

## EDITORIAL

### Relationships and our profession

Relationships are everyday, and they can be simple or complex. They exist in the moment, with conversations that create emotions; and they evolve. A simple relationship can become complex and vice versa. Only a few words need be uttered to change a relationship.

Friendship is one of the easiest of relationships to manage. With 2 or more people sharing common interests, friendships often flourish. However, when people do not share common interests, ah, that becomes more complex and challenging. And because our profession is diverse, and uncommon and competing interests are part of the field, challenging circumstances frequently arise. How we handle these relationships is a true measure of our person and the units in which we associate.

One area of in which relationships can be strained is when change is imminent or is occurring. Those interested in the old way may be unaccustomed to new developments and may react adversely to the changes and to the persons implementing the changes. Economics, new information, and new directions often contribute to the friction that introduces “change” or “potential change.” As a result, benefits to an important segment of the interacting groups may be, or appear to be, disenfranchised or stymied.

Relationships can also be strained as policy and vision collide. Policy is derived from the need for governing directions. Policy provides for clear guidance for the sake of safety, efficiency, and/or expediency. Vision, on the other hand, contributes to where we, alone or as an organization, are going. Organizations are typically composed of a limited number of visionaries and many “worker bees,” because that is how organizations accomplish things and effectively generate their product. By the very nature of this distribution, visionary changes are infrequently offered, and as such the course of institutions is difficult to alter and remains unaltered for many years—unless there is a culture to encourage ideas and target improvements.

Within the profession, specialty recognition sits at the crossroads of growth, vision, relationships, and policy. Growth allows our profession to flourish, especially when structures are created that allow growth in directions that improve patient care. Seeking this growth should be an underlying mission of our profession. Yet to do so, vision and good relationships must intersect with policy. Oral medicine seeks both growth and good relationships with our professional col-

leagues. Yet we realize that the path of growth has not been, and will not be, easy. A new resident in the neighborhood is not always greeted with an apple pie and a smile, but those who reach out to understand their neighbors stand a good chance of becoming friends. I am proud to say that this platform of reaching out to neighbors is a frequent behavior of the American Academy of Oral Medicine, which has held joint annual meetings with their neighbors Les Journées Dentaires Internationales du Québec (2001), the European Association of Oral Medicine (2001 and planned in 2014), the American Academy of Orofacial Pain (2005) and currently planning a joint meeting in 2015 with the American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology.

A dental professional with many years of experience told me recently at a wedding reception something very insightful. He was recounting his 50 years in dentistry, his background from Appalachia, and he being the first family member to go to college. He told me of new friendships that developed between persons of diverse backgrounds during the 1960s when he was going to dental school. He commented, “Who would have thought that a small town boy, a Christian dentist, would become best friends with a Jewish lawyer from the big city having very little in common—at least at the surface”.

At first, yes, we often only see the surface of a person or organization—their outward appearance. From that perspective, we do not understand their complexity or their sincerity, but with time the differences can become understood, accepted, and enjoyed. The same can be said of dental specialties and emerging specialties. We all can be friends, we just need to see beyond the surface and get to know each other better. With that in mind, I suggest that we take a moment to get to know each other better and see the other person’s and organization’s point of view, so that together we can help the profession. Cooperation is generally advantageous,<sup>1</sup> and our profession will likely benefit from these behaviors.

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#### REFERENCE

1. Rand DG, Greene JD, Nowak MA. Spontaneous giving and calculated greed. *Nature* 2012;489:427-30.