

Mirror, mirror on the wall...

Ways you can change your professional image this fall. by Colleen Rutledge, RDH

Let's face it—dental hygienists are sometimes labeled as non-team players that scrape teeth all day and leave the dirty instruments in the sink. This stereotype is demeaning and it diminishes the credibility of the entire dental hygiene profession. But in order to change that perception of dental hygienists, we must start by changing ourselves.

Assessment

Grab a pen and check where your perceptions are in regard to your role in the dental hygiene profession.

- Job—or—
- Career
- Employee—or—
- Colleague
- Unionized mentality—or—
- Ownership mentality

WHO AM I?

A healthy self-image is the first step toward perfecting your professional image. A person with a healthy self-image radiates confidence and others take notice. Take a moment to see how you rank on the self-perceptions scale.

WHAT DO I DO?

Do you view dental hygiene as just a job you do perform, or do you see yourself as building a career? If you think, "Of course I have a job, I work for someone else," then let me offer a new outlook: Even while in the employment of someone else, you can still work for yourself and adopt an "ownership mentality."

Ownership is the fact or condition of being an owner of something. Think of care as your business and the treatment room as your office. It is a unique world that patients enter, receiving care that is unique to your experience and critical thinking skills. Viewing yourself as a colleague of your dentist instead of his or her employee, is a great way to start this transformation.

WHAT DO I SAY?

Words and actions leave an indelible mark on our thought patterns as well as influence the way others perceive us. Little changes in words and mannerisms can make a huge difference. Look at the patient greetings below and decide which one best conveys professionalism:



Before



After

Before: MH contributing editors Anastasia Turchetta and Colleen Rutledge pictured pre-makeover with image consultant Janice Hurley (center). **After:** A little glam goes a long way in boosting their confidence.

Patient Greeting 1. You are standing in the threshold of the treatment area. You look at your next patient and you pleasantly say, "Hi, Mr. Jones, how are you? Come on back, I'm ready to clean your teeth."

Patient Greeting 2. You walk directly over to the patient and firmly shake their hand. With a big, broad, confident smile, you say, "Welcome, Mr. Jones. I'm Colleen, your dental hygienist. I have reviewed your chart and I am ready to see you."

When using the first greeting, a message of friendliness is conveyed. In the second greeting, friendliness also is conveyed, but it is now coupled with confidence and professionalism. Try it the next time you are greeting a patient.

WHO DO I KNOW?

One way to build a better understanding of the role you play in your profession is to associate with other people in your position. Joining your professional organization, the American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA), is a great place to start. Providing opportunities for both networking and continuing education, the local, state, and national components of the

career | PERCEPTIONS

organization can be an invaluable tool in building your professional self-esteem.

The annual session for the American Dental Hygienists' Association ADHA is a nationally recognized conference where dental hygienists can expand their knowledge and skills while meeting and connecting with other hygienists. Go to www.adha.org for details of future meetings, as well as the Center for Lifelong Learning. And if you don't want to travel far, contact your state association for information on their annual session, or at least attend a look into local meetings in your vicinity.

Attending national annual conventions designed for the broader dental community is another avenue to expand your horizons and perfect your professional image. The Chicago Mid-Winter meeting, or the American Dental Association (ADA) or American Academy of Periodontology (AAP) annual sessions would be great to attend solo or with your dental team.

HOW DO I LOOK?

Despite our bristling at the idea of it, appearances can make a difference, especially in the business world. Have you ever wondered what hairstyle or clothing would best promote a pro-

fessional image for you? If so, you might benefit from the talents of an image consultant. For example, Janice Hurley and Associates (www.janicehurley.com), is a unique consulting firm that, in addition to their practice management advice, specializes in professional image makeovers for individuals as well as entire dental teams.

If you think a makeover may be in order, remember that professional attire, proper grooming and a confident smile are always in fashion. [ml](#)

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