

A story of passion ...

Part 6

THE JOURNEY OF TWO WOMEN

During the final leg of the journey, the authors observe that the momentum of passionate hygienists is 'unstoppable.'

Would we do dental hygiene all over again? When you read that question, does it stir any passionate feelings? Does a smile come to your face? Or does your gut roil? Do you feel nothing at all?

In the beginning of the "Journey of Passion" series, we spoke about our frustrations and feelings of being stifled in the profession of dental hygiene. We wrote that through desperation and the driving force of passion we were able to "think out of the box" and change many aspects within ourselves and then dental hygiene both personally and organizationally. Passion is what drove us.

The "would we do dental hygiene all over again?" question was recently posted on a very active hygiene internet list serve group moderated by Amy Nieves (www.amysrdhlist.com). This simple question took us back to basics, stirred a lot of conversation and some controversy. Some of the first responses seemed almost automatic and Pollyannaish, "Yes! I love dental hygiene and what I do!" We could almost picture a Cupie Doll with a dimple and a Betty Boop voice. Was it passion that made them answer that way or habit? The ways we communicate our passions are very personal. As it happens with the best discussions, the question evolved. It became "what's so great about a dental career?" We wanted to see, hear, and feel the passions from one another around this important question.

After the preliminary responses of "Let's give three cheers for dental hygiene! Rah! Rah! Rah!" others responded in other directions including:

- "In order to do what I love in dental hygiene, I would have to go to dental school to be the dental hygienist that I would want to be ..."
- "... Probably not [go into dental hygiene], it's too restrictive."
- "I would go into business and then consider dental hygiene or some other area ..."
- "I would go into computers; that seems to be the way to go."
- "I'd go to dental school ... and still might."
- "I'd go to dental school and have a harem [authors' comment: "Yikes, our politically correct radar is lighting up off the charts!"] of hygienists and address access to care issues and be economically productive at the same time."

- "[Dental hygiene is] ... too frustrating when I know more than the 'baby dentists'."
- "No, I wouldn't go into dental hygiene unless the laws were the same in every state and we were allowed to do what we were educated to do."

Do you hear the passion in these comments? Passion is energy. This is the same kind of passion that drove Deb and Patti to branch out into expanded careers within our dental hygiene scope of practice. This is one of the important strengths of sharing with other professionals. We can feed from each other.

Most of us want a life. We want time away from work to be with family and friends, or just to be alone. Lots of us would like to make a greater contribution to our community or



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society, pursue hobbies, or maybe just spend a little time lying on the grass watching the clouds go by.

Yet, it more often seems like we get busier and busier with less time to do what we want, be who we want, and have what we want. The mantra becomes, “I must, I must, I must and I can’t, I can’t, I can’t.”

Sound familiar. Is a dental hygiene career restrictive? Only to the extent that we believe it is. (That is a different question than are the laws that govern our practice restrictive.) So we complain and bellyache and do nothing to change it.

However, there is good news here. The complaining and bellyaching is passion. Passion is energy. It is just a matter to channeling that energy toward to a positive direction that we desire.

But how? You ask once again. Last month, we looked at your individual job. This time, let’s look deeper. Let’s look at what is the real essence of you. What floats your boat. Think about it, what do you enjoy doing? If it’s completely out of the realm of the dental hygiene practice as we currently see it — so what? We are not looking to

... how can we be stopped if we are focused, passionate, and feel good about ourselves? We can’t. When we’re working from that passionate core, we are unstoppable

create your passionate dental hygiene career at this point we are just trying to help you find you’re your individual passions. Dental hygiene as a career is not for everyone.

Last year, a dear childhood friend of Patti’s gave her a book titled, *All About Me* by Philippe Keel (Broadway Books, 1998.) It’s a book with a lot of empty space in it. In the introduction, the author says the purpose of his book was to create a neutral tool that simply asks questions. He prompts the reader to answer spontaneously because the first answer is probably the best and most honest. This simple tool takes you through levels of self-discovery. There are 25 simple sections of questions. Questions range from simple to more complex. The following are some examples from the “yes/no” section:

- ▼ You keep a diary.
- ▼ You like to cook.
- ▼ You exercise regularly.
- ▼ You sketch while you are on the phone.
- ▼ You snore.
- ▼ You read in the bathroom.
- ▼ You can remember jokes.
- ▼ You write letters regularly.
- ▼ You recycle small batteries.
- ▼ You believe in destiny.

Seemingly strange questions, aren’t they? Here is another section where you are asked to list your top three:

- ◆ Your three favorite childhood toys or games
- ◆ Three people you consider to be geniuses

- ◆ Three lessons you learned the hard way

In the “wishes and dreams” section:

- If you had the talent or the opportunity, you would

...

