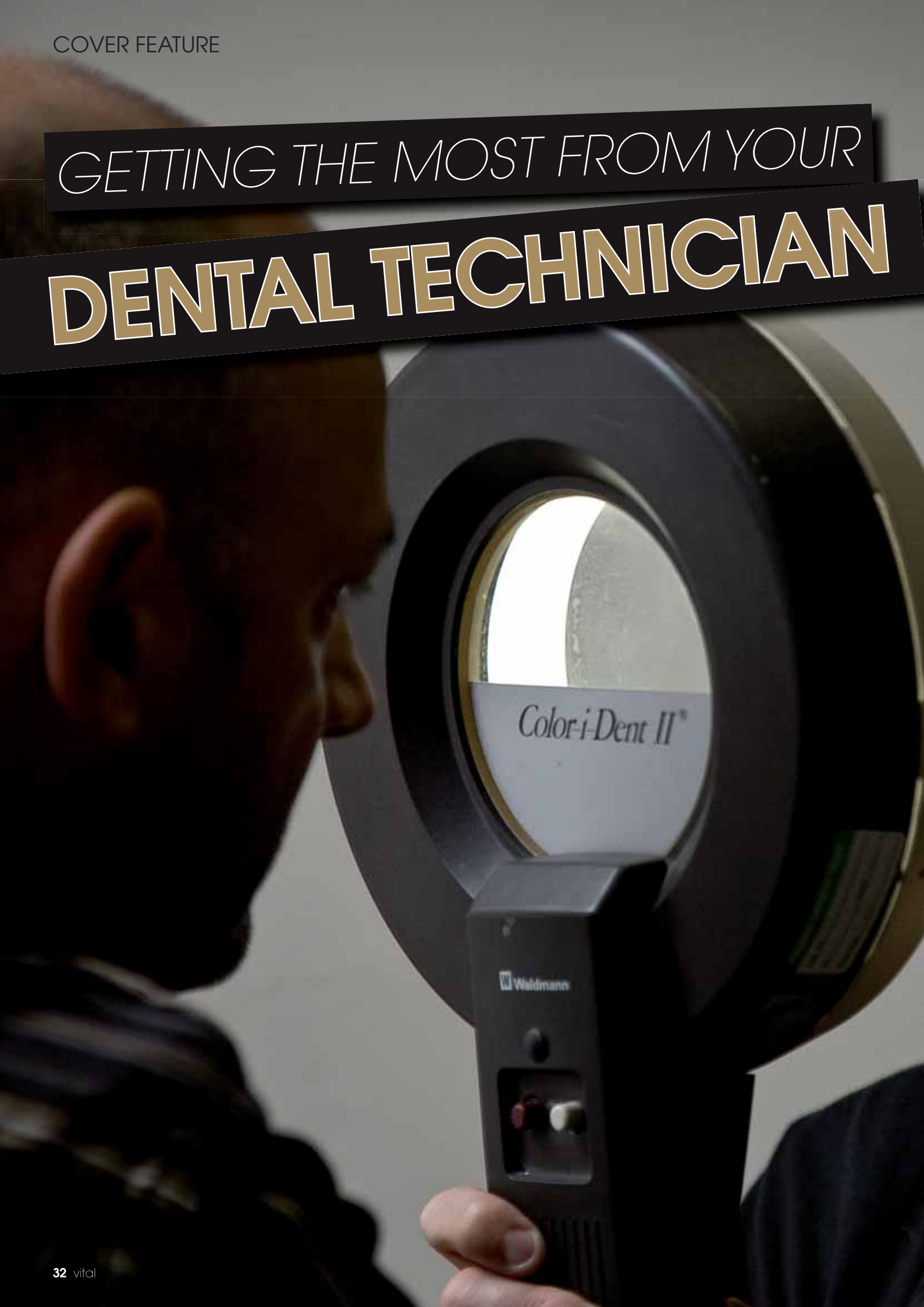


GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR
DENTAL TECHNICIAN





Dental technician

Mark Oborn*

presents his views on management processes and principles in the extended dental team.

