

# Only as good as the dentist?

Really? Is the headline true? How do we empower ourselves to be better than we already are and maintain that level of excellence, regardless of how good the dentist is?

In the box below is a humorous “Top Ten” list that was on the [www.amyrdh.com](http://www.amyrdh.com) listserve.

I love it! We ought to make up a dental hygiene board game with these!

Do you ever wonder if you belong in a practice? Are you a good match with the dentist and the personnel? First of all, I need to get this off my chest: If you are working *for* a dentist, you already need a head change. As licensed professionals who contract *with* a dentist, we enter into an agreement *with* the dentist that allows us to work within our scope of practice, which brings our expertise in prevention and health to the dental practice.



When searching for the correct dental team, don't forget that we too are interviewing. Just as the dentist is assessing whether or not you are a fit for his/her dental office, you are doing your own assessment of what you want from your dental hygiene practice. Remember, where you work and whom you work with can reflect on you as a professional. Your reputation is at stake here — not to mention the effect on your self-esteem.

I cringe when I hear hygienists talk about their “bosses.” I have no boss. I am the boss of me. I am the boss of my dental hygiene department. No one in my office is an expert in this field more than I. I work with a dental team and am a critical team member. There is a team leader, the dentist, who has contracted me for my expertise in oral health care.

“You're only as good as the dentist you work with” is a profound statement

## Top 10 signs that you may be working for the wrong dentist

10. Directions to the office include: “Turn on to the dirt road.”
9. Your dentist is wearing a pair of pants that you gave to the Salvation Army last month.
8. Your dentist giggles uncontrollably whenever he hears the words, “That hurts!”
7. Your dentist drops an instrument on the floor and yells, “Fore!”
6. Dental diploma appears to be a warranty from Black & Decker.
5. The very first line on the patient's questionnaire is: “Have you ever pressed charges?”
4. When giving nitrous, the patient is assured, “Don't worry; I just tried some myself!”
3. When giving a local injection, you hear “Let's all do shots!”
2. Your Christmas bonus includes a free subscription to *Living Cheap* magazine.

And the number one sign that you may be working for the wrong dentist is:

1. Your retirement plan is a free seed catalog and instructions on how to grow your own food.

I suspect we all can add to this list that was derived from [www.amyrdh.com](http://www.amyrdh.com). As a matter of fact, I've got a few more

that I can think off of the top of my head:

- The dental assistant is directed to adjust the dials on the nitrous.
- The patient forgets to take their pre-med and the dentist says, “Go ahead and do them anyway!”
- You present a profitable and true treatment plan to the patient and the dentist says, “Don't worry about it — you don't need that right now.”
- The patient asks you after the dentist presents the treatment plan, “OK, now what do I really do?”
- A patient's comment regarding the dental equipment in the office, “Oh I remember that ... from World War II.”
- The crown on a maintenance patient that was just completed by the dentist reminds you of a mushroom.
- On that same crown, you confront the dentist with the uncontrollable bleeding from the tissue surrounding it and the dentist says, “Give it time; it will heal.”

OK, OK, I'll stop now. I'm laughing too hard. The truth really does make the best humor, don't you think? The pathetic part is that the ones above are true. We have all experienced at least one of them. I just can't stop — they keep popping into my head!

- You discreetly pretend that you are in question of what might look like a carious lesion, and the dentist replies, “Let's put a 'watch' on that.”

to me. I really hope that is not true.

Think about it, we get comfortable in our offices, and we allow ourselves to fall into complacent routines. If the dentist is not a motivational leader in the office, we have a tendency to “fall in line.” There are only so many battles that we choose to fight. We get complacent with our instruments, products, and annual review, if we even have one.

What keeps us from using a product that we would really like to try? Why should we wait and ask if it is okay to get a set of new instruments? If we want to try a particular product of interest, or it will help us ergonomically, why do we not purchase it ourselves?

Some of us feel like we’re caught between a rock and a hard place. We don’t see how to get out of this feeling of helplessness, so we give up. We don’t care anymore. We’ll use the cheap, poor quality product because we get tired of fighting and asking “daddy” for things and getting rejected. It’s a degrading way to work.

