Common Sense Solutions for Practicing Post Pandemic

By Wendy Lewis

It's Q2 2021 and vaccines are plentiful and free, for the most part. Yet, about 40 percent of U.S. adults have still not received a vaccine shot.[1] This is not because they can't; rather it is because they won't for a variety of reasons, including fear of the unknown, general distrust, possible side effects, and mixed messages from competing sources. The infectious disease community appears to be united on this front: we need at least 70–85% of the US population immunized to reach herd immunity.[2]

Fortunately, most aesthetic practices appear to have bounced back quickly from the pandemic, with many in a healthier state. Undoubtedly, the way they practice and manage patients has changed. Let's face it; none of us would have chosen a global pandemic as a defining event in our lives, but here we are. The bright side is that we all learned some hard lessons emerging from this period that will serve us well over the years to come.

For example, plastic surgeons have readily embraced non-surgical treatments as a highly lucrative addition to an aesthetic surgery practice. Professional skin care sales carried many practices through the lockdown by implementing drop shipping, curbside pickup, Shopify, and Facebook/Instagram stores. Those who were formerly resistant to the concept of telemedicine, virtual consults and follow ups, and events, have most likely embraced these trends with open arms and are fully onboard. Many have realized that they don't need a cavernous waiting room anymore and may prefer not having patients and their friends and family present for consults and procedures, thus have re-engineered their space to get the best return on their square footage.

Many practitioners I know have emerged with stronger management skills, a healthier respect for the bottom line, a desire for leaner and more efficient systems, plus updated ways to accomplish many day-to-day tasks. They have sold, donated, or traded up capital equipment that became expensive coat hangers, and eliminated a lot of waste in their businesses. I have also seen the emergence of a more open mindset and renewed creativity among my plastic surgeon colleagues and friends that has also motivated their teams to think outside the box.

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The mainstream adoption of working from home during COVID has impacted the post COVID workforce for the long term. In fact, many leading companies have announced their commitment to a remote workforce solution, including Amazon, American Express, Microsoft, Salesforce, Starbucks, and Target to name a few. Considering the undeniable success of the remote workforce over the past year, more companies will switch to a work from home model for at least a portion of the workforce. There will be a sharp increase in remote jobs available to capitalize on the desire for workplace flexibility. Plastic surgeons may consider this option or a hybrid model for some staff members who are not patient facing, such as bookkeepers, accountants, schedulers, administrative staff, marketing support, computer techs, as well as some clinical staff. Consider the examples of Uber, Lyft and Door Dash that have attracted freelancers from all walks of life as their sole source of income or just for extra cash. They can work when they want and make as much as they want, which has revolutionized the labor market.

Keeping your best people happy translates to low to no turnover and loss of institutional memory. When I ran a plastic surgery practice over 20 years ago in Manhattan, where the labor pool is a challenge and turnover is high, I determined that it was better to have rock stars on board part time than staff who were 'just okay' full time and would quit after 18 months. This philosophy transformed the practice. In fact, as of about a dozen years ago, my consultancy has had a 100% virtual team which has kept our overhead down, expanded our ability to hire talent, and kept our turnover to next to zero.

Post COVID, 'work-life balance' that used to seem like a myth to many of us, has taken on new meaning from entrepreneurs to administrative staff and everyone in between. Being able to spend more time with your kids, take a yoga class, meet a colleague for coffee, jump on a ZOOM to learn about a new product launch, or sign on for a virtual workshop or conference on your own time has created new opportunities to do what you want, when you want. I don't see that going away any time soon.

Wendy Lewis is Founder/President of Wendy Lewis & Co Ltd, Global Aesthetics Consultancy, a boutique marketing communications group in New York City. She is a frequent presenter at leading conferences internationally, a prolific writer for may publications and websites, serves on the Editoral Board of PRIME Anti-Ageing Journal, and the author of over a dozen books. Her next book is the Second Edition of Aesthetic Clinic Marketing in the Digital Age Post COVID (CRC Press). wl@wendylewisco.com

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