

On your marks, get set, re-set!

Take pride in being an optician

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This article will re-emphasize and celebrate the value of being an Optician as well remind ourselves that this is a career (not just a job) that offers quite a bit of fulfillment if you allow it. Change the way you view yourself in this role and you will come to a higher level of realization. You are not only an Optician, but a healthcare provider: you improve lives. Start thinking in this way and you will naturally provide better care to your patients. In our small community of fellow Opticians, united we can strengthen ourselves while bringing forth and providing top level service. The intent of this article is to help you to increase your self-awareness and realize the integral part you play in helping people with their vision correction solutions while building your brand – you.

## You are educated

On your journey to becoming an Optician most of you completed many courses and invested a lot of time and energy working on assignments, meeting deadlines and studying for exams and tests. This career sure didn't come easy. You have worked to attain this accomplishment – be careful not to lose sight of this. Being an optician is more than a sales role, more than a stylist role and more than making a buck. It is a responsibility. You have gathered many skills along the way and although you may not realize this you use them every day. You have strong verbal communication skills, most likely work in a team environment and you help clients determine their needs, daily. As an optician you are providing options, educating, reading customer behaviour and handling difficult customers. No doubt you just caught yourself thinking, "Yeah, I do do that!" The things we end up taking for granted often are the things we are doing unconsciously. Sometimes we have been doing the same things for so long we forget we are actually doing them. Being conscious of all we do can only help to restore your pride in this profession.

## We are regulated

The College of Opticians of Ontario (COO) regulates the profession within the province. Opticians must maintain membership, complete continuing education credits and uphold service quality standards. Some may consider the licensing fees expensive, however, these licensing fees support the people and systems that help regulate our profession, we need to reflect on the positives of being regulated. Being regulated gives the profession value. The COO also requires Opticians to develop and maintain a portfolio. This encourages Opticians to attend trade shows, create goals and stay current with industry developments, which is a good thing for the profession and the public.

## Ethical Practice

What does ethical practice mean to you? Morality, unity, strength, honesty, respect, and equity are some words that come to mind. Opticians should take the morally correct road in all they do. This is a personal and professional responsibility. While maintaining our top priority let's agree to not undercut

the optical down the street even if the market is over saturated. Nor engage in any behaviour that could even remotely be misconstrued as insurance fraud. Let's have the strength to guide patients with their best interest in mind, even if this means potentially losing a sale. Let's not fear telling a patient that another dispensary is better suited to address the patient's vision needs. Patients deserve honesty and respect – but so do fellow Opticians, and coworkers. Let's conduct ourselves to the best of our ability.

## Differentiate

Within this career choice we do have the ability to make it our own. We have talked about what you are already doing. How about something new? How about differentiating yourself from your fellow peers and extending your scope. Not everyone will like every aspect of their job. Find an aspect that you love and specialize in it. Do as much research on it as possible. Talk about it with people in your network. Educate and offer it to your patients. Be the expert

## You are the inside source

You are the inside source to those around you. Be sure to keep up with developments in the industry and share that wealth of knowledge with others. With the explosion of digitally made lenses in recent years there have been numerous advancements to the fabricating of lenses. You may be working for a corporation that only sells specific lenses. If you only maintain knowledge of your company's products and processes you may have no idea about other lenses on the market; how technologies have advanced; and what is current. This is why it is important to attend trade shows and continuing education seminars such as the one you are attending today. Remain aware of developments in the industry.

## Build and Grow

The term *networking* is thrown around a lot in the business world. To “network” means to “build relationships”. These relationships can provide a medium for your career advancement. As your career progresses, talk to people about your ideas and where you want to be. This will ensure your current and future success, both personally and professionally, as people will naturally keep you in mind when opportunities arise. Whether you own your own dispensary, work for a large corporation, independent or alongside a doctor, networking is key. A key component and a key ingredient in having a lengthy fulfilling and fruitful career. No matter your career choice, networking is vital and easier than ever. Grow an important strong network of people in the industry. The optical industry really is a small one. Chances are the people you went to school with, and the people you have worked with, will be the same people you encounter over and over again. A rep working for company “A” today may be working for company “B” tomorrow, all in the same field. Make those connections and keep them healthy. Chances are your personal network will not understand the wins and woes that come with your professional duties. With this in mind, it's good to draw from both your personal and professional networks.

How and where can you network?

Networking is much like making new friends. Trust and loyalty are built over time and so you must consider these working and growing relationships. Networking doesn't always take place at formal optical trade shows or CE seminars. It could be that person you met on the bus or the one standing in line next to you while you wait in line for your morning coffee. Tell them what you do and exchange business cards. You'll be surprised at how many people will call on you for your expertise. If you don't typically engage in small talk then our current "connected" era has been designed just for you. LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook are all wonderful sites where you can meet people. Often there are groups on these sites that allow you to read and discuss items that may affect you, without ever having to leave your comfort zone.

I hope this piece has re-inspired you to love your career again and look for ways to continually improve. Be it your knowledge, your skills or your appetite for advancement. Take care and pride in the service you provide and always educate your patient – they'll be grateful and you will find much fulfillment. Continue to seek more knowledge about the innovations and technologies that affect vision and get involved with campaigns and discussions that will connect you with the things in the industry you may be passionate about.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Yasmeen Syed".

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