

Guest Editorial *Survival Tips for Your Dental Practice*

I have been in practice for 30 years and have decided to jot down a few thoughts with the hope of providing some survival tips to my younger colleagues. The 30 years between planning to open my office and planning my retirement have passed in an instant, and the pleasures of my profession have been innumerable. First, I have had the opportunity to treat great patients (and a few not-so-great patients!). I have treated 3 generations of some families. I have been challenged to learn new technologies and evaluate new materials. I also know the self-satisfaction that comes from the completion of a rehabilitation case in which everything has gone perfectly. And finally, I have gained the continuing respect of the community at large.

The challenge to grow, learn, and mature is ever present, while the opportunity to serve society in this honorable profession is truly a delight. To my younger colleagues I offer a few thoughts on how to be happy with your profession and satisfied with its rewards. First, remember that it is not easy. Dentistry requires much dedication and hard work, along with constant evaluation of where you are and where you are headed. The following tips may help you along your path.

Some of these "instructions" apply to everyone, but will be particularly helpful to those in the dental profession:

- Happiness with yourself should be a primary goal.
- Maintain a suitable level of physical activity and a healthy diet.
- Value your family, and share in others' lives.
- Surround yourself with as many good friends as possible. When things go badly friends can be a great source of strength.
- Do not spend more than you earn.
- Be able to admit that you are wrong or do not have all the answers.
- Take a stress reduction course, and practice what you learn there.
- Do not work through lunch.
- Schedule your time efficiently.
- Finally, develop a spiritual center, either through religion or philosophy.

These suggestions will hopefully aid my colleagues on the path to personal and professional fulfillment:

- Perform procedures for which you are qualified, as getting in over your head is a major source of stress. Excel at the procedures you perform.
- Seek out the best specialists available. Aim to develop a good professional, and if possible personal, relationship while you learn from them.
- Treat and care for the entire patient.
- Charge what you feel your dentistry is worth, and then do not apologize for your fees.
- Avoid managed care if possible, as it is the death of quality dentistry.
- Remember that insurance companies make money from your hard work.
- Strive to provide an excellent dental experience for the patient.
- If a patient leaves your practice, do not be upset. You probably did nothing to warrant it. After all, we are all only sharing one another's patients.
- Do not criticize your colleagues' work if you would be unwilling for others to observe your work.
- Develop an office staff that shares your philosophy and goals.

You can have it all, but not all at once. It will take a certain degree of patience and hard work to be successful and fulfilled in your professional life. Do not be in a hurry; instead, enjoy the ride!

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