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[Practice Politics: The Enemy Within](#)

The single greatest impediment to your dental practice's success isn't the insurance companies or the economy...its internal (personal) divisiveness and political (professional) wrangling. This series of articles shows you how to identify and rid your practice of the "politics as usual" that stifles the top performance of your team. This strategic approach will help any dental practice materially improve their performance.

Work vs. Family

I have been working with dentists for over 12 years. As a psychotherapist and business coach I have listened to many dentists make a very brave attempt at fabricating their own explanation of life in the face of sleepless nights, diminishing production, staff anarchy, marital alienation and a deep sense of loss over a connection with their children. For many of these dentists, they believe what happens at home has nothing to do with what happens at work. It doesn't take long in the coaching process to show them that who they are at work is the same person they are at home.

The brain's natural imperative to protect itself keeps this obvious parallel universe a secret. Yes, the brain can keep a secret from itself in an effort to provide the means to survive and forge ahead. In the realm of evolutionary psychology, we call this biological imperative, "Survival at all cost". It seems that the DNA is naturally designed to seek out solutions to survive regardless of the pain or discomfort endured. This impetus materializes at every level of consciousness. In other words, your need to survive outweighs your need to feel happy.

In this first article on a series called The Enemy Within, I am introducing a simple psychological and human behavioral fact which is that who you are is either your greatest asset or your worst enemy. If you want to know, which are you, asset or enemy, simply observe the faces of your family or the faces of your staff. In other words, despite what you might think of yourself when you are alone in your office, in your den, in your car driving home, that is not who you are, who you are is what others observe.

Just like you can't say you're an excellent dentist if you continue to lose patients, you can't say that you're in control of your life, if you experience a distance from the people in your life: at work and at home. I have worked with dozens of dentists who bought into the belief that money plus family equals happiness. I have worked with dozens of men and women who expressed deep exasperation over the

realization that it was not true. They simply continue to ponder how to get their staff to cooperate and coordinate amongst themselves, as well as their deep sense of loss and powerlessness over how to gain the love and attention of their children or the intimate affections of their spouse.

If I have caught your attention with the preceding monologue, then perhaps the ensuing discussion about solutions will make some sense. If you can relate to the above, then you now know that you have a problem. Recognizing that you have a problem is really only one third of the solution. It is only one third because plenty of people know that they are dissatisfied, but they are no closer to a solution with that realization. There is a basic fundamental psychological defense mechanism which reflects the human psyche's desire to protect itself.

The overwhelming majority of people, when confronted with the realization that they are not happy, defend themselves by saying that this is the way it's supposed to be, and that this is the best that they can hope for and there is nothing they can do about it. This allows them to move forward without dwelling on the past in the belief that the past has been left behind. It can't! This distraction, this momentary distraction makes them feel like they have accomplished something. This makes them feel better, because this conclusion implies that there's nothing left to do. Thus, the second third of the solution comes down to recognizing that the need for change, to change something--anything, has to take place, but what?

People don't usually come to resolve the second third of the solution until they have hit bottom, hit a crisis or something terrible has happened, such as three consecutive bad production months, collaboration by employees to obstruct changes in the practice, an inappropriate intimate affair with a colleague or staffer, or news that your children are performing badly in school or acting out with some antisocial behavior. It is these horrible disconcerting confrontational awarenesses that bring, of course not only dentists, but the general public as well, them to the point where they commit to seeking help with these issues.

The third part of the solution involves several steps. First, you need information. You need information on human behavior. You need information on your own behavior, as well as that of your staff and family. There is a way that people interact that feels relatively normal to most. Although your childhood might have felt chaotic, it probably was. However, your childhood may have felt good and loving, and it may not have been. There are a set of rules, principles, rituals and traditions that hold the family functioning together, either functional or dysfunctional. The need to understand human behavior in terms of new information begins the process of understanding the enemy within. Step #1: get new information about yourself.

The information about human behavior then transcends to a basic challenge. Do you possess the emotional strength to challenge the disorganization that you experienced at home or at work? What becomes very clear, very soon when you begin accumulating information is that *who you are at home is who you are at work*. You are not a different person regardless of your fantasy. You are the same person exercising the same solutions to very similar problems. Thus, this realization regarding your invulnerability or rather the bursting of the fantasy that your life is the best it can be becomes your next

challenge. Can you withstand a life without fantasy? Step #2: acknowledge that your worldview and self-image may be wrong.

After the information and after acknowledging the myth of your fantasy, institutional change becomes the final challenge the family and work institutions. What makes institutional change difficult is that, besides the refusal of others to cooperate, which is a minor problem, the outcome you desire has no basis within your psyche for what it feels like. In other words, if you wanted to feel good about yourself, but you never had anyone say anything nice about you while growing up, then the only image you have of yourself and the only feeling that you are left with is one that feels badly. Thus, once you decide to challenge the institutional values that have led to your discontent, how do you set up a new goal to produce a new feeling to move towards? One thing is for certain, making more money does not make the discontent disappear. Step #3: focus your efforts on feeling differently by changing behavior.

Thus, you should conclude from the above description that the enemy within, is really within you. You can take the courses and you can read the books, but I feel obliged to let you know that all of the rational decisions that you might come to conclude, all the rules and the steps that will be outlined in the books and seminars will ultimately fall short over time, because the emotional world that lies deep within you must support the outcome that you envision. It is only the basis of your emotions that your new goals can make sense to the brain. Otherwise, your old emotions will only support the original way of managing your life, business and family. This is why money doesn't buy happiness; money is not a feeling or a behavior. Money leads to stuff. Step #4: do what makes you feel better about yourself.

Happiness is a feeling and it is a feeling that is born from a sense of confidence that one has fulfilled their biological potential. With this discovery comes limited control over one's world while still getting one's needs met. For those who fantasize total control, they only experience unhappiness. For those who experience no control, the sense of powerlessness simply leaves them in perpetual chaos and unhappiness. The trick to mastering the enemy within is to recognize what you can and cannot control and then taking the steps outlined to act accordingly. I am reminded of one of Ernest Hemingway's greatest books, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*" eloquently reminding us of our existential reality: it tolls for thee.