



In Your Tissues

Another Ten-Year Retrospective

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I first wrote an article like this for a *Pankeygram* in 1994. Ten years has past, having spent those years involved in the day-to-day teaching at The Pankey Institute. I have come to learn, first hand, that impactful teaching involves many different attitudes and skill sets than I first thought were associated with the teaching profession.

Abilities that help create learning moments to thoroughly engage individual participants, stimulate reflective thinking, and place a smooth “reminder” pebble (sometimes unaware) in the learners shoe, is indeed a challenge for all who desire to communicate in a way that has lasting impact. This is not only the challenge of the institutional teacher but also the dentist in day-to-day practice. You have often heard me refer to the state-

ment about a dental office: “It should look more like an educational institution than a purveyor of goods and services”.

Lately, I have been telling friends, who tell me that I do not look like I am retired that I am “Reengaged in Life”. Throughout my life I have grown to consider life in ten-year chapters. This has gifted me an opportunity to do some reflective thinking and reconsider what it is that truly brings meaning to my life; to reengage from the inside-out! This is in and of itself a developmental process; behaviorally, not unlike developing a practice, a team, a patient (at their own speed), even yourself; when you get a glimpse of the similarities – “It is Huge!”

For me, one of the developmental concepts that bring me understanding comes from the study of Erick Erickson’s “Developmental Stages.” For most of us, we first want to be competent. Erickson says when that is in conflict or questioned in our thinking we will get very busy to prove it is not an issue – does that look familiar to anyone’s schedule you know personally? Once we are feeling pretty confident that we can “do it,” we move on to ask the question “Is this really what we want to do?”

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In dentistry I hear this as “Do I want to be a fixer of teeth or do I want to be a facilitator of health?” While not being exactly separate questions, they do imply a different set of skills to accomplish one or the other; it is left brain and right brain, respectively. Often I hear the expression from participants that they would like to learn to “communicate” better to get case acceptance when they are working at this level in the Erickson Model; the benefit of some resolution at this level is your unique individuality.

What I often heard in Dr. Pankey’s words was that the “yes” is only the beginning. He wanted his patients to not only do the dentistry but, in addition, “pay a fair fee with gratitude and appreciation!” This implies yet another level of understanding in the Erickson Model; one that revolves around the intimacy of feelings and values. What is the most operational value that internally motivates patients to move toward health; what is most important to them? If you really want to know, you will have to have the courage to ask and make sure you listen to their response! Their values are most often expressed when you are listening carefully for the feeling behind their statements.

Thomas Gordon wrote and talked about this in the 70’s in his “Patient Effectiveness Training” book and seminars; learning to listen for content and feeling within another’s words is foundational to a relationship-based dental practice. This is what Erickson was talking about as he came to understand the issues at conflict. Are we going to choose intimacy or isolation as we face relationships? Will dentistry be only a mechanical exercise or will it truly be “connected” to the person who came in with the teeth? The benefit of wrestling with the intimacy issues, according to Erickson is what he describes as “Mature Love”; the capacity to commit oneself to concrete affiliations and partnerships and to develop ethical strength to abide by such commitments, even though they may call for significant sacrifice and compromise

Back in the middle 70’s, I remember my frustration with progressing slowly toward my preferred future. I cornered Dr. Pankey, who sensed my feelings, and he shared a story about one of his associate’s “development in this work.” When I asked how long it took this particular dentist, his response to me set me on my ear. “Fifteen years, to get it in my tissues,” he said.

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Since the Institute was already functioning and on its path, I asked what he realistically hoped its influence would be on my timeline (wanting and needing it to be shorter). His answer was, “It will probably shorten the process two years.” His reasoning was, “It not only takes time to get it on the shelf technically (competence), but it also takes time to get it in your tissues (behaviorally).

This situation is all too common, and at all levels of the Continuum. Participants are unsettled with their progress, as I was. Often, my counsel is to “lighten up, be gentle with yourself, your staff and your practice.” In order to “get it in your tissues” and let change flow gracefully into your life, it is important to “Know Yourself.” In the C1 and C2 experience, we introduce you to learning about yourself through the Social Style Matrix, while in C4 you spend time pursuing the “Know Yourself” aspect of Dr. Pankey’s Cross of Dentistry through the use of the Keirsey/Bates Temperament Sorter. This instrument allows us to look at our personal and professional “typology” and identify various “types” of individuals and how they deal with ever-constant change.

There are individual “types” who get excited with the ideas involving change, handling it appropriately from a psycho-

logical standpoint; another group manifests the ability to deal with change with and through people. Yet another “type” rises to the challenge, gaining energy through the intentional creation of a “crisis” to which a response is a forced necessary. The final “type” includes those that feel most comfortable when they can find “relief” from change, avoiding it or letting it pass by. Interestingly, my experience leads me to believe most dentists fall into this last “type” category – often referred to as “traditionalists” or “stabilizers.” In my ten years of collecting data from the C-4 participants approximately 65% are of this last “type”.

A better understanding of our unique “type” gives us the ability to develop in the Erickson Model along with uniquely individualized leadership characteristics. An Individual who is willing and able to influence behavior, their own first and then others, is defined as a leader. The good news is that we are in charge of both the willing and able. The operative word, *willing*, has to do with attitude. The word *able* has to do with skill development within Developmental Stages.

As you come to understand yourself, you can use intentional learning and encour-

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age yourself to move out of your comfort zone to experience change as a benefit to your life and practice, not as a threat. Consequently, we need to find ways to measure our progress, make corrections and implement personal and organizational change. This behavior has direct impact on our patients, our staff, our families, and ourselves.

Our expanding world of information and experience provides us the freedom to change and grow. Peter Drucker's words "Vision, Action, Understanding" are a framework for "getting it in your tissues."

We are permitted to act before we completely understand the scope of our total vision. Identifying vision, purpose and philosophy of life and practice, as many of our Pankey Participants have discovered, is at times lonely, and can seem slow. But from this perch of "Reengagement" it is a time to ask once again, "What is it that holds meaning for you, at this point in your life and practice?" In quiet reflection become increasingly clear about what is most important to you and then act on it prior to requiring yourself to have a "complete" understanding; truly, this only comes after you have acted and had time to reflect on your action/outcomes. Continued growth along the Developmental Stages requires

openness to new mentors, study mates, friends and experiences.

Envision it. Act on it. Then and only then will you understand it – and you'll find your "development quotient" accelerating

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