

Monday, January 6, 2014

My Advice to New Dentists



Our receptionist Gina called to me. "The American Student Dental Association News is on the phone for you!"

Gosh, I have not been a dental student since 1979. The closest I come to school nowadays is watching our son progress through his third year at George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences.

The journalist on the phone wanted to ask me about "boomer dentistry" and how it will affect the new generation of dentists. What could they learn from me about being a new dentist and treating folks in the boomer generation?

My answer? "Tell the new dentist to not listen to the boomer dentists."

His hesitation said it all. "What do you mean?"

"Please tell the younger dentists to not listen to all the gloom and doom the boomer dentists are talking about. This younger generation of dentists is way more prepared for the new evolution of dentistry than the boomer dentists ever will be."

Young dentists today have all the skills they need to be successful. They are used to the technology that is now part of everyday life. Boomers are still trying to figure out how the technology works.

Younger dentists are much more connected than boomer dentists. These fledging dentists are connected by technology that was not even invented when boomer dentists first went into practice. The young can communicate and learn more sitting at their desk in a day than we could in a week at a school.

Younger dentists, part of the Gen Y era, are looking for meaning in life and not just work to make a lot of money. As a generation, they are noted for being willing to live beneath their means in order to get what they want from life.

Most importantly, they are used to change. Their lives have been marked by constant change in technology, communication, etc. Their world is flat.

Dentists today are facing many different economic challenges than boomers. School loans and interest rates are at an all-time high. The competition for discretionary dollars is fierce, and utilization of dental services is being pressed in a downward direction. Every day, dentists are told to do more with less.

My message to new dentists is this: "Dentistry: you can have it all if you live small." The journalist really liked that phrase. What my wife and I did 15 years ago was embrace the change and adapt our expectations of what life as a dentist should be. Do you want time or money? Do you want things or experiences?

Let's not forget the boomer patient. This is a generation of endless of youth. It is the last generation that experienced having "their doctor" as children and young adults. Boomers will be a generation of folks who expect to be fully dentate for their new extended life expectancy. This will be a great challenge for the next generation of dentists.

Back in the late 1990s, former AGD President John Chandler, DDS, MAGD, said about the evolving times, "Change is inevitable, progress is optional."

My great hope is that dentistry will remember that when two generations evolve, it is change; when two generations work together, it is progress.

Enjoy the journey,

Bob Oro, DMD, MAGD

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