



Road Signs on the Road of Life

Student Professionalism and Ethics Presentation,
University of the Pacific, Arthur A. Dugoni
School of Dentistry in San Francisco

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Editor's Note

Earlier this year I had the opportunity to attend a study club featuring Dean Emeritus Arthur A. Dugoni, DDS, MSD. His presentation that evening brought back memories from more than 34 years ago when, on my first day in dental school, I sat waiting for the "Welcome to UOP" address from the recently appointed dean, the very same Dr. Dugoni. My déjà vu was the message, which is based on the lecture he gives to first-year students at the Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry. While the words may have been different, the message was the same: professionalism, integrity, stewardship. This has guided my professional and volunteer career for more than 30 years.

Put yourself back at your first day of dental school, full of expectation mixed with apprehension. The following is an edited transcript of Dr. Dugoni's comments, which still resonate, maybe even louder, today.

Welcome doctors to a profession!

Please realize, however, your life will never be the same. You are committing yourself to service above self — and committing yourself to caring for others. Here, "we build people, and along the way

they become doctors." We strive to *build* people who have integrity; who have the commitment, character and dedication to the values that are essential as a doctor. As you go through dental school, one of these important building blocks is to develop a passion for *integrity*. Integrity is one of the greatest of virtues.

Well over 100 years ago, a few super professionals, with dreams, ambition, ideals and aspirations of making dentistry a noble and learned profession, organized and developed our ethical standards — our code of conduct — now our heritage — and molded a profession from a trade. You are aware of the ADA *Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct* and the Hippocratic Oath of Medicine and Dentistry. However, our forefathers recognized human frailty and morality. They would have agreed with Mahatma Gandhi on those things that will weaken or destroy us as individuals or as a profession:

"Politics without principles, wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, business without morality, science without humanity."

We in dentistry today inherit positions of respect, given to us by individuals who achieved that respect by

adhering to principles, by going the extra mile, by giving of their time, talent and treasury, to create a profession.

They looked upon their fellow dentists as colleagues and not competitors. They believed we were a profession, not a trade. They believed we were providers of service, not commodities. They believed we have a commitment to serve mankind. That is how we got where we are; but the challenge we face is to *keep us here*.

In the past, professional people were considered to be very special. Parents would say, with pride, "My son, the doctor," "my daughter, the lawyer," etc. Professions were referred to as "callings." These callings were the conscience of America, dedicated to noble things, moral things and helpful, idealistic and unselfish causes generated for the benefit of humanity. This commitment earned dentists and dentistry the stature of a learned profession (from a trade to a profession — it took us more than 50 years!).

We are called "doctor" and are filled with pride when we hear our names called as doctor, or when that patient says to us, "Thank you, doctor, thank you for stopping my pain," "thank you for my smile," etc. What does the calling to be a doctor imply?

In my mind, it implies fairness, integrity, honesty, service above self or self interest, respect for the human dignity of everyone, a passion for quality and a commitment to excellence.

Albert Einstein reminds us to "try not to become a success but rather to try to become a man of value."

Character comes from the Greek words "to mark or engrave." Are adults doing enough to engrave ethical values in young people? Do our leaders set the example? Our parents? A Harvard University study of confidence in leadership found that almost two-thirds of Americans think we are suffering from a leadership crisis.

The Harvard study's respondents showed little confidence in the honesty, integrity and ethics of leaders in sections ranging from business and religion to local, state and federal government.

In my view, one possible answer is that we are ignoring what really constitutes leadership. According to Michael Josephson of the Josephson Institute:

"We are focusing too much on issues of style and ignoring issues of true substance — character and values. I believe that a leader's character is central to the development of positive relationships with followers."

IT IS MY STRONG BELIEF
that leaders have the ability
and the opportunity to
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Transformational leaders act in ways that turn followers into leaders. By empowering their followers, they build excitement around an appealing vision that creates performance excellence in challenging times.

It is my strong belief that leaders have the ability and the opportunity to influence ethical behavior and, thus, can truly make a difference in the lives of others. A few such leaders include Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, Pat Tillman, Maya Angelou and John Wooden.

I believe leaders must grow people. As dean and as a professor, I took every opportunity to do that. I repeated often that our mission as educators

and teachers was to grow people and along the way, we made them doctors. If we *only* educated them as doctors, we failed. We needed to grow people, connected to what is right, to what is best for their profession, best for their patients, best for their community and best for their families.

These are difficult times for individuals to lead and demonstrate those qualities of ethical and professional leadership that are essential and important in order to influence change — difficult, but not impossible! I believe everyone, and especially all leaders, must be teachers, and whether you are a dentist, football coach, basketball coach, senator, parent or an educator — all of us must be teachers. Teachers affect all eternity, as those who are taught in turn teach others.

President Teddy Roosevelt told us, "To educate a person in the mind but not in morals is to educate a menace to society."

Michael Josephson of the Josephson Institute, gives us six pillars of character: trustworthiness, responsibility, fairness, respect, caring and citizenship. On these pillars rest these powerful statements that reflect *who* we are, *who* we have become or *who* we will be.

"Please realize someday, ready or not, your life will come to an end. There will be no more sunrises, no more minutes, or hours, or days, and all the things you collected whether treasured or forgotten, will pass on to someone else.

Your wealth, fame and temporal powers will shrivel to irrelevance, and it will not matter what you owned or what you were owed. Your grudges, resentments, frustrations and jealousies will finally disappear. So too, your hopes, ambitions, plans and your to-do lists will all expire. The wins and losses that once seemed so important will fade away.

It will not matter where you came from or what side of the tracks you lived on. It will not matter whether you were beautiful or brilliant. Even your gender and skin color will be irrelevant.

So what will matter? How will the value of your life be measured?

- *What will matter is not what you bought, but what you built, not what you got but what you gave.*

- *What will matter is not your success, but your significance.*

- *What will matter is not what you learned, but what you taught.*

- *What will matter is every act of integrity, compassion, courage or sacrifice that enriched, empowered or encouraged others to emulate your example.*

- *What will matter is not your competence (although it is important), but your character.*

- *What will matter is not how many people you knew, but how many will feel a lasting loss when you are gone.*

- *What will matter are not your memories, but the memories that live in those who loved you.*

- *What will matter is how long you will be remembered, by whom and for what.*

- *What will matter are the lives you touched along the way."*

Living a life that matters does not happen by chance. It is not a matter of circumstances but one of choice. As health care professionals, you have chosen to live a life that matters. And because you have, many individuals will have a better quality of life, go to bed without pain, have a beautiful smile, live longer, healthier lives, walk a little taller — and you will know in your heart that you have made a difference.

Congratulations for choosing to live a life that matters. ■■■■

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