

**"Will You Make a Difference?"**  
**International College of Dentists / American College of Dentists**  
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**Arthur A. Dugoni, D.D.S., M.S.D.**  
**Dean Emeritus and Professor of Orthodontics**  
**Senior Executive for Development**

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to be here and share some thoughts with you regarding dental education, its future, and our profession.

John Chandler, your president, and Moody Alexander, a longtime friend and professor at Baylor College of Dentistry, have challenged me to present to you the University of the Pacific, Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry's model of humanism.

I am a strong believer that leaders should grow people. At Pacific, as dean and professor, I took every opportunity to do that. I repeated often that our mission very simply was to "grow people and along the way make them doctors." If we only made them doctors, we failed.

We need to grow people, connected to what is right, what is best for the profession – best for their patients, best for their community, and best for their families. Nicklaus Morton, the Dugoni School student body president, recently wrote an article, which was published in the January 2008 issue of the Journal of Dental Education:

*"For far too many dentists and dental students, the three or four years of dental school are filled with negativity, unhappiness, and condescending attitudes from faculty and staff. Students often feel that their opinions do not matter and go unnoticed. It is nonsensical to believe that a student who is mistreated throughout dental school will suddenly have positive feelings toward the profession on graduation day.*

*I recently attended the American Student Dental Association Annual Session in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Students from all fifty-six U.S. dental schools were in attendance. The keynote speaker asked all those students who were "mad and upset" with their dental school to raise their hands. I was amazed to see that over 50 percent of the students raised their hands! For students to show displeasure in such a public way made it clear that there is still a very clear disconnect among students, faculty, and administration at dental schools.*

*How can we expect students to become humanitarians in the community, active members in organized dentistry, ethical providers of health care, and leaders in our profession if their first three or four years are filled with anger at the very*

*institution that should be instilling these qualities? The future of our profession is at stake.*

*There is another way. Instead, imagine entering a dental school where you are called "doctor" from the very first day. While it is recognized by all that you are a novice, it is equally understood that you will soon be a professional colleague, so you are treated as one right away. With this understanding comes responsibility for both parties. You are expected to dress in professional attire because you understand that you are not going to school to get a job but instead are preparing yourself to enter into a profession. Your concerns and opinions are valued just as strongly as are those of faculty and staff. Nothing is perfect, but you know that your thoughts matter and any problems you bring forth will be addressed by the faculty and school administration. Above all else, you are treated with dignity and respect. This is the environment at the University of the Pacific Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry.*

*The movement towards humanism must come from the very top. If the dean of the dental school does not aspire to these ideals, the dental school will never truly be able to create this nurturing environment. Every quarter, each class has a brown bag lunch with the dean and associate deans where any concerns or problems are raised. There are also biannual dean's dinners, at which the student leadership spends over three hours in a dinnertime discussion with all department heads and all members of the administration.*

*It is agreed upon by all parties that any concerns that are raised will be addressed within sixty days. Students also have the dean's email address. He regularly responds to any emails within twenty-four hours. Open discussion and communication are of utmost importance.*

*The students themselves are not the only ones to benefit from this model of education. The faculty get to teach happier, more productive students who have a high degree of self-worth and therefore are motivated to excel. With no "us against them" attitude, everyone is able to form relationships that often last well into the students' professional lives.*

*When students first enter dental school, they are always enthusiastic and excited about what the next three to four years will bring. How appalling it is to see that well over 50 percent of the students from our dental schools may be graduating angry and upset.*

*Certainly, there are situations when an administration does everything it can and a student still leaves unhappy. However, this can and should be the exception. Dental school is an extremely rigorous time in any young dentist's life. A supportive environment is of the utmost importance. It is the responsibility of all dental institutions to teach more than how to restore a tooth or perform an oral prophylaxis. A dental school must also teach students compassion, empathy,*

*caring, and a passion to give back of their time, talents, and resources to their communities, the profession, and their schools.*

