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Top 5 psychological barriers dentists face that keep them from achieving satisfaction with their careers.

"I loved being a dentist." That is what he said to me, and I believed him. I looked at the smile on his face; it was a genuine smile. My mind flashed back to his handshake; his handshake was firm and deliberate. He was exuding confidence. I could not help notice the suit and tie perfectly matched and obviously expensive. At this moment, I look down at his shoes just to see if the continuity was evident for everyone to see.

While, this man genuinely loves being a dentist, there are many others who question their decision rarely, occasionally, frequently and every morning when they force themselves out of bed. Let us accept for the moment that a dentist who experiences one of these four levels of self-doubt and self-criticism is experiencing something different than the person that genuinely loves their decision to become a dentist.

Of course, I can make the same argument for any of the professions that I work with and that is because this progression of feelings regarding job satisfaction has nothing to do with the job. The ability to feel satisfied in our careers involves something deeper. The decision to choose a career always feels like a rational decision, but it is really the product of your deeper personal beliefs and truths. What you truly believe and what is true for you ultimately determines your satisfaction with your career on a daily basis.

As a coach, with many years of experience, I will assure you that what you tell yourself is not necessarily the truth., However, what you do and how you behave is often what you truly believe. Just because it feels right, does not necessarily mean it is the truth or good for you. So, what is the truth? The truth is what works for you. Your truth is embodied in your actions. If you live up to your own truths, you will find satisfaction with your career; however, if you live up to the distorted truths of the past or the truths of others, then you will always be dissatisfied, because your self-interests are not being met. The big question is: why do you live up to incorrect or someone else's truth?

For those dentists who are feeling dissatisfied with their careers, their beliefs and values do not always point them in a direction to feel good, because feeling good is different from feeling right. The doctors that are not achieving satisfaction in their careers are practicing dentistry to feel right; they are not practicing dentistry to feel good.[The good vs right might need some additional clarification] They are following their beliefs and values which typically reflect personal distortions which are based on previous experience, such as distorted beliefs about work, time, quality, staff, men, women, vendors, children and patients. Often, dentists internalize these distorted beliefs from early experiences or from listening to others too intently searching for the magic bullet.

Yes, I understand that men and women who complete a postgraduate degree do not want to believe that they are not right (I hate that feeling), but the truth is that what feels right may be part of your personal worldview which involves inefficient lessons, experiences and conclusions. The inefficiency of your beliefs and value system, when that system is brought into the office, brings with it the chaos and illogical power relationships that result from trying to implement your distorted beliefs and values. [Perhaps an example or a short illustrative story would help here, to clarify your meaning for the reader.]

You decided to become a dentist; you decided on helping people with their health; you decided on making money; and, what you did not decide on was being an entrepreneur where intense people contact is the rule. Being a dentist involves running a business and running a business involves dealing with the public, vendors and most difficult of all – your staff. . It is at the level of interaction with staffers and the public that your beliefs and values about people, time, energy and money may be misguided and make career satisfaction impossible.

At the heart of every career is a decision to interact with people. Interacting with people consumes energy. Dentists who find themselves dissatisfied with their daily routines are essentially expending more energy than they can rejuvenate after a night's sleep. Of course, most of these dentists are not getting a night's sleep, because they cannot stop thinking about all the interactions that made them feel challenged and made them feel vulnerable during the day.

Thus, a discussion about psychological barriers to achieving greater career satisfaction begins with an acknowledgment that career dissatisfaction begins with not having the skills to modulate the expenditure of energy during the day. Without sufficient energy, you cannot make the necessary decisions to change the habits and viewpoints of your life. Rather, these energy depleted dentists continue to spend inordinate amounts of energy trying to simply get through the average day.

When we are in our 30s, we have plenty of energy to handle this. Our natural denial mechanism kicks in and we can make it through the decade. When we get to the 40s and realize that we are on the downside of the curve, suddenly this excessive expenditure of energy is no longer capable of being hidden from our consciousness. As a result, the dissatisfaction begins to appear at first in a dream and ultimately on a daily basis.

As an executive coach working with business executive, attorneys and dentists, I have developed a tremendous respect for the brain and the mind. The brain has needs and when these needs are not fulfilled, the mind makes it very clear that this feeling of dissatisfaction is not going to go away. It begins to show up everywhere. Of course, everyone who is rational believes that they can figure out a way to move past the pain and postgraduates are the best at rationalizing away their discomfort and unhappiness. The typical answer is to make more money or take more vacations.

You cannot rationalize your dissatisfaction, nor can you rationalize the cause or the solution. The psychological barriers that keep you from achieving career satisfaction are in the past, perhaps as far back as your childhood.. Because they are in the past, we can, with effort and outside help, leave them in the past. Then, we can begin a process of changing our beliefs and values so that we can determine a new truth for ourselves. Living with a new truth requires that you behave differently, run your business differently, and interact with your staff and your family differently.

If you make the decisions to change, so will your sense of satisfaction, and so will your destiny.

The outcome of your life remains in your hands. Right now you know what you have, the question is will you do what's necessary to achieve something that feels better and more natural?

Next issue, I will discuss specific barriers that dentists experience which reflect limiting personal beliefs and values that hinder optimum career satisfaction.