



The Business of Dentistry: It's OK to Do the "Small Stuff"

Like many of you, I often ponder the "business" of dentistry, especially the "cosmetic boutique" type of practice that we all strive for. I hear and read many accounts of practitioners who achieve the pinnacle of success in cosmetic dentistry; for example, preparing and seating full-mouth rehabilitation cases day in and day out...seemingly without failure! Let me say something, however, that few seem to admit: this smile boutique practice is one tough nut to crack! And for that matter, if not closely managed, it is not always the most profitable, either.

I have always been intrigued with both the clinical and management aspects of running a dental practice. I think dentists are a unique breed of business owner, being both a player and a coach. Not only do we work in a space the size of a tennis ball all day long, playing with small, seemingly insignificant pieces of porcelain, connected to a sensate human being; but we also must manage our team members, our equipment, our public relations, etc...all while trying to turn a profit!

I am an open-minded person, and believe that there is always more than one way to get something done. One path to success for creating the cosmetic practice that has worked well for me is to follow the "Practice within a Practice" principle. In other words, first create a strong base of "bread-and-butter" general dentistry as a foundation for their practice. Then, and only then, add the "caviar" (elective smile design) to the already successful base. I believe this model can allow anyone the opportunity to build that elusive boutique within the "safety net" of a financially sound general practice. In addition to a solid base, commitment to consistent and congruent cosmetic treatment philosophy is a must. Congruency that transcends the entire practice, from the exquisite margins and golden proportions of your veneers, right down to the marginal ridge of your posterior direct resin restorations, and *everything* in between.

For most of us, the "caviar" or elective smile design is far more exciting and emotionally rewarding than the "small stuff." In my case this was so true that I found myself becoming myopic, concentrating on the exhilarating part of my practice while disregarding the foundation of my general practice, to the extent that my bottom line began to suffer!

Obviously, not everyone has a smile design boutique practice, me included. Nor do most of us practice in the major metropolitan cosmetic "hot spots" of the world. You work hard to make an MODBL onlay on tooth #30 invisible, and do the occasional smile design. I am here to say, "That's OK," as long as you don't chase the "caviar" so hard that you lose sight of the basics that got your practice to where it is today. The "small stuff" really does matter.

With that in mind, I have developed a new section for the Journal, titled "The Business of Dentistry." This section will be written by different authors, who will provide us with useful tools and tips to create solid foundations for successful practices. I hope that these ideas will allow each one of us the freedom to go after all the "caviar" our hearts desire.

Finally, a note from the heart: Our friend and "brother" Dr. Dennis J. Wells, who has given so much to the Academy, recently lost a beloved and remarkable son, Dustin Jack Wells. Our prayers and love are with the Wells family. *AK*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael".

Michael Koczarski, D.D.S.
