award. They wanted to see all my hard work pay off.

My wife is not a dentist, not medical in any way and not in the least bit knowledgeable about the skills involved in dentistry. But, I owe her a great debt. She managed to write a great entry, which I was only allowed to read after I got shortlisted. With her lack of dental knowledge, she took it upon herself to invite my team, peers, mentors and patients to write about me and their opinion of my work. She got my Smile Award cases for the case submission part and put it all together.

Quite a bit of the entry was based upon testimonials from very kind and generous folk. So my debt of gratitude goes beyond my wife to those people whom she pestered to write something about me.

Personally, it is the ultimate accolade from your peers and the Private Dentistry Awards are tough to get shortlisted for, let alone win! I am very proud to have won the award, not just for me but my whole team.

## A roller coaster journey

The journey – from starting out to winning the award – has been a roller coaster, as I am sure most previous winners will tell you. It's been tough getting the work/life balance right and I still struggle with that. But, happiness is a journey, not a destination. Happiness is now... in this moment, doing what I am and enjoying it!

This award concluded the trilogy of FMC awards. I have been fortunate to have won other awards along my dental journey. The awards have helped me to complete a jigsaw puzzle for Rosebank. Being awarded Best Practice in the South East at the Dentistry Awards recognised the efforts of the whole team, the patient care and the philosophy for Rosebank. With these sound foundations, I won three Smile awards last year, recognising my clinical skills at the Smile Awards. Therefore, the final piece of the jigsaw would naturally be winning Private Dentist of the Year at the Private Dentistry Awards.

I feel truly chuffed and humbled at receiving this acknowledgment, it means all the hours of dedication and hard work I put in is recognised and worthwhile. The team love winning these awards and the ceremonies are great for team bonding and a chance to let your hair down!

Our patients are also very proud of us and feel great in the knowledge that they are coming to an award-winning practice. It also gives us a really good unique selling point.

### Rosebank's five principles of providing excellent patient care, aka the 'five ways of being'

1. To be welcoming. You only get one chance to make a first impression
2. To be genuine. You need to listen and connect with your patients
3. To be considerate. Understand your responsibility to other less fortunate than ourselves and for our community
4. To be knowledgeable. Invest in yourself and your team to offer the best expertise and knowledge available
5. To be involved. Encourage a 'Yes I will' attitude in yourself and your team.

## Key differences

There are some great dentists and beautiful practices out there. It is inspiring to work amongst these fine people. But I try to march to a different drummer than everyone else.

I am a self-confessed learning junkie. When I am not studying or attending courses, I am reading in my spare time. I love reading. I think what I do is take the best of everything that I learn and read and use it to help develop myself.

I think the following quote from Maurice Greene, five-time world champion 100 metre sprinter, describes clearly what I am trying to say: 'Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up. It knows it must move faster than the lion to survive. Every morning a lion wakes up, and it knows it must move faster than the slowest gazelle or it will starve. It doesn't matter if you're the lion or gazelle. When the sun comes up, you'd better be moving.'

## Plans for the future

My plan for the future is to carry on with the journey and enjoy the ride. I would also like to become a 'shortcut' to young dentists. If you're not a shortcut to someone else, you're taking up too much space and will probably be replaced with someone who is a shortcut!

Also, every year I try and do something for charity. In previous years I have trekked Jemel Toubkal for DentaId. I have raced through Europe in a Crumball Rally, but the top of the list is doing the Goldeneye 750ft bungee jump from the Verzasca dam for the charity Healing Little Hearts. I am currently considering my next hair-brained adventure! PD

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Private Dentist of the Year 2010