



The Three Ts of Giving

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ABSTRACT The profession of dentistry is recognized as one of the most trusted, honest, and ethical professions by many sources. But are we the most generous with the three Ts of philanthropic giving: time, talent, and treasure? We are fortunate to be able to do what we do and are rewarded accordingly. No matter what stage of dentistry our career is in, we should be able to give back to our profession, our communities, and society in one, if not all three, of the Ts of philanthropy.

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The year 2006 was a very good one for the dental profession. The Harris Poll listed dentists as the second “Most Trusted” profession among 11 occupations.¹ The Gallup Poll reported the dental profession in the top five of 23 professions as the “Most Honest and Ethical.”²

But are dentists the most generous?

The three Ts of giving – time, talent, and treasure refer to philanthropy. The Greek origin of philanthropy loosely translates to “love of mankind,” one of the foundations of caring for our patients. The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines philanthropy as “goodwill to fellowmen, especially: active effort to promote human welfare.” When most of us think of philanthropy, our checkbook and our favorite charity comes to mind.

As a member of stage 1 in your dental career there is probably nothing left over at the end of the month for philanthropy.

Or is there? You have a job, but not necessarily permanent as an associate. You’re paying off an average dental school debt load of \$173,000.³ You bought a starter home for \$310,000, and are looking at purchasing Dr. Jones’ practice for nearly \$400,000.^{4,5} You want to give back to your community, school, profession, but have more time than money. Bingo!

There are many opportunities for philanthropy out there looking for your time. You have probably come across a couple of colleagues who have talked about the Rotary and the Lion’s Club. Go online to learn more about these community service organizations. You will find that Rotary International is the world’s first service club organization, committed to “Service Above Self.”

They provide humanitarian service, encourage high ethical standards in all vocations, and help build good will and peace in the world. Across town, the Lion’s

Club, “Serve their communities, meet humanitarian needs, encourage peace and promote international understanding.” You feel working with kids would be more rewarding? Try Kiwanis, a global organization of volunteers dedicated to changing the world one child and one community at a time. The author could list Civitan and 100 others, but you get the picture.

You also noticed your colleagues always seem to have enough patients. Could their involvement with service clubs be a synergistic relationship, providing a network of contacts resulting in increased patient flow?

But you have evenings and weekends available, not lunch. And you grew up with softball, baseball, soccer, etc. Call your local recreations departments and volunteer to coach. At the novice levels, more enthusiasm is needed than experience, so don't let ability hold you back. Plus, most communities provide coaching seminars to support you. There too is an additional pool of potential patients.

Another worthy outlet for your time is your church, mosque, synagogue, temple, or other place of worship. This option may be a better fit to involve the entire family. If you want to separate church and state, political advocacy may appeal to you. When it comes to giving of the first T, time, the list is endless.

As you move to stage 2 in the profession, your dental skills go from competent to proficient. Perhaps giving of the second T, talent, would be more satisfying. As an educator, this author will be selfish with his No. 1 recommendation: teaching.

Today, the best guess is there are more than 300 full-time positions open at dental schools across the country, an average of nearly six faculty members per school. If you don't think you know enough to teach, remember Karl Menninger's words, “What the teacher is, is more important

than what he/she teaches.” Or perhaps James Howell's comments, “We learn by teaching” will prompt one to join a faculty to enhance one's own dental skills.

Live too far away from one of the soon-to-be six dental schools in California? Faculty commute 2 ½ hours each way? Gas too costly to commute that far? Ask two to three other colleagues to teach and share the traveling costs with you.

If you must stay closer to home, how about being a part of an effort like Su Salud

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or Mission of Mercy? CDA member Dr. Guillermo Vicuna of Stockton, Calif., started Su Salud (Spanish for “Your Health”) in the 1980s for those less fortunate in the San Joaquin Valley. Vicuna banded together dentists, physicians, their staffs, as well as additional volunteers and the health care industry to provide a day of health screenings and prevention presentations to as many as 20,000 thankful recipients. His motto, “To Prevent is to Cure” is a foundation for any health professional.

