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Finding Balance Personally & Professionally

By Jeffrey C. Hoos, DMD

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With forty thousand dollars my father lent me in 1978 after I graduated from dental school, my wife Betsy and I created a single dental chair office (plumbed for three chairs), on the second floor of a free standing bank building with no elevator, no windows in the reception area, and a desk made out of two filing cabinets and a hollow core reject door sitting on top. Supplies were kept to a bare minimum and there were no patients on the appointment book. My wife, who supported us while I was in dental school by working full time, was nine months pregnant. Why would someone possibly open a practice with all that pressure?

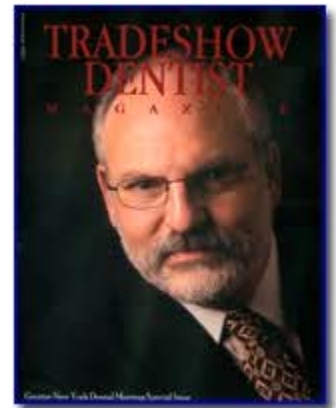
The truth is I was fired from my job. In fact I was unable to keep a job and worked in three different offices over a period of one year.

Because of determination fueled by fear of failure, a dental office was created in seven weeks. We opened on a Monday morning with three patients in the book, and with my very pregnant wife behind the desk. This is how my private practice began.

It is the telling of the journey that allowed a one-chair and one-assistant dental practice to grow into a ten operatory practice with four doctors and thirty staff members. I hope this will inspire other professionals find their vision and help them feel great about being a dentist and being part of the great "healing arts". As told to me at the beginning of my dental education: "You are being given the right to cut human tissue. Do not ever take that lightly and without great thought." It is with great humility that I present this article that I hope other dental professionals will find some help in finding the way in **BALANCING: the ART, SCIENCE, & BUSINESS of DENTISTRY**

A MISSION DEVELOPED IN CHILDHOOD YEARS

I came to the world of dentistry with a mission. My mission was developed from a very early age and nurtured for many years by a great dentist who taught me the art of compassion.



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When I was a child, I developed a terrible toothache at synagogue one morning.

My dad called his dentist and I went to the bathroom in my pants. At the age of five, my mother had taken me to a dentist who hurt me so much I would go to the bathroom in my pants at the prospect of going to the dentist again.

Well, this didn't faze my father, who said, "What are you crying about? Next time, you will think about this because you are just going to have to sit in it." So, I switched to Plan B. Armed with a stomach full of lox, bagel, scrambled eggs, and juice, I had plenty of ammunition. I proceeded to throw up all over the dentist's bathroom. The difference was that instead of the dentist making my father take me out of the office, he came into the bathroom and sat down on the floor next to a trembling little boy with vomit all over him.

It is amazing how someone responds to compassion. The dentist explained to me that he knew how I felt. It is a method many of us know -- feel, felt, and found. "Jeffrey," he said, "I understand how you feel being frightened. I have felt that way, too, but I found out there is a way to do this comfortably."

It is because of Dr. Irving Paul from Bangor, Maine, that I decided to become a dentist.

COMPASSIONATE DENTIST

When I started dental school; I made a vow to myself. I would try to perform procedures as painlessly as possible and to try to deal with my patients with as much compassion as I could. Later in my dental career, I decided to try to take Dr Irving Paul's message to other dentists and help dentists in their careers. That message was: treat people as adults, be understanding of their concerns and fears.

OUR PHILOSOPHY, OUR SUCCESS

My wife and I graduated from Tufts School of Dental Medicine in 1978.

The reason that I am very clear by saying my wife and I graduated is because she has been along for the ride as an active supporter, cheerleader and confidant while never attending a single class. Betsy Hoos never spent a single day at One Kneeland Street, Boston, the home of Tufts School of Dental but can tell you more about oral pathology and other important dental topics than most dentists because she read it to me as we drove to school for three years. Most people would ask, how that relates to my success as a dentist.

So many people never have had a life partner and are still very successful in their professional lives. I am going to be very clear that it is the philosophy that Betsy and I developed and we believe it translates to a success that can be reproduced and understood by anyone who would like to put their arms around this way of thinking.

My husband, Jeffrey Hoos, is one of the most self-actualized people I know.

From the tender age of five, he has wanted to be a dentist. We have a cut & paste picture to prove it! When we met in college, I was 19 and he was 20. Together, from the beginning, we worked to help him achieve his goal, and in so doing we achieved a wonderful shared goal of building a life together that has been so rewarding and meaningful for our entire family.

What does it take to be a success in dentistry? It is a challenging profession that requires so many different skills. Jeffrey brings a genuine interest in people and a desire to help them. He is a true problem-solver. His greatest satisfaction comes from being able to help the patient who has a challenging dental problem.

Having watched him work over the last 28 years, I'm convinced that his greatest gift is his ability to listen to the patient. It always amazes me how well he knows his patients when you would think that they would have little time to talk! We have gone in at all hours, made many house calls, nursing-home calls, hospital visits-with the singular goal of reaching out and helping a patient in need.



