



## Experimenting and Discovering

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The “crucible” is the metaphorical place where I work out new ideas, feelings and behaviors to make them my own. Using mortar and pestle engenders in me the image of working hard and long with materials that at first don’t seem to mix. It’s a place of discovery for me, a place for putting things together and rubbing them around – all the while not really knowing what the outcome will be but trusting I’ll discover something in the process.

Was I always this way? I think not. Just ask some of my old friends! Experimenting and discovering is part of becoming all you were meant to be. For most of us, this is a lifelong task! To me the process has become fun, exciting and often leads me to say, “Isn’t that interesting?” We bring to our own crucibles our circumstances, objectives and

temperaments, beliefs, minds, behaviors and feelings. We bring the whole of our life.

One of the concerns I have as I observe The Pankey Institute’s participants, faculty and mentors progress is whether they will take the time to place just one thing at a time into their crucible, think about it, rub it around, think about it again, see what they discover, and through this process make it their own.

Often, I witness in others and myself the tendency to put too much into the crucible at one time. Most of us find change difficult. I think it’s easier to create a whole new system of behaviors by rubbing components around in the crucible, one at a time.

No one is more qualified than you to work out new ideas. You have all that you need. Trust in the fact that you can discover the way. The key is to throw something in your crucible. When you like the results, clean out your crucible and throw in something new. Transforming a practice takes patience and time! Hopefully, trying out new behaviors and outlooks, and then refining them will become a comfortable lifetime habit.

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As a small boy, I was hesitant to swing a bat. I kept waiting and watching for the right ball. My father pushed me into the batter's box with encouraging words, saying it doesn't matter if you miss, you have to step in and swing. By swinging you'll get the feel of it and after a lot of swings, you'll experience the right moves to hit the ball. How many of you are hesitant to step into the batter's box when you return home from the Institute? Taking swings without contact isn't exactly what you had in mind but, unless you are unusual, that's exactly what you need to do. So you experience a failure or two or three...what of it? We learn from it. As my grandfather would say, "That's tough. Life's tough. Now dust yourself off and get back in the game."

This month, I'd like you to take the challenge of Creating Learning Experiences for Your Patients and throw it in your crucible. You know the value of your patients "owning" their oral conditions and feeling responsible for them. How does that sense of ownership and responsibility come about? By patients being actively engaged in discovering the conditions and what has caused them, and then realizing how their behavior has

and will significantly impact the conditions for better or worse.

So, in your crucible let's place the question, "How can I help a particular patient discover, understand, and acknowledge his or her own condition and contributing behavior? Mill this question around in your mind but don't just think. Act. Observe. What are you experiencing as you create a learning experience? What is your patient experiencing? What did the two of you seem to learn? Are you sure? What might have gone better? What was your talk/listen ratio? What might you do next time? Take another swing.

Many of you leave here looking forward to creating a new "New Patient Experience" or refining the one you set about creating some time ago. Many of you have the awesome task of mentoring a colleague as they go about this. Think about all the little learning experiences you can create within the larger new patient experience. Watch out... think ahead. Will the new patient experience include new data collection forms or a new way of thinking about your patient, or both?

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We encourage you to be patient centered. You probably haven't had opportunity to learn much about your new patient when the first comprehensive oral evaluation begins. Do you know his or her personality, history, and circumstances? Do you know what he or she needs to learn to uncover your answers?

Creating a learning experience will keep you on your toes! Given that individual's personality, history, and circumstances, ask yourself as you go along, "What's a good way to help this new patient discover, then care to inquire and better understand?" Check yourself as you go. Are you being patient centered or doctor centered?

You may have to change and readjust your game plan as you proceed. But remember, as the frequency of creating learning experiences rises, so will your acumen. Keep swinging!

I'd enjoy hearing what you experience when you set about creating learning experiences for your patients. Please feel free to email me.

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