

Giving is serious business

The discussion of full-time faculty shortage is on the daily agenda of every credible orthodontic organization. Meetings are held, the issue is discussed, and it is decided that someone ought to do something. Once the issue is discussed and the problem is noted, and the decision is made that 'someone ought to do something', then it is time for a drink. But who is this elusive 'someone'?

In an environment where the governments must fight terrorism, or the spread of mystery diseases and falling stock markets, orthodontics is not a high priority. Especially, when the campaign platform of every political candidate is to cut back taxes. Cutting back taxes is easy, but its consequences not pretty. Where is the money to defend the country from intruders, or to pay the police force for security, to fund scientific research to fight the spread of mystery diseases? There has never been enough money for all the projects our governments wish to undertake. And certainly at times of national crises no one cares about orthodontics more than orthodontists. So who is that mystery person named 'someone' who will do 'something'? Does he wear a cape and fly in his underwear?

Obviously, it is us who ought to be doing the 'something'. Clearly, insufficient funding, minimal reward for good work, and the like, drive many of our teachers away from the academic world. Yet they are the ones who are committed to giving although they are the ones who could afford it the least. It is almost like the stereotypical casino gambler or the buyer of lottery tickets: they are the ones who can afford it the least.

Teaching has to be habit-forming. But when a habit is no longer pleasurable, one stops indulging in it. For the educator orthodontist, university life is not the fun it once was. Corporate money can easily realize: 1) full-time educators are forced into unfair hardship, 2) there is a lack of support from their own kind, and 3) the demand for orthodontic services is greater than ever. Thus, it should come as no surprise that corporations will take over the business of training orthodontists. Chances are they may not be able to produce the skeptical-thinker clinicians we are accustomed to, but

certainly will produce adequate technicians. We have seen numerous examples in the history of orthodontics that business empires could be built by training dentists to do orthodontics. No reason why the corporate orthodontic training programs could not be equally successful.

These days there seem to be reluctance to giving in the dental profession when the educational system needs it the most. Some say that our educational institutions are failing us. But this is just one more challenge. If one does not trust the way our educational institutions work, make it work better. Universities, after all, ought to be a reflection of the desires of its alumni, showing their 'public face', working together to solve the joint problems that we share as a community. Cynicism or withdrawal to surrender the business of education to corporate capital does not help. Time is now for the orthodontic community to see itself obligated to give back. *Giving back is a budget item.*

We hear a lot about the importance of quality of life, taking it easy, spending more time playing, and similar others. A purely hedonistic attitude indeed. The buzzword is if you win the rat race you are still a rat. It has been said only rats win the rat race, as they are devoid of commitments, to family, society, alma mater, and the like. But such talk about *not* winning the rat race, in many ways, is a convenient excuse not to succeed. Al Franken on this topic had said 'If you win the rat race, you'll never have difficulty feeding your family'.

Success is never bad. One might hear people talking about how lonely it is at the top, but it is *much* lonelier at the bottom. If orthodontics is to maintain its top position, failure to educate future generations of orthodontists cannot be an option.

There are those who say: no man in his deathbed ever said 'I wish I had spent more time at the office'. This is cute, but I bet there are many more people who in their deathbed, said something like 'I wish I had taken the time to work harder; I would have had a much better life than the one I am about to end'.

Ruth Simmons, Brown University President, in a commencement speech at Washington University in St Louis said: '...You all know you are leaving college in

debt. No I don't mean the obligation to repay the loans that helped finance your education, though, keep in mind you need to repay those as well. I mean the debt you owe to the world that has nurtured you. There is nothing worse than a person who rises to high achievement and who thinks they did it on their own. I hope you won't be one of those....'

Abigail Adams, when she was in Europe accompanying her husband in his diplomatic work after the Revolution was over, Abigail learned that John Quincy, who had since returned to attend Harvard, was acting a little too full of himself, a little too impressed by his own opinions. She wrote the following letter to him, which in many ways is a better guide to life even than most of the advice we seem to receive in abundance.

'...If you are conscious to yourself that you possess more knowledge upon some subjects than others of your standing, reflect that you have had greater opportunities of seeing the world and obtaining a knowledge of mankind than any of your contemporaries; that you have never wanted a book but it has been supplied to you; that your whole time has been spent in the company of men of literature and science. How unpardonable would it have been of you to have turned out a blockhead....'

One of the most obvious lessons of history is that there is no such thing as a self-made man or woman. We all are beneficiaries of those who have helped us, who have guided us, who have nudged us in different

directions when we needed that nudging, who have encouraged and inspired us. And I include in that those who went before us; those figures from the past to whom we owe so much.

Graduate students of orthodontics, like John Quincy Adams, have had opportunities – unlike most other people in the world. They too have never had to want better privileges or station in life. They too, have spent their time in the company of women and men of literature and science, and they too, we certainly hope, will not wind up a blockhead in life.

Our culture is built on giving back. Give back your love, your time, your skills, or any other assets you might have. But understand that giving time, for example, is a budget item. Time to exercise, time to spend with the kids, time to go to the cinema, are all budgeted. A business owner would simply not take the leftover cash in the cash register at the end of the day and call it salary. Monetary support cannot be done by leftover cash at the end of the month; there would not be any left. Giving has to be a budget item. It should not be too difficult to grasp that our lot in life, made possible by those who stopped us from becoming a blockhead, needs to be sustained. Giving is serious business – enough to be a *budget item*.

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