

## PUBLISHED ARTICLE 2

### HOW TO BE THRILLED IN DENTISTRY (FOR THE FIRST TIME?)

#### **Introduction**

Do you feel unfulfilled and fundamentally unhappy in dentistry? Fifteen years into my dental career, I was feeling just like you—tired, depressed, and frustrated with my current situation. My daily work had become mundane, and simple patient and staff complaints were starting to get to me. Dentistry—or to be more accurate, my dentistry—wasn't cutting it anymore.

Sadly, polling dentists attending my lectures reveals a huge number of dentists in this group. But what are your alternatives? You can linger in misery until retirement, which unfortunately is farther off than you think. You could scour the want ads for other careers, but what are dentists trained for? Or, you can make your dental world a more rewarding one. The key is understanding how. Although I read every dental publication that landed on my desk, I realized that if I wanted to stay in dentistry at all, I needed to become more skilled and more fulfilled.

#### **Choose Your Passion**

What would you *love* to accomplish in dentistry? I discovered that I love to treat complex, cosmetically oriented cases. Does that inspire you? Would scanning and milling your own restorations (e.g., IPS e.max CAD, Ivoclar Vivadent); placing implants; or providing quality digital dentures in less time (e.g., Pala Dentures, Heraeus Kulzer) rock your world? Would helping save lives and putting less stress on your own body by treating sleep apnea patients (e.g., Sleep Group Solutions; AADSM) make you happier? Would you like to provide more esthetic and minimally invasive direct composite restorations (e.g., Estelite Omega, Tokyama; Empress Esthetic, Ivoclar Vivadent)? Would treating developmentally disabled patients give you the fulfillment you don't have now? Does getting more involved in the dental health of your community sound exhilarating to you? Would you like to give back to the profession and younger dentists by teaching? Thinking about and then working toward what excites you is key to being thrilled with dentistry.

#### **Determine What You Need to Know, and Educate Yourself**

Although I graduated from one of the country's most prestigious dental schools, I'd learned how to fix teeth, not how to repair a smile, a headache, or joint issue. I never really learned what *ideal* is, so I didn't know how to get my patients there.

And, like many dentists, I was intimidated by complex cases. When I realized I wanted to do more comprehensive dentistry, I needed to know where to start. My answers to such questions as how to alter someone's bite or how to make an attractive smile more stable were, ironically, found in publications that had been available for years. These included an article written by Dr. Pete Dawson, which caused a light bulb to go off—***I needed more education.***

I attended a weekend session at the Dawson Academy in St. Petersburg, Florida, about *complete dentistry*, and so began the transformation of my dental career. I embarked on an adventure of learning how to fabricate a functional, comfortable smile, and soon realized I was halfway through a 10-year plan to improve my dental world! By spending about two weekends per year investing in my new skills, I changed the course of my dental career.

My next goal was learning how to make a newly stable smile more esthetic. After reading about the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD), I attended the annual scientific session in San Diego, CA. I learned from many industry leaders, including Drs. Corky Wilhite, Brian LeSage, and David Hornbrook. At the session, these educators demonstrated their aptitude for conservative dentistry and their willingness to help you become an expert yourself. It was one of the most impactful weeks of my life, during which I learned just how well dentists could transform smiles.

The engaging and helpful nature of AACD educators inspired me to maintain my motivation and, in 2007, to create a New York AACD affiliate chapter, the Empire State Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (ESACD). Today, the ESACD is a vibrant and successful organization on its own. I have had the opportunity to not only participate in my local affiliate chapter, but currently serve on the AACD Board of Directors as well. Due to the exceptional training and rigorous curriculum, the AACD accreditation track produces the finest dentists and laboratory technicians in the world. By becoming an active member in the AACD, I have gained clinical knowledge and colleagues—both dentists and dental laboratory technicians—who challenge me and inspire my dentistry to *fly to new heights*.

The bottom line is that there are many reputable organizations and instructional institutes through which you can achieve the level of education, training, and support that you need and desire. The Dawson Academy is a great resource for advancing your skills and understanding of *complete dentistry*. Drs. Pete Dawson, John Cranham, Witt Wilkerson, Scott Finlay, Raj Upadya, and others have made the Dawson Academy a resource for dentists looking for the principles and skills necessary to create a successful practice of complete, predictable, and quality dentistry. Spear Education, led by Dr. Frank Spear, is a knowledgeable avenue to help you become the dentist you have always wanted to be. Dr. John Kois is another outstanding mentor, and at the Kois Center, he demonstrates new technology and skills that are essential to improving clinical practice.

