

## Reaching Across “Party Lines”

The 2012 National elections have just concluded, and thank goodness—if I had to listen to just one more mud-slinging, defamatory, deceptive political advertisement, I believe I might have gone “postal” and thrown something at the TV. And, regardless of whether your candidate won, there is a lot to be concerned about here. Over the last 2 years, with one house of Congress being “red” and the other house “blue,” the real issue is not who is in control of which house of Congress, but rather who is willing to reach across the aisle and break ties with the party line to reach some collegial compromises, **FOR THE BETTERMENT OF ALL OUR CITIZENS!** It seems that our political system has become so divisive that nothing is getting accomplished, except a lot of finger pointing and blame casting. Have our congressional leaders become so tunnel-visioned that they are incapable of working together to resolve those issues that will surely have a significant impact on us all? Did not most of us learn how to play together, to negotiate, and to compromise, way back in preschool in the sandbox? I would suggest, if our elected leaders allow us to plunge over the “fiscal cliff” and into recession, we immediately begin recall procedures on them all, to the end that we actually **DO** elect some representatives of the people that **CAN** work together. Enough, already!

You are probably wondering, has the Editor-in-Chief lost his proverbial mind? What the heck does this have to do with prosthodontics, you ask? Actually, it has quite a lot to do with it. I am looking at the 18 different prosthodontics organizations in the United States, and, as a member of several of them over the years, and particularly my role on the Boards of several of the organizations. I am struck by the similarities of each of the organizations, and how each believes how unique it is, and how much better it is than all the other prosthodontics organizations. Many of us hold memberships in multiple organizations, yet many of us do not even attend the annual sessions of those organizations to which we belong. I have actually elected to terminate my membership in several of them, simply because I simply do not understand their *raison d’être*! And, when you attend one of these meetings, you are reminded of the following:

- (1) Everything that is said in the meeting must be held in the strictest confidence, because what goes on there is so “top secret” that one of the other organizations might steal the idea, claim ownership of it, and run with it!
- (2) You are always told, at the start of the meeting that “it’s time to put on your organization hat (for this or that organization) make decisions that only affect this organization.” Come on, **REALLY?**

As Prosthodontists, we have been accused of “giving away the farm.” I have heard on many occasions that we “gave away implants, we gave away CAD/CAM, we gave away esthetics, etc.” Was it really ours to “give away?” Every prosthodontics

group wants to be known for being the national/international leader in leadership development, evidence-based dentistry, implants, reconstructive dentistry, public relations, providing the “think tank” for our sponsoring corporations, and fundraising initiatives. How many times are our 18 organizations going to reinvent the wheel before we come to our senses? Does not this sound a lot like what is going on in our Congress? Is it not time for the leadership of **ALL** prosthodontics organizations to sit down and strategically plan the future of **PROSTHODONTICS** (not necessarily the future of each independent organization)? Does that not benefit us all? With many of the organizations having education foundations, with each having an annual session (how many annual meetings do we **REALLY** need, anyway?), and with each having an annual dues structure to help support their efforts, I believe we have lost sight of both the Specialty as well as the Discipline of Prosthodontics. And, it appears that no one is willing to give up **ANYTHING**, much less collaborate on anything. All of us approach the same corporate sponsors for ever-shrinking budgetary support of our meetings and our organizations. In these challenging economic times, we are all competing against each other for a fixed (or shrinking) amount of corporate support, **rather than working for the collective good of all Prosthodontics!**

Am I implying that some of the prosthodontics organizations should merge with others, or merely fold up their tents and steal quietly into the night? Perhaps so. Think about it—if the 18 prosthodontics organizations were to merge, have a single dues structure, a single endowment fund, yet maintain a few regional meetings to facilitate travel and the local economies, we would all get better continuing education, more “bang for our dues buck,” greater support from corporate sponsors, actually have an opportunity for a fruitful public relations campaign (that everyone is clamoring for), and begin to play with our sister Specialty organizations on a more competitive level. One does not have to look far to see what a singular specialty organization, such as the AAO, AAOMS, AAPD, or AAP, have done for their members in multiple areas over the last two decades. Is not it time for **all Prosthodontic organizations** to work collectively to strengthen the Specialty and the Discipline? If we do, we all, as well as our patients, benefit. I see it as a win/win proposition.

I will challenge each of you for your input on this topic—do you agree with me, or not? Please respond to dafelton@hsc.wvu.edu at your earliest convenience. I believe it is time to put our differences aside, work across the boundaries (aisle) of the various organizations, combine our collective strengths, and move forward as a unified voice for prosthodontics. Right now, we are all treading water, at best.

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