

Save the Children

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In her hit, "The Greatest Love of All," pop singer Whitney Houston warbled "I believe the children are our future. Teach them well and let them lead the way."

From a rational perspective this is prosaic and tells us something that is obvious. From an artistic and more philosophical perspective, her melodious delivery and style makes one pause to think. Certainly our children are our future. That is a biological constant. But the more intuitive meaning has implications for our dental organizations and continued leadership within the California Dental Association and its components, as well as for the American Dental Association.

Last year we experienced, unfortunately, for the first and hopefully last time, a diminished and inadequate number of individuals who volunteered to serve on the multitude of committees, task forces, councils and work groups that allow our members to chart the course of our organization. There are hundreds of positions available to work within CDA; each of them having diverse areas of interest, skill set requirements, and time commitments.

Introspective analysis of why this problem occurred is conceptual at best. Some argue that a significant lack of communication or marketing to the members in recruiting individuals to do the work for the organizations is responsible. Others noted that generational values and realities of life in present times do not allow for global participation of members. Other theories exist but, in reality, none of them are significant. What is important is that the problem occurred.

Not our children but most assuredly our future, the young individuals entering our profession will become the leaders for today and tomorrow. As senior leaders complete their obligations, young indi-



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viduals need to be groomed for service to our profession, our organizations, and dentistry. It is a real problem but maybe a temporary one.

One solution has been the structural division of what was the Leadership Development Committee into two separate entities. The new Leadership Development Committee will be charged to pursue methods of "teaching our children" by continuing to provide educational offerings that show the value of leadership and assist in developing requisite skills and attitudes. The Committee on Volunteer Placement will be aggressive in evaluating and recruiting individuals for the multitude of positions within our organization.

It is unclear at the present time if this will be a more effective means for continuing the strong tradition of bringing excellent volunteers through leadership positions within organized dentistry at the state and other levels. It should be; that will mean problem solved.

In recent months I have been fortunate to attend two component dental society installation ceremonies for new officers and committee chairs. Both occasions were beautifully done with the requisite honoring of outgoing individuals who have served. There was a genuine appreciation for the efforts made to continue the local component service to its members.

What is most telling about these meetings was the installation itself. It

was refreshing to see individuals placed in positions at the committee or board level in the local component who are young and ambitious. These are the people who will take on the responsibilities of directing local matters for the next year. These are the people who will continue to serve the organization in other capacities. These are the people who can be developed and recruited for the future of CDA and ADA.

It is not all bleak. As one looks at the history of the Committee on the New Dentist, the contemporary iteration of a committee developed many years ago to assure that younger members are involved, it is reassuring to see that this group has been successful in having young members participating at all levels within our organization. There are few committees within CDA that do not have young individuals participating. This is yet another sign that we will continue to foster the introduction of youth into organized dentistry. This committee, as well as the student delegations to the House of Delegates, has had impressive impact on our structure and goals.

As singer Houston continues later in the song to suggest, "Everybody searching for a hero, people need someone to look up to," those of us who are more senior need to remember that.

We are the individuals who will mentor younger and newer dental individuals to participate at all levels. Perhaps last year

was an aberration. We have talent and interest among our members. The encouragement and development of leadership desires, skills and positions for younger and interested members is our legacy.

It is encouraging to see young people serving the local components. I am encouraged by the ability that we see in our “children” at the state and national levels. These people are our future. We can increase the ability and desire of newer members to serve in positions at all levels. It is critical we mentor them continually and get them involved at their own comfort level and within their parameters for participation. As this happens I am comfortable that organized dentistry will have a bright future.

There is no option. ■■■■

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