



With Gratitude & Appreciation

By Richard A. Green, DDS, MBA,
Director Emeritus of Business Systems
Development

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The writing below is something I sent at the end of the year 2004 to a number of my colleagues. Many of them responded and asked if I would please have it placed in the *Pankeygram*. In the past, while in practice, I would put these thoughts and feelings into a letter to my patient base. It seems appropriate to encourage you in this type of “contact” with and for your patient throughout the year. So it is in that spirit that I have reprinted this piece for the *Pankeygram* and for placement in your *Crucible*!

The months of November and December have always been reflective months for me and 2004 has not been an exception. Throughout our life's journey, no matter the chapter or the context, as we endeavor to develop a relationship-based practice/business, we look forward to reveling in the times when patients pay their fees “with gratitude and appreciation.” (Dr. Pankey's definition of a fair

fee is “a fee that is paid with gratitude and appreciation.”) Early on we would have been happy if the patients just paid their fees. Yet, as time goes on, we realize that money is not the only exchange necessary to live a “fulfilled life.”

I remember discussing this very topic over lunch with Dr. Pankey some thirty years ago. It seemed as if I had become quite efficient, with the use of time and motion studies, comprehensive treatment planning and scheduling. I was getting paid, but life as a dentist was a “dry hole.” He smiled as he listened to me and offered his suggestion: “Why don't you slow down and become more affective?” Affective, I thought, affective with what? “With people,” he continued.

His words have had a profound influence on me through the years. He had not asked me to become less productive but rather more affective, which would ultimately lead to being much more productive. As I struggled to learn new skills, one thing became amazingly clear. As our patients come to us, confident in the care they receive, the trust they transfer to us is incredible. I found myself acknowledging, out loud, this trust transfer of my patients, and an interesting thing happened; they began to “pay” with gratitude and appreciation. To the extent that I conveyed to the patient “I don't need your gratitude and appreciation” they didn't extend it! But, when I was

rich@evergreenconsultinggroup.com

5302 Ladyfinger Lake Road

Sanibel, Florida 33957



ready to risk myself and my own gratitude and appreciation, the patients took the opportunity to express theirs.

At this time of the year, it seems appropriate to reflect on the gift of trust your patients offer you. Find some way to acknowledge it either through a warm handshake, eye contact, or a verbal thank you – or via a written note or open letter to your patients, possibly all of the above. The point is, be intentional and sincere in this communication. Instead of looking for the gratitude and appreciation, try expressing yours, and view it a most rewarding way to celebrate this past year and ring in the new one.

So hear me when I say to you, thank you for giving me the opportunities to learn and grow with you this past year. Those shared moments in various venues hold memories of great delight, uncovered feelings joined with new understanding and insight. A lesson renewed for me this year is one of vigilance; have faith that as you attend to people and are truly present with and for them, little by little, as completely as you are able, plus reading outside of dentistry, things will come to you in bits and pieces.

One of the implied “keys” to our understanding is in the development of the power of attention. Attention to what, you ask? The answer is attention at many levels. The question of attention relates not only to thought and the “mind,” but to

the virtually autonomous worlds of emotion, sensation, instinct, and contact. There is everything to be understood here, practically and experientially, rather than intellectually and theoretically; even a glimpse of this will enable us to move toward understanding in a new way.

Often in our time of study together, I have been tempted to offer up “the answers” that I had been gifted the time to figure out for myself, by my mentors – it is very difficult to hold back! It has been described by others as “staying in a state of unknowing” with and for another person and wishing for a grain of understanding in the silence; and by others as “staying in the question.”

While staying in that silence, even for a few seconds, one can feel like hyperventilating. You want to talk to calm yourself but realize that by doing so you rob the other person of a taste of their new understanding. Therefore, choose to resist giving your answers to your students, your patients, rather discover a way to engage them in their own learning, their own answers; a creative learning moment! Remember, when a person discovers something for himself/herself, they truly understand it. Being conscious of oneself in the midst of life leads to even greater understanding; it is a fusion of the language of your intellect with the language of your heart.

rich@evergreenconsultinggroup.com

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Sanibel, Florida 33957



So again, thank you for the memories, for listening to my old stories and gifting me many new stories to tell about us. Thank you too for our experiences together, and our shared learning. Stories are to serve as encouragement and put you in touch with the language of the heart. It is with “Gratitude and Appreciation” that I wish you a Blessed Christmastide and a Very Prosperous New Year!

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