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THE EDITOR'S CORNER

The Habitual Vision of Greatness

One of my friends had the good fortune of studying with Alfred North Whitehead after the great philosopher and mathematician came from England to Harvard for a short period. One of the most enduring lessons my friend learned was, "Moral education is impossible apart from the habitual vision of greatness."

I don't think it would be taking too much liberty if I paraphrased that profound statement to say that education in general is impossible apart from the habitual vision of greatness. Behavioral psychologists have told us for some time that most of what people know comes from imitating role models. My friend said he often thought of Whitehead's remark in recalling his own educational experience in a one-room rural schoolhouse, where a single teacher taught all of the grades. He told me how seeing the older children perform their mysterious and arcane tasks at the blackboard stimulated his own learning. Those more experienced students were a constant inspiration for my friend, and he was always grateful for that early educational adventure, which provoked a curiosity he never lost.

Only occasionally do truly great people appear. Holy Writ calls them "five-talented"; today we might call them "supertalented". In any particular field, however, a Socrates, a da Vinci, a Newton, a Mozart, an Einstein comes on the scene only once every three or four hundred years. Even the natural pairing of great ability and opportunity, like that of Charles Lindbergh and aviation, is a rarity.

While I and most other orthodontists may humbly acknowledge our own lack of greatness, this does not prevent us from intellectually walking with the great. I am not, and very few others are, an Einstein of orthodontics, but by reading first-rate articles, I have had a chance to consult some of the supertalented people in our profession. Many of my most valuable lessons began with reading an article that showed me a new dimension and encouraged me to learn more. I will always be grateful for friends like Charlie Burstone, Reed Holdaway, Tom

Mulligan, and Fred Schudy, among others, who responded to my professional ignorance and graciously took the time to explain their exciting discoveries in detail.

We are fortunate to be part of a field that is generous and open about sharing its collective wisdom. Not all professions are so charitable in the nurturing of younger colleagues. My son is an attorney, and if you think those folks are adversarial to physicians and dentists, you ought to witness how they treat one another. I distinctly recall my son approaching a well-known litigator to inquire about a case. The older and more experienced lawyer not only refused to share information, but suggested that my son refer the client to him. Thankfully, that kind of crass, presumptuous behavior is almost totally absent in orthodontics, and all of us—and our patients—are better for it.

One of the primary purposes of the *Journal of Clinical Orthodontics* is to allow you the opportunity to associate with some of the greatest minds in orthodontics from around the world. In the last couple of issues, for instance, we have

given you a heads-up about where technology may be taking the profession in the near future. Both the Invisalign System shown by Dr. Boyd and colleagues and the new three-dimensional intraoral scanner described by Dr. Sachdeva last month may permanently alter the way we work. In the current issue, Dr. Burstone offers us another tantalizing therapeutic possibility with his use of fiber-reinforced composites to improve anchorage, esthetics, and efficiency while avoiding some of the disadvantages of individual brackets.

I couldn't have imagined any of these ideas even five years ago. It may take a few more years to find out whether any or all of them will change our professional paradigms. But regardless of the outcome, I—and, I trust, our readers—become excited and energized by this habitual vision of our most talented people, and by seeing them challenge some of the arbitrary boundaries we have previously accepted. My professional life has been enhanced by walking with the greats whose articles often grace these pages, and I hope you feel the same way. LWW

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