

## THE FOUNDATIONS OF SUCCESS



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### FOUR MOLDING FORCES

I have lived in England, Africa, Australia, South America, and North America; and have spent time with thousands of people in all walks of life, varied professions, and occupations. In all those interactions, the questions that intrigued me most were, "*Why are these people—who are more successful, have better relationships, have greater prosperity—also better leaders?*" "*What were the forces that molded these individuals to be what they became?*"

I believe that there are four forces that mold characters, behavior, relationships, and success. They are as follows:

- beliefs
- values
- references (experiences)
- rules.

When you were born, you had none of these; you were an "empty vessel," eagerly waiting to be filled. With time, you "filled up" with beliefs, values, references, and rules. These were in large part determined by your parents; and by other factors such as faith, teachers, friends, and media messages. These four forces came from everywhere and as you adopted them—usually without question—you became who you are.

### BELIEFS

We are certain of these; we will fight for them, often in blind obedience, as people have done from the beginning of time. Be aware of your beliefs. They are so powerful that you will follow them to your benefit...or your detriment.

Beliefs influence how you think and feel every moment of your life. They determine what you will and what you will not do. They determine how you

feel about everything that occurs in your life.

I recently asked a number of dentists, "How long does it take you to prepare a lower posterior crown?" The answers ranged from seven minutes to 45 minutes. Upon further questioning, the responses were surprising. The faster doctors said that the longer it took, the less satisfied they were with the result. The slower doctors said that the longer it took, the better the result. Others said that if they finished too quickly, patients would feel that they had not received value for their money.

As a non-dentist, I am surprised that a procedure that is performed so frequently by dentists could produce such varied beliefs—all based on time taken—as to what constitutes a good result.

In the hygiene area, I see a wide range in the quality of care. These differences are driven by the caregiver's beliefs. Examples include the diagnosis and enrollment in treatment of periodontal disease. Some hygienists enroll patients easily in treatment. Others fear patients' reactions and continue to perform "bloody" prophys. Scheduling preventive appointments can vary widely from practice to practice and from hygienist to hygienist in the same practice, again driven by the hygienist's beliefs.

## VALUES

Happiness, love, commitment, determination, success, freedom, and security are examples of values. They guide your every decision. When you know what is important to you, making a decision is easy. Values such as honesty, integrity, wanting to contribute to society, and

knowing right from wrong come, in large part, from the people you were most closely associated with while you were growing up. Any time you have difficulty making an important decision, you can be sure that it is because you are unclear about your values. It is essential to be clear about what is most important in your life, both personal and professional, and to decide to live by those values, no matter what happens.

## REFERENCES

References accumulate from life experiences, both good and bad. These in large part will determine your future behavior when faced with similar situations or circumstances. Take, for example, a dentist performing an endodontic procedure or an extraction that does not have a successful outcome. The dentist's confidence level with these procedures will be greatly impaired, which may result in him or her referring future similar cases to a specialist. The opposite is also true—when procedures go well, confidence levels increase and the likelihood of future good results also increases greatly. The solution is to get better training and develop a new set of references that, in turn, will build confidence.

The way you use your references will determine how you feel, because whether an experience is perceived as good or bad is based on what you are comparing it to.

This is highly significant when attempting eight- or 10-unit anterior cases; training and practice create the references that give you confidence and skill. Obviously, pursuing Accreditation, during which you have the opportunity for skilled mentor-

ing, would be the ultimate skill and confidence builder.

## RULES

Rules affect day-to-day behavior. When you become upset, it is because something, or someone, has broken one or more of your "rules" (by saying or doing things that in your opinion are wrong, incorrect, or inappropriate). The more rules you have for other people, the more you will live your life in a state of upset. Think about the last time you were upset with someone: Were you really upset with them, or were you upset because they violated one of your rules? The challenge is that others do not know your rules and even if they do, they may not care.

It is very helpful to have rules for yourself—for your own behavior, health, and security. You will know when you break your own rules because you will feel guilty. You also have rules for your team, and you should identify what these are. Decide which you want to keep and eliminate those that do not make sense or serve you. Communicate the ones you want to keep with your team and make them "must" rules. Teams always perform better when they know the rules. The side benefit is that you will be upset much less frequently.

## EXAMPLES IN DENTISTRY

To further expand the impact of beliefs, values, references, and rules that affect your practice and the quality of your life, I will address some examples of these in dentistry. Picking examples that are controversial or interesting can help you determine how you feel and think about the issue.

Insurance—the very word can generate a torrent of negative emotions in many practitioners. Yet to others, insurance, which might comprise 60 percent or more of practice income, is regarded as an opportunity. Do your beliefs, values, references, or rules dictate your relationship with insurance?

Other examples include opposing attitudes such as the following:

- “Employees are out to take advantage of me every opportunity they have.” Or, “Employees want to contribute to the best of their abilities.”
- “Doctors who ‘cut’ on virgin teeth are irresponsible.” Or, “To create a great smile, it often is necessary to prepare virgin teeth.”
- “I only diagnose to the limits of my ability to do the work.” Or, “I diagnose the optimum treatment and find someone qualified to meet that need.”
- “I don’t trust my staff and believe they will embezzle.” Or, “I put in place business systems to protect my team and minimize the opportunity for theft.”
- “I believe the best practices are those that focus on advanced esthetics.” Or, “I offer full-service treatment, including advanced esthetics, to my patients.”
- “I am working hard because I want to retire early.” Or, “I am working

*for the joy of what I do and intend to have a full career and stop when I am no longer able to contribute.”*

- “I crave the acknowledgement of my peers to feel successful.” Or, “I feel good about the opportunity to help others. That is what makes me feel fulfilled.”
- “I have my degree and no longer have to take continuing education courses.” Or, “I owe it to my patients and my profession to invest my resources in training and technology to be the best I can be.”
- “Amalgams have been around for 100 years and I see nothing wrong with doing them when I need to, and certainly see no need to replace them.” Or, “I believe my patients want white teeth and I will certainly share with them the new materials and techniques available to give them beautiful white teeth.”
- “Why do bad things always happen to me?” Or, “Everything happens for a reason.”

#### SUMMARY

It is necessary and very appropriate to examine your beliefs and ask yourself questions that either reinforce or cast doubts on them. Either way, be sure that your beliefs are ones you have chosen, and that they serve you.

Examine your values—are they giving you a fulfilling life, or are

you grappling with guilt? Make a conscious choice as to who you want to be.

References can either enforce or eat away your self-esteem. If you have had bad experiences regarding what you are capable of, then work to achieve better experiences.

The challenge in terms of rules is to remember that the more rules you have for others, the more upsets you are going to have. When you have rules within your practice, make sure your team knows what they are—the quality of your life will improve proportionally.

What really matters is whether your beliefs empower or diminish you. Begin today to develop the habit of focusing on the consequences of all your beliefs. Are they strengthening your foundation by moving you to action in the direction you desire, or are they holding you back?

Beliefs are a tremendous source of power. You can choose what to believe about yourself, and these beliefs will determine the actions you take. A key component to creating long-term change is a shift in beliefs. Beliefs determine whether we operate out of abundance or scarcity. Choose beliefs that support you and give you hope and energy. *Ad*



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