



Two-Way Lessons

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

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The months of November and December have always been a time of reflection and thanksgiving for me. One of my significant learning experiences, during one of these times, was discovering how my patients helped me learn about myself, my practice and life in this ever-expanding world.

In our attempt to live up to the Latin derivative of the word “doctor” (“teacher”), we think of education (or learning) in the dental office as a one-way event. However, if we take what may seem a relatively small risk, the opportunities to learn become a two-way exchange.

In my *Pankegram* columns, I have encouraged you to reflect on your dental office as an educational institution. In that way, everyone involved (doctor, staff and patient) can learn and grow. This means we must turn the tables and sometimes look upon our patient(s) as “teacher.”

Like the values that drive health ownership and health decisions for each individual, I have learned that when I encourage my patients to clarify their values of health, they make decisions to improve dental habits with intent and conviction. Similarly, when I clarify my practice values, I make decision to improve my own career.

Years ago, I had a patient (Harry) who was an upper level executive for a worldwide management consulting firm. He would almost always greet me as I walked through my office door, 30 minutes prior to his morning appointment time. He had already picked up my Wall Street Journal and would read it with his cup of coffee while we “huddled” prior to his appointment. Dr. Pankey had spawned my interest in investing and money management, and although I had been subscribing to the WSJ for some time, I did not really understand what I was reading. Naturally, when I noticed Harry’s intrigue with the publication, I asked, “How do you read the WSJ?” His response was, “It depends. It depends on what you are invested in.” From that point on in our doctor-patient-teacher relationship, I continued to learn from him. In retrospect, it was the beginning of an

rich@evergreenconsultinggroup.com

5302 Ladyfinger Lake Road
Sanibel, Florida 33957



interest that led to my MBA in Finance, my association with MAS and the Gallup Organization, and eventually my departmental position here at the Institute.

Through my association with the Institute, I have had the privilege to learn from you. Interestingly, you come from unique areas of the country and the world, yet so many core beliefs are similar. As I study the patient perceptions of your behaviors (those of you who are engaging in the Pankey/Gallup Patient Satisfaction Survey program), I have come to discover that we all have a lot to learn together.

The Institute is about much more than technical training. In some instances, the feedback of your patients has revealed that you are very good in both the technical and lower-order relationship dimensions, which we have titled "Relationship, Trustworthiness and Impact." Other offices, according to their patients, are doing very well in the higher-order dimensions, as well. Their patients are perceived care, concern, and genuine interest in their opinions and their oral health, both present and future.

How can we turn this information into a learning experience for all? First, we need to take the risk of simply asking for our patients' perceptions and then examine the opportunities for two-way learning and interchange. Consequently, we can act on our discoveries. Maybe then, upon reflection, we will begin to realize the knowledge and understanding we can gain from these valuable interactions.

Those of you who have taken such risks have been able to learn about yourself, your practices and other areas of your life. You have also enabled me to see the impact of our teaching, giving us the opportunity to reflect on the dynamics of our Continuum classes. We can also measure our effectiveness by how your patient perceives the level of care, skill and judgment received from you. Learning is exciting, continual and truly more than a two-way street.

Aim high!!

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5302 Ladyfinger Lake Road

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