

What's a Dentist to Do? Foolish Pride

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Pride. An emotion which refers to a sense of self respect, a refusal to be humiliated, a joy in one's accomplishments. We often use this word to describe our pleasure or satisfaction with something or someone: pride in the crown we just placed; pride in a son who just graduated from high school.

This type of pride — for instance, on a crown well done — propels us to do more of the same for our patients because it feels good. If such pride spurs us to finer dentistry for our patients, the opposite could also be true. When we look at an item of our work and realize it falls short, we feel remorse. Our innate pride will see to it that we do better next time. This is a good sort of pride. It uplifts us, and, most importantly, serves our patients.

Another type of pride is civic pride, that is, something of which a body of persons is proud. As such a body, the profession of dentistry has much to be proud. It has always been an advocate of the people. Years ago it fought for water fluoridation, eventually convincing the people of Brainerd. Though it took money out of dentists' pockets, we understood its benefits, in particular reducing caries by 70 percent without causing cancer.

Dentistry continues to do the right thing. We and the people in research and development are constantly producing better and more efficient materials and equipment to better serve our patients, and we do it with

a product that lasts. We stress and practice prevention to the immense benefit of our patients, saving them time and money.

Dentistry has always responded positively to its "issues du jour", so to speak. The requirements and regulations spinning off the AIDS/OSHA crisis years ago seemed enormous and unmanageable at the time, but are now woven into the fabric of our practices, and though time-consuming and maddening at times, have made dentistry for the most part a better place for our patients.

Confidentiality was another "hot button" issue. The MDA responded with its forums educating its dentists on HIPAA concepts and requirements.

Recordkeeping continues to be an issue, and we are responding by educating and re-educating our dentists as to the new protocols. Access to dental care, of course, has been, is, and will be a problem with which dentistry must cope. We will find the

right model or combination of models to get more people care with help from the Minnesota legislature.

Of course, dentistry should be most proud of its people — those dedicated to a profession they love, those who diligently serve, those who genuinely care.

Pride can also be defined as "the high or inordinate opinion of one's own dignity, importance, merit, or superiority, whether as cherished in

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Please e-mail us at jackchurchill@msn.com or fax us at (612) 339-3618. We look forward to hearing from you not only regarding this article, but also if you have any ethical dilemmas you would like to present to the membership. Perhaps we can help you decide what to do.

the mind or as displayed in bearing, conduct, etc." This pride is a word centered upon the letter "I" — as in me, myself, and I. "This type of pride, or vanity, is the competitive and excessive belief in one's own abilities."** As such, it is considered not only as one of the Seven Deadly Sins, but as the original and most serious of them. It is the source from which the other six arise. This type of sinister pride is the desire to be better than others, failing to give compliments to those around you, and excessively loving yourself.

Dante defined pride as "a love of self perverted to hatred and contempt of one's neighbors."*** In the story of Lucifer, it was pride that caused his fall from Heaven and his transformation into Satan.

In Proverbs 11:2, the Bible says of pride, "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom." In Proverbs 13:10: "Pride only breeds quarrels..."

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<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pride> * http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_Deadly_Sins

Ethics Committee

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Proverbs 29:23: "A man's pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honor," and finally, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

This last type of pride is very destructive. A prideful (full of pride) person is highly competitive, seeking to elevate him or herself above others.

C.S. Lewis states, "Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man... It is the comparison that makes you proud; the pleasure of being above the rest."

A prideful person is not concerned with

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what he or she achieves but only that he or she achieves more than the next guy.

It's an emotional parasite. There is no joy or peace in it because there is always someone who has more than you do. C.S.

Lewis also observed, "Pride is a spiritual cancer. It eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or common sense" leading to hate, envy, and conflict.

Prideful people are only secure when they see

themselves far up the ladder compared with others. They may not care if it's leaned up against the correct wall.

This dark side of pride can skew one's perception of reality. It often obscures the truth because the truth

is often humbling. Pride blinds us to reality.

As a dentist, are you at peace with your work? If not, the reason may be this. Pride is a type of scarcity mentality. It creates a sense of integrity based on how you stack up in relation to others. Do not allow this to happen. Do not allow the cry of competition to be louder than the whisper of conscience.

The antidote for the poison of pride is humility, the idea that true meaning does not come from consuming and competing but from contributing.

Don't live your life out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility, consider others better than yourself. Remember, our skills and abilities are not our own but a gift from our Creator given to us freely so we may serve others. Let this give you peace in your work. ■

Italicized print quoted from *First Things First* by Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill and Rebecca R. Merrill, 1994, Simon & Schuster, New York.