Clear across the country, executive director of the Virginia Dental Association Dr. Terry Dickinson and the association annually spend two days with hundreds of dental volunteers providing thousands of grateful underserved individuals hundreds of thousands of dollars of dental care. At both of these events, it is hard to say who benefits more. One thing is for

certain, whether one is a volunteer or a recipient of the second T, talent of philanthropy, one's life will be changed forever.

The third T, treasure, is available to all dentists from stages 1 through 4. Financial resources are actually the easiest to give because they take the least amount of today's most valuable commodity: time. There are plenty of opportunities for this T.

First off, charity starts at home, take care of your families. As income earners in the top 2 percent in the United States, we often are in a position to have enough to make a difference in others' lives beyond our family. I would not be doing my duty as a board member of the California Dental Association Foundation if I did not invite you to join me as a Friend of the Foundation.

The Foundation represents the dental profession and the members of the CDA. The Foundation is committed to “increasing access to care for vulnerable people” with a mission to improving the oral health of all Californians. For more information and the opportunity to become a “friend,” visit us online at www.cdafoundation.org or contact us at foundationinfo@cda.org.

There are many ways to give your financial resources but the philanthropic terms can be confusing. The three main gifts dentists encounter are unrestricted, restricted, and endowments. An unrestricted gift is given to a charity to be used at their discretion with no restrictions. Unrestricted gifts are typically favored by a charity since it allows them the freedom to fill the needs they perceive the most pressing. A restricted gift would include an area designated by the donor within which the charity would be required to use the gift.

For example, at a university, the donor may wish the gift to benefit scholarships for students, the faculty of the biology

department or for bricks and mortar: facilities and buildings. An endowment is typically a larger gift, \$25,000 and more, where the gift becomes similar to a savings account. Only the interest from the endowment gift is used annually while the corpus is kept in perpetuity by the charity. An endowment helps to solidify the future of any charity.

As a dental educator, I would again be remiss if I did not ask you to consider giving back to your dental schools that provided the foundation for your professional success. Say what you want about how they may have treated you in dental school, but you could not be where you are at without the education they provided. And, it is a new day. Just ask the best and the brightest who are graduating from your alma maters.

Stage 3 and 4 dentists may begin to engage in “planned giving” or “estate giving.” These are plans made to ensure a donor’s estate is settled in a way to provide for their families and favorite charities while taking advantage of tax benefits in doing so. One’s estate primarily goes to family, charities, and the IRS/Franchise Tax Board. Proper estate planning benefits the former two areas and can help minimize the third.

There are hundreds of other charities to support: your local dental society, the ADA Foundation, your place of worship, your undergraduate institutions, you name it. Don’t overthink this. Sit down and budget where you want to make a difference and, as Nike says, “Just Do It.”

I am often asked “Why should I give?” The easy answer is, it is the right thing to do. The more complex and demanding answer is we are dental professionals. We have a social contract with the public and our communities.⁶ Sociologist Talcott Parsons wrote in 1968, “The core criterion of a full-fledged profession is that it must have means of ensuring that its competencies

are put to socially responsible uses.”⁷

The Harris and Gallup polls confirm dentists are responsible to our patients. Additionally, Daniel Goleman, in his book *Social Intelligence*, challenges us to be “emotionally intelligent.”⁸ One component of emotional intelligence is empathy, the capacity to imagine oneself as the other, to project one’s self into another’s circumstances to sufficiently understand the other’s feelings.

As dentists, we have been blessed to be a part of one of the most trusted, honest, and ethical professions on earth. With it, we have enjoyed very gener-

ous remuneration for our services. It is time for dentistry to be considered “The Most Generous Profession.”

We would be hard pressed to justify not sharing our blessings within any areas of the 3 Ts of philanthropy if we are truly empathetic, emotionally intelligent, dental professionals.

Sir Winston Churchill said it best, “We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.” ■■■■

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