

X

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**Democracy is a wonderful thing. We know this because the people who are democratically elected tell us. So it must be as true in dental circles as it is elsewhere.**



We are clearly entering another dental election season, or maybe year, since candidates are queuing up for seats on this society and representation on that committee and positions on the other clinical forum. The trouble for we mere voters is that we don't seem to get to see much of them between ballots, let alone between patients. Once the cross is planted the recipient seems to magically vanish until the next election is due, so what's in it for us? A careful scrutiny of the candidates' election addresses always provides some insights.

In dentistry they invariably start off with a great list of qualifications with groups of initials that have Cs, Ds, Fs and Ms predominating. This is presumably in order to justify the candidates' appeal to trade your valued ball-point pen's worth of ink to make an 'x' to allow them to represent you or propel them into high and noble office. Or, cunningly, they try the completely opposite approach, playing against the image of the organisation, committee or board so as to appeal to we ordinary practising mortals. Such candidates have a particularly distinguished lack of a list of anything. In the section headed, 'CV and positions held' it simply states 'honest yeoman' or 'ethical clinician' or 'hard working dentist'. In other words, something so completely not lardi-dah that it's an emphatic statement in itself.

Then there's the part in which the candidate can tell you the potential voter, what he or she really wants you to know about them so as to influence your intentions. Careful wording is needed here so as to draw in like minded folks, say orthodontists or oral surgeons, but not to alienate others, say, prosthodontists or GDPs. Usually, except perhaps for the 'honest yeoman' approach which states that he or she is not afraid to speak his or her mind whatever the consequences (usually not being elected for being too outspoken) the aspirant politician will steer a middle path. This will offer a radical enough approach to want to 'get things

done for the benefit of the whole profession,' or to 'see a new horizon in patient care' without unsettling their audience into thinking that they are about to cast their vote for a rabid revolutionary.

Similarly, however, the seeker of the seat needs to be mindful of what it might actually be possible to achieve. This is so that in one, three, or five years time, they will be able to retrieve the campaign leaflet from their loft (they'll be the only one to still have a copy), wave it around and claim that they've been able to fulfil everything they

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promised despite the multitude of very tedious committee meetings.

They also usually realise that some humility might be in order. A whiff of being very humble suddenly stills the previous zeal of the hustings rhetoric. 'I am of course very mindful of the great honour that you, my fellow dentists would be bestowing upon me by allowing me to be your representative voice.' Or they dip inexplicably into the clumsy absurdity of 'it would be a singular distinction for me to serve in this capacity as your chosen conduit of feedback.'

A closing line or two will throw out words like specialist, importance, money, CPD, future development, ethics, new millennium, money, integration, GDP/ Hospi-

tal/Community, money, demanding action, caries rates, minority interests, money, standards, primary care, customers, modern world, validation, money and objectives. In no particular order.

Then it's our turn. But the method of voting also plays an intriguing part in this most fascinating of democratic processes. A first-past-the-post system is probably the most straightforward. Check the number of candidates to be voted for, plant the appropriate number of x's and it's done. Anything more complex and the matter takes some careful concentration. Various methods come with long texts of small, closely typed instructions and explanations. Investigation reveals that if you vote for the person you want most to win, in common with a majority of other people, then your vote for the person you'd almost like to win will be transferred over to that person. Unless that person already has enough votes to get them elected in which case the next person gets your approbation and so on and so on until your cross for the person you definitely don't want gets them elected too. Or something like that.

Having then untangled the whys and wherefores of the ballot paper you have to place this in an envelope marked 'A' or '1' or 'Voter Envelope' and seal it down. Next an independent person has to witness that you are who you say you are and the date on which you say you are who you say you are (keeping in mind that they've only got your word for it anyway). In turn this is sealed into envelope 'B' or '2' or 'Mailing Envelope' and dispatched.

Some while later, after you've actually forgotten who it was you voted for anyway, the results are trumpeted in the dental press. And, yes, the same faces seem to reappear smiling and thanking and being very humble all over again. Memory plays such odd tricks, is it really one, three or five years since the last one? X.

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