

Uniting Our Community

Following is the text of Dr. Finney's incoming president's speech to the 2003 House of Delegates, given Nov. 9.

Today, I applaud you, the delegates and trustees of the California Dental Association. I applaud you for making a significant change in the leadership of this association.

Never before has a woman held the office of president of CDA. Never before has a dental hygienist been president of CDA. I have not been a component president, a delegate or a trustee. I did not come into this office by the traditional route.

I represent not only a change in leadership but also a change in the pathway to leadership in our organization. The trail has been blazed for any of you or any member of CDA with the desire and commitment, to serve as a leader in CDA – leadership is not an exclusive club.

You had the courage to make a change. Change requires courage because change involves risk. But, if you don't risk anything, you risk even more.

Change is what our association must do to stay current, to lead the way for our profession and those we serve. As we pass the baton from leader to leader, we often do so without a lot of thought. We simply do what has been done. We model those before us just as we have modeled our parents and teachers.

We turned out all right didn't we? CDA is functioning all right isn't it? Dr. Bowen White in his book titled, *Why Normal Isn't Healthy* suggests that while "all right may be normal, it is not the same as healthy."

How do we move from normal to healthy? With advances in technology constantly modifying our environment, immi-

gration continuously altering our demographics and elections transforming the political atmosphere, how do we assure that our association will continue to be relevant to our members in the face of such significant change?

Most importantly, by "Uniting our Community." (slide) This is the theme or the focus that I have chosen for the next year. Our community, the dental community, is increasingly diverse. Yet we are more similar than we are different.

If we unite our concerns and our resources, I believe that CDA can become the pre-eminent dental community in the world. We can go from *Good to Great* as Jim Collins writes in his book with the same title.

We already have some of the attributes of a great company. The first, according to Collins, is what he calls Level Five Leadership. Surprisingly, leaders of the top companies are not high-profile celebrities but unassuming individuals with a strong sense of professionalism. That is the type of leader we have in our executive director, Peter DuBois.

One of the most rewarding roles I have had with CDA was to participate on the committee to select a new executive director last year. The committee members, Dr. Dennis Kalebjian who served as chair and Drs. Marv Scott, Steve Chan, Gerry Gelfand, Brian Scott, Dave Gaynor and I were well aware of the magnitude of our task.

We knew that we didn't need to find an executive director for CDA; we needed to find the right executive director for CDA. We agreed at the outset that we would settle for nothing less even if that meant not selecting someone at that time. We were indeed fortunate to secure the right person



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and that decision is confirmed everyday.

Peter DuBois has been demonstrating another characteristic of companies that have gone from good to great. That is by first determining who and then what. Jim Collin's research showed that great companies first got the right people in right seats on the bus and then determined where to drive it. Great vision without great people is irrelevant.

When Peter joined CDA last March, he recognized that we had great people already on board at CDA even though some of them may not have been in the right seats. One of the great people Peter brought on board is our very capable CFO, Mark Soeth.

Another quality that great companies exhibit is identifying not what they are good at but what they can be the best at, and just as important, what they cannot be the best at. It requires discipline to stop doing things but a "stop doing" list is just as important as a "to do" list.

This House is considering resolutions to discontinue the Direct Reimbursement Committee and the Communications Committee. Next year you will consider additional proposals for governance changes. Remember, "normal isn't healthy."

United, we can identify not only where change needs to take place, but implement it and embrace it. While we may change our goals and objectives, our culture and structure, we must preserve our core values and our mission. They represent our common bond.

The stakeholders in our community are numerous. We have dentists, dental specialists, dental educators, allied dental health personnel, gender-based associations, generational groups, multicultural societies and different practice modalities.

We have recently made significant strides in connecting these groups. Let me identify some of the ways we have already begun to unite our community.

Starting in our own CDA family, during the past year we formed a task force to study our subsidiary companies and determine if there was an alternative structure that would enhance the efforts of TDIC and 1201. The recommendation of the Task Force: unite the companies.

In August, for the first time ever, at our invitation, Russ Webb and I met with the president and president-elect

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of the California Dental Hygienists' Association at CDA. We discussed how we could enhance communication between our associations and collaborate our efforts for endeavors such as the California First Five Initiative.

In 2000 we formed the Inter-organizational Affairs Committee, recently renamed the Dental Forum. It consists of representatives of the Arab American Dental Society, the Armenian Dental Society, the Association of Filipino Dentists, the Association of Black Women Dentists, the California Association of American-Vietnamese Dentists, the Chinese-American Dental Society, the Coalition of Foreign Dental Graduates of California, the Hispanic Dental Association, the Indian Dental Society, the Iranian Dental Association

of California, the Korean Dental Association, the Latin American Dental Association, the Lebanese American Dental Association, the National Dental Association, the American Association of Women Dentists and more.

The Dental Forum has been meeting three times a year. It is an enthusiastic group and continues to attract new members.

In an effort to connect with dental education, the executive committee meets biannually with the deans of the five California dental schools. Together, we are currently working on licensure reform and reducing student debt. We are considering a proposal by Dr. Slavkin, dean of the USC School of Dentistry, to form a California alliance for oral health research.

Now let me tell you about what we have planned to advance our efforts to unite our community.

In past years, we have started the year off with an executive committee retreat to plan for the coming year. In January 2004, the executive committee will meet with CDA senior staff to identify our strategic objectives for the next two years. Consequently, the plan will already be set for 2005 when we enter into the budgeting process.

