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Today Will Determine Tomorrow

Several years ago, at the request of the Strategic Planning Committee, and with the approval of the House of Delegates, the California Dental Association expanded its strategic plan to include the now "infamous" Goal 9. An overarching assessment of the structure of the organization with respect to governance and leadership as well as interrelationships between local components and the CDA in the provision of consistent, high-quality membership services to all was to be studied. The size of the state, number of components, varying membership of individual components, staffing patterns, geographical boundaries and budgets all needed to be evaluated to allow for consistent services throughout.

A large and diverse task force was developed and consultants were hired. Members, leaders, administrators, and other individuals were interviewed in an information-gathering mode to develop what could be construed to be a problem list for future action. This study, albeit a work in progress, was brought to the House of Delegates two years ago and a tremendous sense of unease was noted at many levels. Members and component staff expressed reservations about the intention of this study and had concern about the impact of any reorganization at the local level. The house put in place a second task force and additional information and analysis is underway. The work continues.

Goal 9 is not about eliminating components or staff positions. It is intended to provide a consistent level of quality services to each member regardless of the size, staffing pattern or location of the component, equality of benefits and a basic level of core services should be available to all members. This goal originated from the task force and was confirmed in the "Mind of the Dentist" survey.

Goal 9 is about change. Change frequently is an uncomfortable thing; but without change we would not have progress or growth. However, change just to do something differently does not make sense. But modification of structure or function to provide a better level of service to our members will benefit not only the organization as a whole, but also the membership as individuals.

Introspective analysis is always difficult and it is understandable that many of us do not want to alter our own our present situations. We do not want to leave our comfort zone, but we must strive continually to improve what we do and how we do it. That we "always do it that way" does not allow for creative thinking or advances.

In daily practice, we use technology and analytical skills to provide better, more efficient, and, hopefully, more cost-effective care to our patients. If change were reprehensible to all, our level of service to our patients would not be where it is today.

We need to be ever vigilant in developing means of improving the benefits to our members. Some services may best be delivered nationally by the American Dental Association, while others are bettered brokered by state associations in California and other states. All of us can agree there are significant functions that are delivered most efficaciously at the local level in the component.

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The cost to, and ability of, a local component to deliver necessary services to its members must be weighted carefully. Partnering of small components or sharing of services might be a more effective and efficient means of doing what our organization needs to do for our dentist members and their staffs.

Being comfortable wearing an old pair of shoes may well be a place we would like to be but we risk being out of style in the contemporary environment. We could let personal prejudice and agendas stop us from being responsive to our members needs. Growth that necessitates change in the structure and organization of dental societies and associations is imperative to keep up with the needs of our members. After all, that is why organized dentistry exists.

If tomorrow we function as we do today, then tomorrow will be today over and over again with no room for growth. If today we look toward a better tomorrow, then our ability to grow is unlimited. The adage states "if it ain't broke don't fix it," but how do we know that it ain't broke? Self-assessment is a valuable part of organizational maturity. Things may change, or not. But until we study where we are and consider future needs, we will not know. ■■■■