



The Impact of Leadership and Research on Decision Making: Who Is Going to Lead the Transformation of Dental Hygiene?

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Think back to when you first entered the dental hygiene profession. Most of us didn't stumble upon the profession, independent of someone leading us here. Who guided you into dental hygiene? Some of us were led to dental hygiene because of previous dental experiences or a family member in dentistry. Many have guided others into the profession by sharing with their patients, friends and co-workers all that dental hygiene can offer.

Your passion for the profession and compassion for your patients make you an excellent role model and leader. We must continue leading others to our profession to replace retiring dental hygiene clinicians, educators and researchers. We need to equip future students with data that supports dental hygiene as an exceptional career path. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that employment of dental hygienists will grow 19% in the next decade.¹ In 2015, the American Dental Education Association reported 292 retirements for dental hygiene in the next 5 years representing approximately 2 faculty for each program.² A decision regarding one's professional journey is important and it's imperative that one uses evidence to support the decision.

As you entered the workforce or your current position, did you have a mentor? Perhaps your mentor was someone in your workplace advising you and assisting you with becoming a valuable part of the team. Perhaps it was a colleague from your component or even your "big sister or brother" from dental hygiene school. Would you have been in a different place today without a mentor? It is crucial that we provide leadership and guidance to our new team members regardless of the setting.

There are numerous opportunities to serve as a leader. Clinicians are educating and leading patients to optimal oral health and contributing to overall systemic health. Educators are leading the next generation of dental hygienists into the profession. Researchers must generate quality research that stimulates dental hygienists to produce valuable data in the years ahead. According to John Maxwell, leaders become great not be-

cause of their power but because of their ability to empower others. Are you ready and willing to empower others?³

Fortunately, dental hygienists have plenty of opportunities to develop leadership skills. Two outstanding programs for dental hygienists are ADHA's Unleashing Your Potential Workshop (UYP) and ADEA's Allied Dental Faculty Leadership Development Program (ADFLDP). Participants selected for UYP have the opportunity to network with fellow ADHA leaders, absorb a great deal of information regarding leadership skills, collaborative leadership and fiduciary responsibility. Likewise, ADEA ADFLDP participants are selected bi-annually to participate in a 4 day intensive training in leadership designed for allied dental faculty members and program directors. This interactive program includes self and peer-assessment exercises and presentations from experts in higher education. Individual coaching sessions are scheduled and a mentoring program established. Graduates from both of these programs develop bonds with classmates that often last a lifetime, and have defined these programs as life changing opportunities.

Currently, 8 dental hygiene leaders from the ADHA and ADEA are part of a collaboration titled the ADEA Curriculum Change and Innovation (ADEA CCI) workgroup with the ADHA. This group began working over 2 years ago with the goal to increase and enhance professional development and leadership opportunities for dental hygiene professionals for the future transformation of the dental profession. This workgroup collected data and information on voids in dental hygiene education. They established the priority of building a cadre of new leaders in dental hygiene education that are prepared to assume responsibilities and lead the profession into the next century of dental hygiene. The workgroup is creating a leadership development program. The target group for the program will be part-time dental hygiene faculty and recent graduates of advanced dental hygiene education programs pursuing a career in dental education. It will be a hybrid course that will provide an interactive online component and one face-to-face meeting. Some of the topics include

mentoring, principles of leadership, effective communication, and social and emotional intelligence.

According to Mark Yarnell, a leader is someone who demonstrates what's possible.⁴ As the dental hygiene profession continues to transform, so many things are possible for us that may not have been available decades ago. Each and every one of us has the opportunity to lead and it is our responsibility not to miss the opportunity to be a mentor and leader to the new generation of dental hygienists.

Sincerely,

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