The executive committee retreat has been renamed the "CDA Family Retreat" as representatives from TDIC, 1201 and the CDA Foundation will join us. We want to share our goals with the rest of the family and identify ways we can work together and support each other in the execution of our strategic plan.

In February, we will hold the annual leadership conference titled "Limitless Leadership: The Strength of the Dental Community" for interested CDA members and especially for those in component leadership positions.

In April, at the Anaheim Sessions meeting, we will try something new: A general session for all attendees, a tribute to the dental team. Erin Gruwell will be speaking about how she united

a classroom of teenagers with no hope for their future into a group of published authors.

Their journey and their book *The Freedom Writers Diary* is the basis for a motion picture that will be released next summer. Please join us in Anaheim, if for no other reason to hear this incredible story of how lives can be transformed.

In addition, we are planning a pre-session day for oral cancer screenings. We will work together with allied dental health personnel, dental students and dental educators to screen and educate for oral cancer.

At the Fall Sessions in San Francisco, we are planning a pre-session event called "Uniting our Community: A Celebration of the Dental Profession." We will have a keynote speaker from the Multicultural Healthcare Group and will include tracks for classes related to gender, generational, cultural and practice diversity as well as leadership.

We need to pay attention to diversity, but we must focus on how we are all alike and what we have in common. That is what brings us together.

United, we have greater resources, greater influence and perhaps most importantly, greater vision. Vision is our future and our vision is gleamed by environmental scanning.

We do this through staff and leadership who constantly explore the horizon to identify trends and their possible implications to our profession. With the technology available today, the resources are limitless. We look to other associations, network with other leaders, read publications on management and leadership.

Through environmental scanning, we know that we are on the threshold of a crisis in dental education due to escalating costs and lack of faculty. We also know that we have opportunities to provide assistance such as the national endowment for dental educa-

tion. Dr. Dugoni has been advocating for the endowment for years and now is spearheading that effort.

We know that our licensure process has serious problems, which must be addressed. We know that there are alternative licensure models being utilized such as the PGY-1 in New York state that grants a dental license to those completing a post-graduate residency.

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We know that we have a healthcare crisis, especially in California where 6 million children have no dental insurance. We know that the recent cuts to the adult Denti-Cal program have exacerbated the problem.

We know that there are programs all over our state like the Su Salud Clinic in Stockton, La Clinica in Oakland and many others, that are making a difference. We know that together we can make a greater difference.

Environmental scanning tells us that we must streamline our governance to be the most effective we can be. We must create opportunities for our younger members. We must engage the Gen-Xers who are skeptical and value freedom as well as the millennials who are realistic and value meaning.

We know that what they value least in organized dentistry is structure, yet they want to be included.

We must be proficient at environmental scanning to stay current and relevant. Environmental scanning helps us identify our challenges so we can strategize for success. It helps us create the future while managing the present.

Our members often tend to focus on the present. They are concerned about how CDA is advocating for them on legislative and regulatory issues. They look to CDA as an informational resource.

Advocacy and information are two of the services an association should provide according to Dr. Jim Bramson, the executive director of the ADA. The third thing associations should provide, he says, is community. There is that word again, "community."

Why do we need community? In the book *"The Community of the Future,"* a collection of authors has written about the value of community.

Communities often form around standards and traditions and require conformity. But many of the authors agree that the thriving community of the future must value both freedom and connectedness and not fixate on form and structure.

We can accomplish this by focusing on the heart of the community - what matters, what brings us together and what we can do together. Shared vision is the single most important factor in building bridges to the future. When we have clarity of purpose boundaries disappear and diversity flourishes. Together we can reach new levels of possibility.

Each of you is a volunteer in this organization and every one of you has some stewardship or personal responsibility to improve our community.

I encourage each of you to be a spokesperson for CDA. Each of you needs to participate in environmental scanning by scanning your horizon and bringing the information back to this

meeting. We need to create the opportunity for you to do that – and we will.

If each of us, each delegate, each trustee and each officer called just one member a week over the next year we could connect with over 13,000 of our

members. Think of the impact it would have and the sense of community we could create.

I intend to make those calls and I ask each of you to do the same. Let's find out what is important to our members, what they think CDA does and

doesn't do for them. Let's ask them what we can do better.

Communities of the future will have intense competition for members and face greater challenges in retaining members. They will be communities of choice. Let's help our members continue to choose CDA. We need community as we move toward the future, into the unknown

However we operate and however we're structured, we must always maintain relevance to our members. We will have to be flexible and responsive to our members' needs.

The traditional standards of leadership that may have been acceptable in the past will not lead to success in the future. So let's stop perfecting the past and start preparing for the future. You are the leaders of the future.

The journey begins just beyond where we can see and is limited only by our imagination. The gap between what can be imagined and what can be accomplished has never been smaller.

As Mahatma Gandhi said, "The difference between what we are doing and what we're capable of doing would solve most of the world's problems. Let us become the change we seek in the world."

Is change necessary? Without a doubt. Is it risky? Absolutely. It requires courage (slide) but "courage is the most important of all virtues. Because if you haven't courage, you may not have an opportunity to use any of the others."

Leaders challenge the process. I am ready for the challenge and I hope you will join with me.

I am here to serve you this year and I thank you for this opportunity and the gift you have given me. You have given me the gift of your confidence. You have placed your trust in my ability to lead our association for the next year.

I treasure this gift and pledge to work with you to lead us not only forward but also upward. Together (slide) we can go from normal to healthy, from good to great. Together, we can improve oral health care. **CDA**