



Proactive Versus Crisis Dental Care: Part 1

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As we left my last Pankeygram article, I suggested we spend some time thinking about how you interact with your patients. Do you operate in response to crisis, or are you proactive in leading patients in the choice-making process? There are subtle ways that crisis bleeds into our operations. It seems that most patients have experienced crisis-style dentistry and, therefore, it is reinforced. In fact, it is considered the norm in dentistry as opposed to the exception.

It is funny how when I begin to focus on a topic, events in my life lead to examples and experiences to talk about. Isn't that interesting? Recently, at a dinner party, a new acquaintance was seated at my end of the table. As we began our "Pre-Clinical," I found out that Bob was a retired Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of a medium-size manufacturing company with \$250 million in sales. He had

traveled extensively in his career and had many experiences in dental offices. The conversation felt a bit like a confession! Within minutes I felt as if I could fill in the past history tooth chart in a dental record with only some of the accuracy of the periodontal charting being off because I hadn't been allowed to probe the tissue!

In our conversation, Bob discovered that I was not only a dentist but a teacher. When he asked, "What do you teach?" I thought I would move the conversation off of dentistry by responding, "I teach Finance." He looked surprised and a bit disinterested, though I thought it would be an opportunity for me to climb into the mind of a CFO of a \$250 million dollar company.

He responded with, "You know, the thing that impresses me most, about dentists, is how quickly they make decisions." Trying to find the compliment in the statement that he had just made and hoping he thought dentists to be of high intelligence, I queried, "Quick decisions?" He went on to tell me, and sometimes show me between bites of food, the crowns that I had already noticed as he expressed himself.

He said, "It always impressed me that, when I went into the dental office with a broken tooth, the dentist would have a

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quick look around and then tell me I needed a crown. Sometimes he was ready to do it on the spot!” Reeling from the events of this mealtime discussion, I responded, “Sounds like you have had quite a bit of dentistry done in your mouth.” Bob replied, “Well, yes I have.”

Other things had come out in the conversation. He was an accomplished golfer with a six handicap. He had three homes, and each home had the identical set of golf clubs ready for his rounds of golf at that location. All were recently updated, matched, swing-weighted custom sets. He was a serious golfer to say the least! My mind was spinning thinking about the gap between those matched sets of clubs and his unmatched set of teeth! How could I get his attention?

Doctor Pankey would often say to me, “Communicate with others by making your examples relevant to the other person’s experience or frame of reference.” The light bulb came on, as my mind returned to Bob sitting next to me at the table. “Tell me about how you made decisions as a CFO in your business,” I said, trying to refocus myself.

“Decisions,” Bob went on. “Well, I take a good look at the short and long term impact of the decisions, the cost of capital necessary – both short and long

term, and the risk/reward potential to the bottom line of the company.”

“Sounds like you study the problem and/or opportunity with reflection and quite a bit of detail. You slow down and take the necessary time to uncover the best decision,” I responded. “Well, yes, of course, they would be important decisions, and they would take time!” Bob replied. “Quite honestly, Bob, that is exactly what I and others are attempting to teach dentists at The Pankey Institute. We are asking dentists to intentionally slow down and become more reflective, affective, and effective with their patients,” I said.

I could see he was thinking about this. I thought I could bring conversation back around to his dental condition. Maybe it was easier for me because I was not selling my dental expertise, but be that as it may, I started in with another story that I had heard recently.

“Bob, let’s compare you to your sets of golf clubs.” He was listening. “It’s as if, when you were a young man, God gave you a set of new golf clubs. We, as dentists, call them teeth. You used them through the years as you refined your golf game but in time you broke the 9-iron. You went to the Pro Shop and tried to get a new one. It was a 9-iron, of

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course, but the grip, the shaft and the swing weight were not quite the same as your original set. It was okay; you knew how to adjust, if you remembered to accommodate for the differences. But, as time went on, you had the same experience with your 7-iron, the 4-iron, the pitching wedge, and your favorite wood. In time, you were adjusting your swing and stance every time you used a club.

You noticed that there were times when certain muscles would get sore and that, too, would get in the way of your swing until finally you decided to get refitted with a whole new set of clubs.” I continued, “You went to a professional who put you through a whole series of tests and thorough evaluations to diagnose and plan the best solution that fit your uniqueness. And, you not only got one completely new set of golf clubs, you got three.”

Bob’s face lit up, “So that’s what you teach?” “That’s what I teach,” I responded. “You see, there are so many dentists who believe that you, a very busy man – a Driver personality type, so they think – want them to get you into and out of the dental office with dispatch. They respond in a crisis mode to your event. What we are encouraging our participants to consider, for the best

interest of their patient, is to slow down, be as thorough as you would be in your decision-making. In the short range and long range, it will be better for all concerned,” I concluded.

I believed he had finally understood his present dental condition and what I teach. As we said good night and shook hands, Bob said, “Would you be so kind as to give me your business card with the name of a dentist who thinks like you do? In fact, I’d like three – one for each of the locations of my golf clubs!”

There are too many dentists, too many writers of articles in dental publications, and too many podium speakers of practice management, who in their attempt to help you get busy and do more dentistry encourage you to adopt crisis systems in your daily routine. You may not even be aware that this is what they are promoting. I would encourage you to wonder about the systems you have in place, with which you interface with your patients/clients. Place these systems in your crucible and add the concept of being proactive to the mix. Evaluate this, and see what you discover! Until next time, keep your discovery hat on!

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