Secrets for Dental Success in Life

Martin Edelston, founder of *Bottom Line Personal* magazine, wrote in the March 2009 issue of his secrets for a successful life. This article is patterned on his model.

**Seek out the top experts and get their advice:**
I joined the R.V. Tucker Study Clubs in 1991, wishing to upgrade my skills in restorative dentistry. We established a local study club in Albuquerque with a fine mentor, Dr. Ron Gusa. Beyond that, I requested and received permission to travel to Ferndale, WA to watch Dr. Richard Tucker, the mentors’ mentor, in live action for a day. Seeing a true genius operate was one of the touchstones of my dental career. I always grabbed any chance to learn from top clinicians in any phase of dentistry.

A nephew of mine, and now a newly minted M.D., Jason Degani, initiated an interest in black holes, worm holes, and exotica of cosmology while in middle school. For several years I could answer his questions easily, yet by Jason’s junior year in high school, I was stumped. We needed an expert. My first choice would be Steven Hawking, yet his physical impairment makes it difficult for him to communicate and his time is extremely valuable. Second in line in the world is Kip Thorne of Cal Tech. I emailed Dr. Thorne with several pages of Jason’s questions with the title, “What Do I Do with This Kid?” I had a detailed reply within an hour! Reputably the second smartest man in the world was extremely kind to parse the material and provide two physicist collaborators for Jason. The point here is that often the most gifted humans go out of their way to assist us mortals.

**Think big, plan carefully, execute with intention:**
In 1991, I wished to make-over my practice. My wife interned at a prosthodontist’s office for several months to learn basic lab technology. Meanwhile, we reformulated our practice vision to provide the highest quality restorative dentistry. We redesigned our schedule with blocks, redefined assistant functions, and deleted perio surgery, extractions, and dentures from my dental arsenal. [Aside: this is not deemed wise in the current economic climate. Addition of new procedures to your practice is most prudent today!] I cut staff positions by two. In other words, we designed a more lean practice devoted to the work I loved. We accomplished the transition in two months without a hitch with assistance of a top consultant. My restorative practice bloomed and dentistry was a passion for the rest of my career.

**Keep it simple:**
Office billing: My front desk person and I viewed each account with a balance at the end of the month. For anything over 60 days, I hand wrote on the statement, “Over 60 days, please remit.” For over 90 days, “Over 90 days, please pay promptly to avoid further action.” Over 120 days, “Over 120 days, please pay in full by (ten days out) or account will be sent to collections.” I initialed “DC” after each note. If a patient ever asked, the front desk could tell the patient the doctor wrote the note. That was our collection system. No calling, no letters. I always had accounts receivable of 15-20 days of production.
Never compromise integrity:
I staked my reputation on accuracy in my dental work, my staff’s accuracy in billing and scheduling, my hygienists’ expertise, and my assistants’ efficient setups. If anything ever went wrong, and it certainly did at times, responsibility was taken by the appropriate party, any recourse was negotiated, and we went on.

If ever a dental procedure was problematic, either it was redone promptly for no charge or a referral was made for a redo with full refund, including the lab fee. We solved every problem quickly with the benefit of the doubt always given to the patient. This not only prevented legal problems, but helped me sleep at night.

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1 Download at www.bottomlinesecrets.com/article.html?article_id=47821.