



## Self-Esteem Dentistry: A Formula for Success

<By **Dr. Larry Rosenthal**

*Dr. Larry Rosenthal, a 1972 graduate of NYUCD, has one of the busiest, most glamorous private practices in the world and teaches postgraduate courses on advanced esthetics at the NYU College of Dentistry. He is the principal benefactor of the Larry Rosenthal Institute for Esthetic Dentistry at NYU, and is widely recognized for his ability to market the benefits of esthetic dentistry to the public. Below, Dr. Rosenthal talks about the qualities that make a successful esthetic dentist.*

In the early 1980s, esthetic dentistry was still considered by some people to be "experimental." Today it is a highly respected practice modality embraced by both the profession and the public, and its influence is felt everywhere, from supermarkets and pharmacies to the latest reality-based television shows. Esthetic dentistry is here to stay; indeed, it is the future of dentistry. But what accounts for its tremendous, ever-increasing popularity?

The best answer is probably America's quest for a fountain of youth. People want to look better, to feel better, to BE better, and esthetic dentistry offers them the opportunity to fulfill these desires. A synonym for esthetic dentistry might be "self-esteem dentistry," and it rests on a new equation: Dentistry = Science + Beauty. Because of better methods of prevention and treatment, people today have less decay, less periodontal disease, less loss of teeth than ever before. Therefore, dental procedures have become more elective, and, if this trend continues, as it no doubt will, it is predictable that dentistry's primary goal in the future will be to enhance smiles.

What makes a successful esthetic dentist? As with any business or profession, success depends on commitment — a commitment to excellence, and to the acquisition of top-notch clinical, business, and leadership skills. Gaining knowledge and keeping current are vital to success, along with an ability to implement sound, proven business principles and to demonstrate strong leadership skills.

Within the field of esthetic dentistry, continuing education at the lecture, demonstration, and hands-on levels is easily accessible, both nationally and internationally. For example, the programs that I conduct at NYU, in Palm Beach, Indianapolis, and London, all provide high-quality, hands-on opportunities for dentists to gain the most up-to-date knowledge about treatment planning and diagnosis, with special emphasis on technical knowledge, preparation, smile design, and occlusal principles.

Sound business principles are also a key ingredient in success, although they are frequently overlooked. Many practices are conducted as if they were non-profit organizations, which they most certainly are not! Often dentists think that because they have a dental degree, they are immune from the need for business knowledge. Our profession is laden with practices debilitated by huge debt, overhead, and accounts receivable. Having or acquiring good business acumen is critical to success in general, and particularly for success in esthetic dentistry, because of the unique opportunities the field offers in terms of marketing, promotion, and internal systems structure.

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Should dentists expect automatically to know all there is to know? Absolutely not! But we should be willing to admit that there is more to learn than we already know and also be wise enough to invest in gaining knowledge from those who know more. As Disraeli said, "To be conscious that you are ignorant of the facts is a great step toward knowledge." We are privileged to have outstanding management leaders in our profession: Cathy Jameson, Bill Blatchford, and Bobbi Anthony are among the many who have helped hundreds of dental offices across the globe to become more successful.

The third ingredient for success is a determination to develop leadership skills. For some, leadership comes comfortably and naturally. For most, it is an acquired skill that takes time and commitment. Successful leaders are learners! Becoming a strong leader requires

patience! It is akin to investing in the stock market: If one hopes to make a fortune in a day, he or she is not likely to succeed. Continued, methodical, consistent investment in acquiring leadership skills will yield the knowledge needed for dentists to successfully navigate their practices through the changing tides of the health-care marketplace.

Our willingness to embrace this model or our reluctance to commit to it sends a clear signal of the depth of our motivation and the strength of our aspirations. Knowledge is freedom and does not come without a price; it costs time, energy, and money. Are you willing to pay?

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