

# ‘Today I am living that dream’

For **Rachel Dilley**, resilience is rooted in her strong support network. Here, she shares her people-powered path to practice ownership with *BDJ In Practice*.

‘Her compassion and leadership style allow people to thrive in the workplace. She is a true visionary within the dental industry.’

‘Rachel is very determined to succeed in her work.’

‘Rachel personifies professionalism and integrity – her endless energy, vision and expertise shine through.’

With accolades like these, Rachel Dilley should be proud of her achievements. An inspiration to many, the new owner of Tower Hill Dental Practice, located in the market town of Sowerby Bridge, West Yorkshire, quit her hugely successful role at a practice earlier this year to pursue a dream. Throwing caution to the wind and overcoming multiple personal challenges, she has finally fulfilled a lifelong ambition to become the owner of a dental practice – a dream that was 30 years in the making.

This is a story of many chapters and the beginnings of her new venture, Liberty Dental Group. As she shared on Instagram on the day of opening her first practice: ‘Today I can smile. It’s been a long time coming! I can honestly say this has been one of the most challenging times of my life, and, believe me, I’ve had many. Today, I’m sitting behind a reception desk, running my own practice and it feels good. I’ve turned a rundown practice that closed its doors

during COVID-19 into a bright, welcoming workplace and a comfortable and caring practice for patients to enter. Today I’m building. I’m building a vision, a future, a happy place, a team and a wonderful practice for our community. Today I am grateful for an opportunity that I could only dream of. Today I am living that dream.’

If the road to practice ownership is littered with obstacles, then multiply these challenges tenfold because Rachel started her dental career as a dental nurse.

Despite this, her dedication and drive propelled her into various management and leadership roles that have earned her multiple prestigious awards.

She was enjoying her role as chief operating officer at the multi-award-winning Town Hall Group and chief executive officer of its charity, Town Hall Foundation in West Yorkshire, when she decided to bite the bullet. A long-time advocate of compassionate dentistry and seemingly at the pinnacle of her career, why leave now?

‘I’ve had many happy years in several different and diverse roles within dentistry. It wasn’t an easy decision to leave a successful dental business, but when an opportunity came my way, I had to decide whether to stay in a comfortable role or to take a risk and grab what was on offer,’ she says.

‘In the past, fear was the one factor that stopped me from pursuing the idea of owning my dental practice. On this occasion, I knew I had to embrace the opportunity and find the strength to make what was a difficult decision.’

Tower Hill Dental is a smart two-surgery practice and Rachel is keen to pay tribute to her ‘visionary builder’ who supported the renovation and who, she says, ‘had a base shell to work with, and that was about it!’

She employed an experienced marketing consultant to help create and develop the brand and is delighted with the results.

‘We wanted to create a practice that was fresh, warm and welcoming. We worked with a palette of colours, which became our branding. When our patients entered the practice, we wanted them to feel well cared for and respected.’

She had a tight budget so purchased reconditioned chairs to keep down costs.

‘Belmont has an excellent reputation for the longevity of their equipment. The chair package I purchased looks new, and patients comment on their comfort. They also love the colour scheme.’

But her biggest challenge was not the capital investment required for the project but more the naysayers who doubted her ability to run her own business.



‘There were many people who thought I would fail. Some offered advice whilst others gave reasons why I shouldn’t own a dental practice. Sadly, I have sacrificed some friendships along the way. I’ve immersed myself in the business and made it successful. I have gained support from like-minded individuals who see my potential.’

She still works front-of-house and believes this is paramount to a happy business.

‘Dental nursing is where I started,’ she says. ‘It gave me the passion and drive to want more. I will always continue to be a registered dental nurse. I must lead my team by example, get to know my patients, build relationships and learn. I am grounded. I did not come from a privileged background, although I never felt I went without as a child. I had to work from 12, which taught me to strive hard. I believe I am a compassionate leader, but I’m nobody’s fool.’

Divorced with two sons and a daughter, Rachel’s partner recently suffered a stroke and she lost her mother, too. She has had her own health issues, and last year her daughter haemorrhaged at 31 weeks pregnant and granddaughter, Willow, was born seven weeks early.

‘I have experienced a lot of challenging times in my life, and I have struggled. My youngest son has a rare genetic condition,

and this changes you. With the recent passing of my mother and my partner having a stroke, times have been tough. But life has taught me to put one foot in front of the other – the more steps we take, the stronger and more resilient we become.’

Despite all the obstacles life’s thrown down, she believes it’s vital to remain strong. ‘Strength is absolute. I could never give up on something. Persistence and determination are two great qualities for overcoming the bumps. It is important to experience days where life is joyful and fulfilling.’

She draws strength from her faith and this inherent determination to never give up. ‘My faith does not remove the pain, but it enables me to endure it,’ she adds. And strength comes from loved ones too. ‘Not a day goes by that I couldn’t be without my family and friends.’

Like any new business, Tower Hill Dental Practice has been a financial challenge, adding: ‘When you start a new business, it always costs more than you expect. I learnt to budget an additional 30% for all major

costs and purchases, but did not want to cut costs where I felt it mattered most. I intended to make the best of what we had, as we had one chance to make an impact with our little dental practice in Sowerby Bridge. I am very pleased with the overall results, and it seems to have helped to attract new patients. I now plan to invest in the practice and expand over the next few years.’

But has it been worth the stressful times, the money worries and draining of energy levels?

Rachel is unequivocal. ‘I may have sacrificed my financial independence but my late mother always told me ‘Life isn’t about money, it’s about moments’. Practice ownership has always been a dream of mine. It’s taken me 30 years and it has been challenging, but I am loving every minute.’

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