

The Power of One — Revisited

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Last month I discussed the interrelationship of large organizations within dentistry in California and how, with cooperation, we can achieve good things for our profession. Collaborative efforts and common goals have had significant effect on the way we practice today. This is a pragmatic elaboration of the aphorism “In Unity There is Strength.”

It is reasonable to believe that this is a reason for organized dentistry to exist. But what of the individual member? One may think that an individual can do little to have impact on our professional or personal lives on a global level. Not so.

It is not uncommon in the arguments over issues that we face as an organization or society that disparate views exist as to what is best for the body. Discussion, debate, and often political maneuvering are the rule for the completion of the work that will provide guidance for our lives. Many of us are privileged, through positions of leadership and representation, to have altered the course of dentistry in California throughout the years. This is not meant to be a tribute to the egos of our leadership, rather a demonstration of how one person with a goal can introduce a resolution, educate others in the preparation of policy statements or effectively debate, and achieve success in effecting change.

Most of us will never be the president or on the boards of the California Dental Association, the American Dental Association, or any other major association of our profession. That does not mean that as a single member we cannot be influential. We should all continue to participate, for it is important for us to give back as individuals.



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A good example of an individual’s ability to effect change and influence the profession is in the recent enactment of a bill that mandates dental screenings in addition to medical evaluation of children before they enter the first grade. The concept for this bill came from a member pediatric dentist who believed that, given the magnitude of dental disease and the education days lost in the early years, preschool evaluation would benefit a population at risk. While it was not without a significant amount of debate, testimony, discussion and effort, the member was able to garner the support of the California Dental Association, who championed the bill through the Legislature. As the bill was signed, the member could feel proud of his impact on dental health in the state.

Even without that level of effort, a member may have significant impact on where the profession is headed. The election for the office of president-elect of the American Dental Association is by their House of Delegates — a body of more than 400 individual representative members. In 2005, the election was a contest with two individuals in pursuit of the office. Much to the surprise of the house, the first ballot ended in a tie with the second ballot ceding the election to the winner by just a few votes. Consider the

power of the few delegates that altered their vote for the second ballot.

There are similar stories on the social political scene. As the municipal and state election season recently passed, and on a historically reasonably consistent basis, many of the contests necessitated recounts or were decided by a handful of voters.

As a member of organized dentistry, you are not required to participate to any extent other than being a dues-paying or “checkbook” member. In reality, most of our members fall into this category for a litany of reasons. Practices are too busy, family requirements prevent their participation, or they are involved in other nondental groups and cannot be involved with depth in dental policy making or political issues. Our organization can accept and encourage membership at this level. Clearly, if everyone participated at a maximum level, there might not be a need for a representative governing body, and such involvement on a grand scale might engender a degree of chaos or confusion in getting anything done.

But for those who do elect to participate, the achievements absolutely outweigh the frustrations. To see your idea develop and be enacted gives one a sense of accomplishment that is difficult to measure. To influence the day-to-day

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activities of your professional life provides a sense of self-actualization that is important for many of us.

That you think it or say it does not make it so. But, if you have the conviction of your beliefs and can argue, prove, substantiate, negotiate, articulate, or convince others then, you can be very successful in being a catalyst for change at the local, state, or national level. An individual who is properly motivated and willing to put in an effort to effect change can make it happen. When it does, there is no greater feeling of success than the legacy you leave or the mark you make on your profession or community. The costs of doing so are great in terms of time, money, and frustration. The rewards are greater. ■■■■

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