



The Happy Juggler

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REPRINTED FROM THE PANKEYGRAM

As a faculty member of the Institute, I have seen thousands of personality preference profiles recorded by participants of our Continuum, and I've observed that more dentists have a "TJ" personality preference than do not.

The "TJ dentist" often expresses the desire to know the top ten things that should be done to be successful or "the" answer to a question. If the comment "it depends" raises the hair on the back of your neck, you may be a TJ dentist.

A way to uncover the strength of your "J" is to ask yourself, "What is my ambiguity tolerance?" Can you give yourself time to discover your own answer? To the extent that you can do this, you have a measure of ambiguity tolerance.

When presented with multiple topics to learn or activities to perform, a TJ will ask, "Which is first?" The answer comes,

"It depends." The TJ then asks, "It depends on what?" Dr. L.D. Pankey would say, "It depends on your circumstances, your objectives, and your temperament."

I have often seen things presented by dental professionals in either list form or as a pyramid that implies a hierarchy to its components. Such an image doesn't invite you to ponder "it depends" and think about your own circumstances. Instead of a list or pyramid, imagine an accomplished juggler. This image carries with it a sense of balance. No doubt, the objects you visualize in the air are the same size and shape. They move around as the juggler catches and throws them, first one, then another, until the first object is tossed again.

Now, think of each object as a component of your practice. These components might include but not be limited to a philosophy of practice, time management issues, technical development, communication skills, organizational systems, financial tracking, an intentional plan for staff development, marketing, and hospitality. If you were to focus too long on one component, you wouldn't be able to catch and toss the others. You would be quickly out of balance. The

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“trick” is to develop in all areas without focusing too long or hard on any one. Your task, like the juggler, is to catch each component, decide on the next step in order to get it back in the air, and catch the next component descending as its last step is completed.

Dr. Pankey talked about four types of people: (1) Unscrupulous and Incompetent, (2) Unscrupulous and Competent, (3) Scrupulous and Incompetent, and (4) Scrupulous and Competent. As I reflect on the “Pankey Crosses” I think of them as tools highlighting the aspects of Life, Dentistry and Health that I need to juggle in order to be Scrupulous and Competent. It is not useful for me, nor in my patient’s best interest, to act according to an order or hierarchy that does not engender opportunities to become both Scrupulous and Competent at ever increasing levels.

In Continuum Level I, you ask yourself the questions, “How much is enough? Can I live on less than what I make? Am I building a bank account? Do I have financial goals that will in time, if followed, allow my invested assets to replace my income?” Pondering these questions helps you focus on envisioning

and achieving financial freedom and independence. Why not similarly reflect on the many components that allow you to achieve your success?

I recommend juggling, taking lots of little steps to develop in many areas of your practice. Your ability to balance multiple components will improve a step at a time. If you drop a component, reach down and pick it up again. Start tossing all over again. Begin by listing components of your practice to develop. Then, take small steps to advance every component. The guiding principle in your decision-making should be to become Scrupulous and Competent for your patient’s best interest. Doing so will have high impact on your happiness and success. Happy juggling!

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