

The Vital Role of Leadership in Dentistry

William Maloney, D.D.S, PgCertMed, F.A.C.D.^{1,*}

¹NYU College of Dentistry, New York, USA

*Correspondence should be addressed to William James Maloney, wjm10@nyu.edu

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Editorial

The success of any organization is a direct reflection of its leadership. Dentistry is no exception. Dentistry has been gifted a magnificent profession due to the selfless efforts of those leaders of dentistry who have gone before us. However, new times present new challenges and, as such, it is imperative that new, qualified leaders emerge so that we may, someday, pass on the proverbial torch of our beloved profession to the next generation in a better state than we had received it.

Dentistry faces many challenges today which need to be addressed in order to navigate the waters of an uncertain future. Among the challenges are workforce issues, patient expectations, financial issues, and the potential effects (either positive or negative) of artificial intelligence might have on dentistry.

In order to successfully face these challenges dentistry needs effective leadership at all levels. There are certain characteristics and qualities which effective leaders must possess. First and foremost, great leaders must adhere to the highest ethical standards. There must be unquestionable faith and belief in leadership in order for the members of the dental profession to be inspired to follow leadership's vision.

Leaders must also communicate their vision in a clear and effective manner. If this does not occur there will only be disarray within the organization, thus preventing goals from being met. Effective communication in dentistry can be achieved in various manners- speaking at meetings, writing editorials or articles in professional publications and, of course, having direct conversations with colleagues. It is vital that leadership has honest and true dialogue while genuinely listening to the needs and desires of those whom leadership represents.

Leadership must not ever think that they alone have all the answers. Leaders must remember that the input and participation of the entire organization is essential in order for goals to be met. Each and every individual has talents and valuable perspectives. It is the duty of dentistry's leadership to listen to each person's unique perspectives and to integrate these ideas into the overall vision of the group. This will allow each person to have a voice and inspire them to work to their full potential for the greater good of the group.

An individual leader cannot, and should not, handle all tasks alone. It is essential that the leader delegate duties and responsibilities to other trusted colleagues. Leaders will only then become fully aware of the group's members and then utilize these talents for the betterment of the group. The leader must always provide oversight and constructive feedback on the work of these colleagues and accept full responsibility when the outcomes are not as previously desired. However, the best of leaders are not looking for awards and accolades. Effective leaders need to give full praise and credit to those who were entrusted with these tasks which proved to be successful. A true leader's personal satisfaction should come from seeing the pride and happiness in a colleague who contributed positively to the delegated task.

History is filled with examples of leaders who have failed their organizations due to their inability or refusal to adapt as situations change. A true leader should always be thinking about achieving the goals set forth by the organization. A leader cannot be concerned with any possible negative connotations associated with the necessity of altering the original pathway to achieving the organization's goals. There is truly nothing for a leader to be ashamed of when having to alter the original pathway to goal achievement. Furthermore, it is the hallmark of a great leader to see the need to make changes and to listen to the wisdom and advice of colleagues.

Dentistry is filled with unforeseen factors which demand leadership characteristics of adaptability. Leaders must be able to evaluate the ever-changing landscape of dentistry and provide valuable guidance to the profession.

There are many ways for a member of the dental profession to put to good use one's leadership skills. The first step is always the same- getting involved and letting others know of one's desire to safeguard and improve the many aspects and facets of the dental profession. There are many dental organizations and associations throughout the world. They all require great leaders in order to achieve their goals which not only benefit the members of the dental organizations but also the many citizens of the world who are in desperate need of pain relief and smile creations which are provided by the dental profession.

The most effective leaders in dentistry realize that they must lead not only by their written words but also, most importantly, by their actions. They need to reach out to new members of the dental profession and listen to their concerns

while making them feel welcome. These leaders must always carry themselves with professional demeanor doing nothing that would bring shame, scandal or dishonor to the dental profession which they represent. They must always realize that being recognized as a leader in dentistry is an honor and, as such, must always act in a manner which shines a positive light on this wonderful profession of dentistry.

Dentistry is a highly respected profession worldwide. This is true because of the skilled and compassionate dental treatment provided by the many members of the profession throughout the world on a daily basis. In order to continue to provide this smile-creating, pain-relieving care, effective leadership in dentistry is absolutely essential. Many people are fearful of the changes that will be brought forth by advances in technology. Certainly, the rate of change will be exponential but, there is nothing to fear with great leaders guiding dentistry through all the challenges of tomorrow. Rather, we should look forward to the future as we overcome challenges as they present themselves as we continue to provide beneficent oral and dental care for the people of the world.