- Something you wish you could change about your life ...

- Something you wish you could learn with the snap of your fingers ...

- How would you plan to spend the last years of your life ...

- How would you like to spend the last minutes of your life ...

Next is the “if” section, asking you:

- ♥ If you had more time alone, you would ...

- ♥ If you could change anything about the world ...

- ♥ If you could be famous, you would like to famous for ...

- ♥ If you could change one law ...

- ♥ If you had a million dollars ...

- ♥ If you could start all over ...

Yes, it brings it right back to where this article started, “Would we do dental hygiene all over again?”

Sound like a parlor game? An exercise in futility? Another time waster? These seemingly mindless, meaningless, unrelated questions are really very related.

They can be part of a process of self-discovery; a way to find your passion.

Fast forward

So let’s fast forward a bit. Through different exercises, deep thinking, networking, and commitment, you have discovered passions. But they don’t seem to fit into your chosen career of dental hygiene. So then what? Then it is time to be creative! Here’s how Deb did it.

Deb has a passion for alternative medicine, the holistic lifestyle, and nurturing people. Like many of us, this single mother needs to work to support her family. Deb’s best opportunity and greatest source for income at one time was only clinical practice. There didn’t even seem to be any choice.

Deb decided there was a choice. She got creative and blended her passion of aromatherapy and nurturing people and applied it to the dental hygiene maintenance visit. This was the genesis of her Perioromatherapy™. This technique she created was the result of her many interests in aromatherapy, music, healing, nurturing, and serving the client. She formed her own company Oraspa™, Inc. to share her techniques with other professionals.

The rewards of Deb’s working from her passionate core are client satisfaction and commanding respect from not only the client but the dentist, staff, and colleagues. She is an individual entrepreneur instead of the “girl in the office who cleans teeth.” Deb did it because she needed

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more from life than to continue in dental hygiene as she always had. She created her own stimuli. It felt as if she were stifled and crippled in her own profession with no room for growth.

One may think, “Wow, cool for Deb! She’s really there, she’s arrived!” No, not at all! Life is a journey, a process that can be a joyful ride, and one that’s taken on a roller coaster. Deb isn’t done because as she is creating, she is also learning and as we learn, we learn by doing.

Help and support from others

Did Deb create Oraspa completely alone? Absolutely not. Part of her learning came through the assistance of others. Three key words assisted her success: networking, listening, and learning.

Networking continuously is a must in order to grow. Even as we reach our goals we must always stay updated on contemporary information regarding our profession and expertise. If you are more introverted, networking can be done via email and other modern technologies. Surround yourself with like-minded people or people who you would like to be with or simulate. Don’t worry, they won’t bite or ridicule you. Find the good in all people; there is always someone there to help you.

Listening is the greatest form of knowledge — not just hearing but really listening to what another person has to say. Feel the emotion ... try and figure out what they are really trying to communicate. Mentoring is a great vehicle for both parties. Receiving and being the mentor is rewarding and a great source of information and inspiration.

Taking what you have heard and whether it is positive or negative, learn from this information. Remember, there are no mistakes — only lessons to be learned and valued. For example, by listening to what other hygienists have been through, those who have been in the trenches and have been knocked down either politically, academically, or in an office situation, receive their experience as a gift. It’s something that you would gladly skip over and not have to go through yourself. Now, with all of this being said, we still need to make our own choices and it may be necessary to pave your own path.

Unstoppable

So get started, take the journey into yourself. Discover your passions. If they can be applied to your dental hygiene career, great! You then have energy to change the things you didn’t like before or to create what you want it to be. You can jump in with both feet and know that you have the power within you to influence people’s behavior. Can and will others try to stop you? Yes! Yet how can we be stopped if we are focused, passionate, and feel good about ourselves? *We can’t*. When we’re working from that passionate core, we are unstoppable!

So ends our series on the Journey of Two

Women. Yet our journey together and separately is not finished, and our passions continue to push us on. This collaboration has been a labor of love. Yet we are not one only ones involved. We wish to thank our Illinois colleagues in particular, Tulips and Precious. We want to thank the many inspirational peers throughout the country including those who post on the www.amysrdhlist.com and the members and staff of the American Dental Hygienists’ Association. You have helped us be who we want to be, to be able to look in the mirror and like what we see.

We must also take this opportunity to thank *RDH* magazine, particularly Mark Hartley and Amy Frazin, two people who have known and supported us for years and believed that sharing our love story would help inspire and motivate others to expand their beliefs about who they are and because we are no different than any other hygienist. We are humbly grateful to those that have changed our lives and look forward to those that will continue to add to the change.

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