For those with a passion for short-term orthodontics, Invisalign, Six Month Smiles, Fast Track, and Inman Aligner Therapy all have training programs and courses available. The American Academy of Implant Dentistry is also an excellent resource for those interested in becoming more proficient at placing implants.

#### ***Align Yourself with Experts***

Once you've become more skillful and are ready to venture toward your chosen path, it's important to remember that you still cannot do it alone. Choosing and aligning yourself with appropriate colleagues is essential.

#### ***Specialists.***

Choose your specialists well. They can contribute to your success *if* they value your referrals, and consider you a partner. These relationships can contribute to a better dental life, one in which these specialists advise you, assist you, back you up on your suggestions to patients, and help to increase treatment plan acceptance. Periodontists, oral surgeons, orthodontists, and endodontists are key to creating a successful treatment plan. If you don't have confidence in your current specialists, find clinicians that you do trust.

#### ***Laboratory Technicians.***

Modern technology makes it possible to select and work with a laboratory technician who is equally or more knowledgeable than you are about esthetics, material properties, and function—regardless of where they're located. Although my practice is in New York, I work with laboratories in Virginia, Utah, California, and Arizona. With a variety of educational programs available, laboratory technicians can receive advanced training from those who have mastered the field. An AACD-accredited laboratory technician is invaluable, since they truly understand all of the nuances of today's comprehensive esthetic dentistry.

#### ***Materials & Manufacturers.***

New and clinically researched materials like lithium disilicate (IPS e.max, Ivoclar Vivadent) are transforming how functional, durable, and strong restorations are fabricated with natural-looking esthetics. Likewise, zirconia options have evolved and now exhibit fine translucencies that are appropriate for use in the esthetic zone. It's therefore important to understand today's material properties and their indications. Attending seminars that carefully explain the advantages and disadvantages of today's restorative materials is essential.

Reputable manufacturers are continually creating and improving products to make dentists' work more efficient, predictable, and esthetic. Products from Ivoclar Vivadent (IPS e.max, Variolink Esthetic, Tetric EvoCeram Bulk Fill, etc.) work seamlessly together.

Pala Digital Dentures from Heraeus Kulzer feature a 2- or 3-step denture system that is incredibly light and offers an exceptional fit. Other composite materials (e.g., Ivoclar Vivadent Empress Esthetic, Tokuyama Estelite Omega, etc.) offer beautiful and truly chameleon-like effects. Don't be afraid to learn about and try new products to improve your dentistry and practice.

### ***Let Your Confidence Show***

When you understand new techniques, materials, and technology, you radiate confidence. That confidence is contagious, leading staff and patients to trust you more; suggest and accept treatments, respectively; and refer friends and family.

### ***Work with People Who Make You—and Your Patients—Smile***

You spend dozens of hours each week with your team—more waking hours than with your family. Choose staff members who are fun, happy, intelligent, and outgoing. Hiring people that you *want* to see every day makes a huge difference in your practice and life! And chances are that patients will want to see them, too.

### ***Help Others***

After I began building “better bridges,” treating headaches and migraines, and creating smiles I never dreamed I could accomplish, I decided to do one more thing that changed my dental world forever: giving back! The joy of helping someone else in need trumps anything you can do to help yourself. Treating a broken tooth that someone couldn't afford to fix for 20 years makes you feel euphoric. I began working with Great Shape International, the largest humanitarian dental project in the dental world. This year marks my eighth year doing volunteer smile improvements for those in need in Jamaica. In addition to this organization, there are a variety of others (*see table*) that dentists and dental professionals can volunteer with, improving lives locally and all around the world.

### ***Conclusion***

The ultimate result of taking this approach has been fulfillment in dentistry that I never thought possible. I have a better staff and a happier me, and I'm more excited than ever in my chosen profession. So...stop trudging up those stairs every night and complaining about how distressing your day was. You *can* do something about it! Dig deep, decide what excites you and what you're passionate about, and then reach out and learn how awesome dentistry can be!