Management by outcomes

This article is aimed at two sets of people:

1. Any dental business manager
2. Dentists, whether they manage a business or not.

This article is specifically about getting the best from the people you manage, and about how to get the most from your dental technician. I have based this article around a particular management theory called 'management by outcomes'. If you want to get the best from your dental technician, or from anyone you manage; if you want to keep motivation in your team up; or if you simply want your team to perform better, this article is for you.

Delegation

As technical or clinical dental people we seem to have a tendency to be control freaks, some of us (and I include myself in this) are verging a little on Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Do you check that your staff have done things all the time? Do you have trouble 'letting go' and delegating? Do you find that no one can actually do the job as well as you can? Do you find people do the job better when you spell it out to them in words of only one syllable? Hmm, me too!

There is a great deal of writing in management circles about management by objectives, or outcomes centred management. But what do they mean by outcomes centred? I'll give you an example.

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What is the best crown?

As a dental technician I often get asked to make an i-esthetic crown,¹ or an inVizion crown² or perhaps a Procera crown.³ Most of the time this is fine, but these types of crown are all different. They all have different properties. Different crowns have different uses.

If a dark tooth needs masking (eg a root treated tooth) then an inVizion would be best. If the underlying tooth is natural tooth colour then why not go for maximum possible aesthetics and use an i-esthetic?

The problem with being asked for a specific type of crown is that what I get asked for is not always best! So what is the best crown then? Well, it depends on the clinical situation!

A technician knows his or her crowns (or should do!); they will know which is strongest, which is most translucent, which can mask a tooth and which can't. They will know which can be used posteriorly and which ones need caution posteriorly.

Team communication

In my opinion, when deciding on what type of crown to prescribe, a better result will be attained from your dental technician if s/he is given two things:

1. The clinical situation
2. The patient's desired outcomes.

This way your dental technician can make the best choice about which type of crown is best, based on his or her knowledge of the materials, the clinical situation and what the patient wants to achieve.

This is **management by outcomes**; give the person the outcomes and let them work out the best process.

‘Management by outcomes motivates, allows people room to think and enjoy their jobs more, performance goes up and everyone is happy.’

Telling a dental technician you want an i-esthetic, for example, is **management by process**; this is a flawed management principle, and ultimately can lead to a very disappointed patient when the crown comes back wrong due to misprescription. Dental technicians are now registered with the GDC and their core subjects for CPD include material science, so they should know the best options.

Vicious or virtuous?

The same principle works for general management: manage people by outcomes, not process. Give people a clear understanding of what is to be achieved, a set of values or rules to go by and help them to make their own decisions on the best way to achieve this.

Management by process is counter productive and starts a vicious circle going. If we spell everything out about *how* to achieve an outcome the person becomes demotivated and doesn't need to think anymore. Consequently they won't perform as well, they make mistakes, the OCD boss notices and decides that a little more control is required and so decides that the person needs to be told in a little more detail ... and the cycle starts again!



Management by outcomes starts a 'virtuous circle'; it motivates, it allows people room to think and enjoy their jobs more, performance goes up and everyone is happy.

The key thing here is to equip your staff with:

1. The resources they need
2. Your support if required
3. A clear understanding of what the outcome is
4. A set of guiding values or rules to go by.

This is why mission statements are so important as they provide these values or rules to go by.

Stop and think

So next time you feel that controlling urge again, stop and think... 'Is it possible in this

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situation to allow the other person to work our how to get this job done by themselves and have I provided the resources to allow them to do it?'

You never know, other people may be able to get things done better than you if only you would let them!

Mark has his own blog at www.dosomethingremarkable.co.uk. He invites all readers to visit this online dental business community and post views on this article. Or write to Vital at vitaleditorial@nature.com.

1. i-esthetic is a trademark of SBO Dental Laboratory
2. inVizion is a trademark of Vident
3. Procera is a trademark of NobelBiocare



Ed's note: As you all know, Vital is aimed at 'the whole dental team', and the dental technician is an essential, if sometimes isolated, member of the dental team. In pursuit of more content aimed at our dental technician readers, I asked Mark Oborn, the author of this article, to contribute to Vital. If you are a dental technician or a clinical dental technician and would like to suggest ideas for future articles in Vital, or if you would like to write an article yourself, we would love to hear from you. Email vitaleditorial@nature.com.