

The Impact of Leadership and Research on Decision Making: The Power of Knowledge

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In my role as Chief Executive Officer of the American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA), I have had the honor and privilege of working alongside many dental hygiene leaders in a variety of professional roles. What I have observed in these leaders is that each has their own unique style of leadership that has allowed them to leave a lasting impression on our profession and on ADHA. In this way, each leader is like a fingerprint, showcasing their individuality and creativity.

Thinking about leadership as a fingerprint helps to understand what it takes to be a great leader. In order for that uniqueness and creativity to have a lasting impact, leaders need to possess certain skills. A crucial leadership skill is the ability to influence others. Influence can occur through having excellent communication skills, and the confidence to communicate ideas and goals to others. Additionally, great leaders will often find other leaders to emulate, identifying leadership behaviors that speak to them. We often see dental hygiene students emulating the leadership behaviors of their faculty, and many of us can bring to mind a faculty member early on in our education that planted and nurtured the seeds of our own leadership. It is important that leaders create a vision of the person they want to be, and that they have the mentors to do so.

However, individuality and communication are only two pieces to the puzzle. Leaders are often called upon to make decisions on a variety of matters, and dental hygiene leaders are no exception. The complexities of the issues we face and decisions that must be made are considerable. Therefore, in order to make sense of complex issues and to make decisions in the best interest of the organization, today's leaders (as well as our future leaders) need to possess critical thinking skills that enable sound decision making.

Several years ago, the ADHA Board of Trustees made a significant decision to use a knowledge-based decision making model, provided by Tecker International Consulting, for all of their governing responsibilities.¹ The knowledge-based decision making model asks:

1. What do we know about our stakeholders' needs, wants and preferences, that is relevant to this decision?
2. What do we know about the current realities and evolving dynamics of our environment that is relevant to this decision?
3. What do we know about the capacity and strategic

position of our organization that is relevant to this decision?

4. What are the ethical implications of this decision?

Notice that each of these questions begins with the phrase, "What do we know about...?" Our role as ADHA staff is to gather the evidence for each of these questions that will provide the "knowledge" upon which the Board of Trustees will deliberate and debate to make their final decisions. Utilizing a knowledge-based decision model enables the board member's critical thinking skills, and reduces the incidents of emotional decision making or anecdotal decision making.

No matter which professional role dental hygienists choose as their career choice, daily decisions need to be made. The underpinning of the decision making process is evidence and knowledge. Evidence and knowledge provides the answer to the fundamental question of "What do I know about..." Dental hygienists in a clinician role have the responsibility for using the dental hygiene process of care to ultimately determine a dental hygiene diagnosis and treatment plan, and evaluate the oral health outcomes for their patients. Scientific evidence, or knowledge, is the underpinning upon which oral health care providers should make their decisions.

It is through our commitment to research and the quest to build the dental hygiene knowledge base that our profession grows and our ability to provide evidence-based care to our patients. Simply asking ourselves the question "What do I know about..." is the starting point to searching for knowledge, information and scientific evidence for the critical thinking necessary for leaders in all of the professional roles of a dental hygienist.

Sincerely,

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REFERENCES

1. Knowledge-Based Decision Making. Tecker International Consulting [Internet]. 2012 [cited 2016 February 5]. Available from: <http://www.tecker.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/TIKBDM-Jan12.pdf>

