

## What's a Dentist to Do? The Hand in the Cookie Jar

**Jack L. Churchill, D.D.S.\***

Lists are part of our lives – lists of things to get accomplished for the weekend, grocery lists, gift lists, Honey-do lists, etc.

I want to bring to your attention another list, one we all need to read and heed. I am referring to the American Dental Association's new Member Conduct Policy. It was recently referred to the Council on Ethics, Bylaws, and Judicial Affairs (CEBJA) by the ADA's House of Delegates. The Council is the ADA's agency dedicated to enhancing the ethical conscience of dentists by promoting the highest moral, ethical, and professional standards in the provision of dental care to the public. Ethical cases brought to our state's Constitution, Bylaws, and Ethics committee, if unresolved, are appealed to CEBJA.

Our own Dr. Patrick Foy served on the subcommittee of CEBJA that was instrumental in the wordsmithing, editing, and production of the final draft of this document. The full Council approved the Code, which was then adopted by the 2010 ADA House of Delegates. It reads as such to become effective at the close of the 2011 House of Delegates:

1. Members should communicate respectfully in all interactions with other dentists, dentist members, Association officers, trustees, and staff.
2. Members should respect the decisions and policies of the Association and must not engage in disruptive behavior in interactions with other members, Association officers, trustees, or staff.
3. Members have an obligation to be informed about and use Association

policies for communication and dispute resolution.

4. Members must comply with all applicable laws and regulations, including but not limited to anti-trust laws and regulations.
5. Members must respect and protect the intellectual property rights of the Association, including any trademarks, logos, and copyrights.
6. Members must not use Association membership directories, on-line member listings, or attendee records from Association-sponsored conferences or CE courses for personal or commercial gain, such as selling products or services, prospecting, or creating directories or databases for these purposes.
7. Members must treat all confidential information furnished by the Association as such and must not reproduce materials without the Association's written approval.
8. Members must not violate the confidentiality of attorney-client and executive sessions conducted at any level within the Association.
9. Members must fully disclose conflicts or potential conflicts of interest and make every effort to avoid the appearance of conflicts of interest.

Another subcommittee of CEBJA is presently working on enforcement procedures for this policy which will be presented for consideration to the 2011 House of Delegates. Sadly, this policy has been developed because of an ever-increasing trend in our American culture of professionals acting improperly within their organizations. The American Medical Association has a similar policy.

But why do we need such a policy?

Please e-mail us at [jackchurchill@msn.com](mailto: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.

There are many important issues in our profession that need to be dealt with, of course, but it may be that some of us are guilty of over-focusing on a particular problem and not seeing it within a larger framework. Granted, some of our problems are larger framework problems, but most of us today are somewhat myopic. We get caught up in the cogs of our lives, only seeing as far as the next barrier, the next problem, and we want solutions now.

Those who "test unprofessional waters" when negotiating an issue with other dentists or the Association may become so consumed by their perspective that that is all they see. Dentistry becomes that issue. We often need to step back for a bigger, broader view. This new policy possibly exists to protect the Association and others from those who cannot step back.

My mother was an amazing baker. My favorite was her chocolate chip cookies. What made them especially special was that Mom added walnuts.

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We had two huge black walnut trees on the farm, and farmers use what the good earth gives them. When I was little and Mom had just baked a batch of piping hot walnut chocolate chip cookies, my happiness depended upon those cookies. I had to have them. If I didn't, it would be a very bad day, and if I did, of course, they'd be gone that day.

Today, what is your "cookie"? What is important in your life and creates happiness for you? Money? A job well done? Prestige? Family? Power? Influence? Is it winning a skirmish within our profession or, on a larger battlefield, improving our profession? Yes, I know what you're thinking – "If we don't win the skirmishes, we don't win the war." I understand. Many of our skirmishes are important, but it's only the way they are posted and subsequently

engaged sometimes that diminishes their goal.

Try to examine and appreciate the larger landscape. Look beyond the immediate horizon in a way that is not only helpful, but creative and visionary.

When you hold your cell phone next time with all its many apps, high speed internet and high tech features, look at the hand that holds it, with its intricate muscles, ligaments, and joints that work together directed by an amazing computer – your brain. That cell phone changes and becomes obsolete in months. Your hand has not changed in thousands of years and is never outdated. It feels heat, cold, or a gentle touch. It can perform intricate surgery yet do the most indelicate of chores.

Look at the crowns you place. Crown technology changes regularly.

Gold, PFM, LAVA, Captek, Emax, CAD/CAM; remember Renaissance? You know what hasn't changed? The smile on your patient's face when you place one of those crowns.

When you're facing the situation of redoing something you had just done for a patient, sure, the "no charge" may hurt your bottom line that month, but on a grander scale, fulfilling the promises of your mission to serve is a forever.

We should make choices for the long-term when faced with immediate satisfaction. And time-wise, things can't always happen according to our schedules. I know it's difficult in today's lightning-fast world, but we must be patient.

And what about the walnut chocolate chip cookies? Be thankful for the walnut tree. ■

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