

Editorial *Your Practice Follows Your Mind*

When was the last time you decided to take a vacation, packed your bags, and took off with no real destination in mind—no map, no plans, no worries? For most of you, the last time you took a trip like this was probably during college or dental school. On the other hand, when was the last time you sat down and planned a course for your practice? Where are you going? How will you get there? Is the path you're on consistent with who you are and what you want? Or does your daily practice of dentistry amount to just another day in the trenches, where solving the next crisis is as far as you get? Sometimes it's easy to lose sight of who we are, what we want, and where we are going because we get caught up in the everyday activities of our practices and lives.

How would it be, though, if there were another way? Instead of living your days as a mindless blur caught between commuting to and from your busy practice, how about arriving at your office with the time and the presence of mind to enjoy your patients, practice, and staff? What if every day you knew you were another step closer to your dreams?

As the old saying goes, if you enjoy what you do you will never work another day in your life. I believe that realizing the potential of this statement is the key to a successful practice and a successful life. What makes people satisfied or frustrated with who they are and what they do is simple—it is the difference between their current reality and how they imagine things should be. The greater the discrepancy between the two, the greater the dissatisfaction will be. Of course, this is a simplification of a very complex situation. We have so many desires: basic survival needs, love, social acceptance, material things—the list goes on. Every time we get what we want, something else always seems to replace it on the "if I only had" list. So where do we start?

The place to start is within yourself. Knowing who you are and setting your priorities is the beginning of the path. First, you must have a clear vision of your practice and your life. Then you must align this vision with who you are morally and ethically. Clarifying these issues is no easy task, but unless you know who you are and where you want to go you cannot begin the journey to your dream dental practice.

How many times have you presented treatment solutions to patients only to have them ask for inferior alternatives? Have you ever obliged these patients, performing procedures that you knew were not in their best interest? Every time this happens it can make you feel like you're selling a little bit of your soul. If your practice vision and philosophy are clear you can begin to refine your goals, redirecting your practice toward clientele with whom you share similar values. Once you define what you believe, you can stop performing dentistry that is counter to your beliefs. Being true to who you are and what you believe is pivotal in living a worthwhile life.

Try asking yourself some difficult questions: What are the five most important priorities in my life? Why does my practice exist? What do I love about practicing dentistry? What am I uncomfortable with in my current practice of dentistry? What principles or values guide my day-to-day practice of dentistry? What does the ideally restored mouth in my practice look like? What does my perfect practice look like? What is my perfect day? If you take the time to really think about questions like these, you will begin to clarify a vision and philosophy for your dental practice. Once you know the results you want you can begin to create the practice and the life you dream about.

Write down your vision and communicate it to your staff, your family, and your friends. Keep this vision alive by looking at it every week, and force yourself to feel uncomfortable with the things that are not in alignment with your philosophy. This will be your greatest motivator, and it will guide you to your desired result. Hire staff who share your values and can buy into your dreams. Most of all, honor yourself and be true to who you are—within these truths lies your freedom from frustration and dissatisfaction. Zen philosophers say that "reality is mind only." Imagine what you want, believe in the possibilities, and let your creativity be the guide to your own reality.

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