

Is there life **after** dental practice ownership?

Dentists often put off selling their practices because they are concerned about life after dentistry.

What will they do with all those extra hours, how will they cope with leaving behind the identity that has defined them for decades? This series of articles explores the very busy lives of some of Practice Sale Search's clients, former-practice owners who have embraced post-sale life.

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Age: 56

Graduated: 1983: Melbourne Uni

Practice Owned: Parkdale VIC

In 1987 I started working in a practice in Parkdale as an assistant dentist. The principal, who owned a few practices, had just bought it from an older dentist. I worked for him in several of his practices, and decided I wanted to live in Parkdale, so I bought a house there.

When I told my boss that I had bought a house, he asked if I wanted to buy the practice too. Interest rates were 7.5%, and I went to lots of banks, but none of them would lend me anything. I was recently married, and the house had cleaned me out. My parents agreed to lend me the money (at bank interest rates) for the deposit, which was enough for the bank to do the rest.

I bought my practice in July 1988, nine months after I started working there. In the early 1990s, the opportunity came up for me to buy the real estate. The place was a rundown old building, not much to look at. I rebuilt the whole thing in 1995. We moved out for six weeks to a nearby practice, and luckily had very minimal disruption to trading. We moved out on a weekend and back in on a weekend.

I worked the practice solo for most of the time between then and now. At one stage I had an assistant, but it never



really worked out. I did a lot of practice management type courses and decided that I like the lean and mean type of practice, and made my practice the best it could be without making it bigger.

Why did you sell?

I had been planning my retirement for a long time. There were lots of things going on in my life and I thought early retirement might be an option. I went to see my accountant one day, when I was around 55, and he said, "OK, I guess you want to retire". There was enough in there for me to retire at that stage, so I thought – ah, I guess so, I'll start looking.

How did you sell?

I put an ad out for an assistant dentist who had a view to buying the practice. I had a three year plan to sell to her. I said I'd sell at market rate, which left me needing to find out what "market rate" was. I approached Practice Sale Search (PSS) and asked what it was worth.

PSS and I set up a campaign where my assistant dentist would get a "Right of Last Refusal". That is, we took the practice for sale to the market, and my assistant would have the chance to match the top offer that came in before it was sold to someone else.

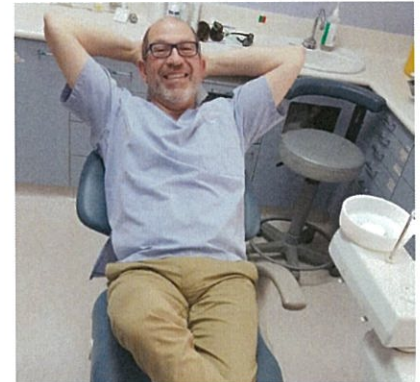
PSS had prepared me to expect quite a few interested parties, and they weren't wrong. It seemed like there were close to 100. PSS handled all the viewings for inspection, after which the offers started coming in. It eventually came down to two good offers.

When push came to shove, the assistant I had couldn't match the other offers, and was priced out by the market, so I sold to one of the other buyers. We finally settled the transaction in February last year.

I stayed on two days a week for the first three months. From May I was down to one day a week, only working Wednesdays. I have agreed to keep working Christmas. My assistant is still working there, even though she didn't buy it.

What is it like being an employee in your business?

Working as an employee takes a little getting used to. It is hard after so long as an owner to see other people making changes to your old business. Fortunately, the new owner has a lovely manner and



the changes have not been severe, so the transition has been reasonably smooth.

Any regrets about selling?

I have no regrets about selling. The time was right for me.

What now?

My wife and I met at the happiness conference four years ago.

I have four kids from my previous relationship and she has three. None of our kids are living with us anymore and there are no grandkids yet, so we are in a great stage of life right now, when we are very free and have few obligations.

We have decided to take full advantage of this window of freedom and plan to have some adventures before we are needed again as grandparents. The hardest part is deciding what to do...

We have a home-base in Bentleigh (a suburb in south east Melbourne), but we have decided to do some house-sits and explore inner city living in Melbourne. Every few weeks we go to a different place.

We are going to the US in July for three weeks on holiday, and when we get back we are thinking that we will probably move interstate to experience another part of Australia for a while. I am thinking somewhere between Adelaide and Noosa. I might do some locum work wherever we go. The world is wide open. ♦

Practice Sale Search is the leading dental practice brokerage in Australia, with the region's largest database of registered buyers and practices for sale. For more information, contact info@practicesalesearch.com.au or call 02 93284678.