I remember when I first ordered fluoride varnish and discussed its efficacy with the dentist I work with. He freaked out because I ordered fluoride through a distributor and he said it was prescription only. I explained to him that this has helped many patients already with the samples that I had been given at a trade show. I also discussed it with him and he agreed that it would be good to add this to our hygiene products and services. Oh, he forgot. It wasn’t important to him.

I share below a true story from a hygienist.

*I experienced a team-killer recently. I was asked by my boss to do a presentation for our new RDH employees on new patient protocol. I spent several days at home making a PowerPoint presentation (this particular software was new to me) and even burned several CDs for each member. When I brought them in to work, nobody seemed to know anything about it; two team members wouldn’t even come in that day to see it. Oh well, at least I tried. The copies are there for them to view. My husband thinks I should be compensated for my time preparing this. They don’t seem to want to take the time to learn the perio charting software, or any of the computer charting for that matter. I’m the only one who enters patient health histories (for my patients only), charts missing teeth and all the other dental conditions. What do you all think?*

What happened here? Was the team leader at fault because he/she didn’t communicate to the other employees that “Jane RDH” was compiling a new protocol and that they would all be expected to review this new protocol together?

Did Jane RDH communicate with the dentist that she would be putting in a lot of work on this project and that she would appreciate some compensation for this extracurricular activity or, better yet, establish a fee?

Was her reaction, “Oh well, at least I tried” correct? Where did her self esteem go? Does she value herself and her time? I think not. She is obviously a gifted and extraordinary hygienist that is capable of leadership. Many times after defeat, we retreat

to our corner of the ring and feel like everything we do and bring to the practice is futile. We get so excited and motivated about new information and educational courses that we have recently attended, and it drops flat like a pancake. The motivation and excitement are lost. We feel like we’ve hit a brick wall. I know we have all felt like this.

How do you build a business within a business? That is exactly what we’re seeking to do.

I say, “Purchase it yourself.” You develop that business within a business. Like all new businesses, it will take time. The important part is to have the mind-set that this is your domain — your business. You are going to provide the utmost in quality health care to each of your patients, regardless of their status — HMO, PPO, fee-for-service. Build that hygiene department and know that, because of you, patients’ health is much better and they are certainly more informed. We get so caught up in thinking that our technical skills are what we bring to the practice. Sure, it’s great to have the hands to maneuver an instrument around different sizes and shapes intraorally, but we need to stop thinking that that is all we do. More importantly, we need to educate dentists that this is not all we do.

Do you want loupes? Go buy them. Do you want an Orascope chair? Gift yourself! The benefits will last you a lifetime. The power of having control over your own hygiene department is life changing. The dentist I work with sees the enthusiasm that his hygienist brings to his practice and the knowledge that his patients were walking away with. To this day, he boasts that his patients are the most informed and because of that, they are the healthiest. That alone is great marketing.

Learn in detail about hygiene products so that *you* are the expert — Arestin, Vizilite, MI Paste, Velscope, glass ionomers, Oral CDX, DNA culture, Saliva Check. Know what over-the-counter products your patients are looking at in retail stores. Develop a relationship with the local pharmacist and give him/her a list of products that you want ordered to have in stock for your patients. If you are not familiar with something you see, call the company or go on the Web site and ask questions. There will always be reps happy to talk to you about their products. Get certified in something. Get your local anesthesia, CPR, or Perioromatherapy™ certification.

Increase your knowledge in public health, enroll in courses to complete your baccalaureate or master’s degree. Better yet, go to dental school so that you can truly be the hygienist you’ve always wanted to be! I remember at one of our constituent luncheon meetings, the guest speaker was the president of the state dental society, and she said, “Why are you always trying to do what we do? If you want to be a dentist, go to dental school!” News flash! We don’t want to be dentists! We want to be able to perform preventive services to the best of our ability. We want to be able to perform preventive services to everyone, because everyone deserves dental care. Reach inside yourself and make the effort for your patients. This shows the passion that you have for your profession and your patients! **RDH**