I believe that for Jeffrey, dentistry is the avenue through which he has been able to use his creative talent and genuinely help people at the same time. Although he loves placing dental implants and doing full-mouth reconstruction, it is that look on patients' faces when they bite into an apple for the first time in years or see their new smile in the mirror, that brings him the ultimate satisfaction.

Betsy S. Hoos

Success in private practice is assured when the doctor finds the proper balance between three important factors: Art, Science, and Business.

Art: The Dentist & Laboratory Technician utilize methods, skills and materials that will provide esthetic and functional restorations for the patients and doctors satisfaction.

Science: The materials and techniques used must be well researched and have documented clinical results.

Business: The procedures used must give a consistent result. This allows the restorations to be fabricated and delivered in a timely manner, with beautiful results, and provide for maximum patient comfort and satisfaction during and after the procedures.

How do we keep the "balance" while facing our daily, monthly, and yearly dental challenges? To be able to face any challenge in a proper manner, every office needs a vision, mission and resulting strategy to achieve it. It is the mission statement that is a daily reminder for the staff and the doctor as to the direction of the office and how we want to treat our patients.

Mission Statement

The mission statement for our office is:

"To provide the highest quality care, to the most number of patients, in the most comfortable way, while maintaining a balance between our personal and professional lives."

This mission is similar to what I have heard many of my colleagues state verbally. By gaining staff buy in and putting it on paper I have seen real results.

Many dentists, therefore, ask how we generate patients who want and need high-end work when they may represent perhaps only five percent of the dental population. Is the challenge to find the internal and external methods to generate these patients? Is it our ultimate desire to only do these type procedures and treat these patients? The wonderful thing about dentistry is that we all have a choice in the way we want to practice. However, it can be frustrating trying to look for and compete for such small percentage of the patient population base.

FINDING BALANCE

My mission and the practical nature of working on "Main Street" has made me embrace the fact that I will treat all patients in the most comfortable way while maintaining a balance. So how do I get balance?

I have come to realize that the success of our practice is not limiting it to the 5% of the patient base that all doctors including me seem to want, but to service all our patients with the highest quality care we can give them. That quality care is not just in the clinical skills we display. All patients assume that their dentist is clinically competent or they would not go into their offices. I believe that we must treat patients with what I call a "high perceived value" and within our large loyal patient base and the people that they refer, the high fee elective cases will be found. That "high perceived value" comes from utilizing good "people" skills as well as great clinical skills.

I am a great believer in treating everyone in our practice. Most "gurus" are talking about treating a very select group of patients who can afford high end dentistry. I like treating those people also and have many of them in my practice. But in my parking lot it is not uncommon to see a Mercedes as well as older Fords. What is the common link? They want to be in an office that offers; compassion, understanding of their wants, desires, in addition to providing the highest quality care that they can afford.

BUILDING TRUST

The two questions that I always ask in all the courses I give are: "How are you serving your patient base in order to retain your patients and how are you generating your new patients?" It is important to understand a simple technique that we have used to help our office become successful. I believe that it is an easy method that can be used in any dental practice. I see this procedure helping me do this. In dental school, a very old doctor told me that if you listen to your patients, they would tell you the problem. These were very wise words. I would expand it further: the patient will tell us what they want or desire. It is our job to fulfill that desire and give them what they want within the guidelines of good science and good business. We want to respond to the patient's desires. Once we have taken care of their immediate needs and built trust, we can build on this to help them understand the other undiagnosed dental needs they may have.

Once we have fulfilled their immediate desires, we as communicators need to demonstrate to them our view of other real dental needs. How we communicate and inform the patient is very important. Once the patient understands their needs, the doctor should provide the solution using methods that the patient can understand. Patients and people do not buy from someone that they do not believe and trust.

My phobia of dentistry was turned into a positive experience and having a wonderful dental school experience continued to reinforce my personal goals in providing dental care for my patients. Having your staff understand your goals with a strong mission statement is extremely important so you can travel the road of success together while maintaining a balance between your personal and professional life. All patients want quality care and presenting treatment options allows for creating a dialogue that nurtures a positive outcome for both the doctor and patient.



Dr. Jeffrey Hoos is world-renowned practitioner and author of numerous articles. He has developed many innovative and exciting dental techniques including the patented H & H cordless impression method. Involved with implant dentistry for the last fifteen years, Dr Hoos teaches implant dentistry and has been chosen as a mentor for the Nobel Biocare.

Dentists from around the world regularly visit his practice to learn how to implement his methods in their own practices. Dr Hoos lectures extensively on practice management as well as implant and cosmetic dentistry. He recently celebrated his 28th anniversary in private group practice in Stratford, Connecticut and is consistently in the top 1% of the dental practices in the United States. He can be reached at jchdmd@gmail.com and his courses can be found at www.dentalexplorations.com.

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Betsy Smirnoff Hoos, Director

**8 Hollow Oak Road
Woodbridge, CT 06525**

**Phone: (203) 389-6263
Fax: (203) 397-3632**

deinfo@dentaexplorations.com



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