*The benefits of the humanistic model are far-reaching. I hope that this article can help to open the eyes of dental educators and assist them in realizing that dental students will invariably become their colleagues. Treat them with respect as colleagues in training from day one, and the students, the university, the educators themselves, and most importantly our great profession will see fantastic benefits for many years to come."*

In 1978, when I was appointed dean, it became my *cause célèbre* to enhance the humanistic model at the dental school to its maximum potential. I thought I could bring a *carpe diem* approach to education by seizing the moment. I believe then and now with a passion that education must be the most inspiring moment of your life – motivating, challenging, and one that builds self-worth. This environment produces doctors who care; who care about their school, care about their profession, care about their communities, and who are dedicated to make a difference.

Some years back, Alan Alda, the actor who played Surgeon Hawkeye Pierce on the television series, "M\*A\*S\*H," delivered the commencement address before a class of medical students. The advice he offered is just as relevant for dentistry. Here is what he said:

*"Be skilled, be learned, be aware of the dignity of your calling, but please don't ever lose sight of your own simple humanity.*

*You are entering a special place in our society. People will defer to you, call you by your title, and it may be hard to remember that the word "doctor" is not actually your first name.*

*I ask of you – possess your skills, but don't be possessed by them. Put people first.*

*You can read my x-rays like a telegram, but can you read my involuntary muscles? Can you see the fear and uncertainty in my face? Will you be the kind of doctor who cares more about the case than the person?"*

Alan Alda closed his advice to those graduating students with these words:

*"There is one more thing you can learn about the body that only a non-doctor would tell you and I hope you will always remember this: the head bone is connected to the heart bone – and I would add that the heart bone is connected to the soul. Doctors, don't ever let them come apart."*

We believe, at Pacific, that we build people who care because we concentrate on relationships at the emotional intelligence (EI) level. We believe EI is more important than IQ.

At a recent College of Diplomates of the American Board of Orthodontics meeting, Moody asked me to talk about and provide him with some thoughts regarding the Pacific humanistic model of education. I wrote down for him the following:

- Build people – by inspiration
- Build self-worth – by building on the positives
- Create a sense of family
- Respect everyone
- Create an environment of trust based on integrity – sign on my desk 1978-2008:  
“Arthur, be fair, power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely”
- Create a passion for kindness
- Create a passion for fairness
- Eliminate the negatives
- Call students “doctor” from day one
- Create an environment of zero tolerance for:
  - arrogance
  - rudeness
  - destructive behavior
- Communicate at every level, and demonstrate often the qualities of a humanistic educational model

Moody asked me if there was one word to describe excellent leadership or excellence as an educator. I responded, “love.” Be passionately in love with your work, with your people, with excellence. Each day as you leave your car, slam the door and say: “This is the best day of my life!”

As we discussed this, Moody asked me how he, as one person, could personally make a difference in his educational environment and with his students. I told him never underestimate the power of one, or how effective one person can be.

- A woman named Rosa Parks changed segregation laws because she dared to sit in the front of the bus.
- Just recently, Al Gore started a worldwide movement promoting cultural change in order to safeguard the earth from the effects of global warming.
- Ralph Nader started the consumer protection movement when he was in his twenties. The movement has saved thousands of lives and prevented millions of injuries.

I further told Moody that as W. Edward Deming, the great industrialist who guided Japan's recovery with General McArthur after World War II wrote:

*"It is not necessary to change. Survival is not mandatory."*

As a profession, we face many challenges. As leaders, you are aware of all of them. For a moment, let me take some time to talk about one of them, and that is dental education and its future.

As you know, dental education is the foundation of our profession, and this foundation is threatening to crumble. If we do not have a strong foundation through education, our profession risks losing its integrity and some even say if nothing is done to repair the system, it will eventually turn the profession of dentistry into a trade. There are overwhelming challenges facing the entire education system of this great nation.

In the book, *Declining by Degrees: Higher Education at Risk*, foreword by Tom Wolfe, and edited by Richard H. Hersh and John Merrow, they state:

*"In our study of higher education, we found an insidious erosion of quality that we believe places this nation at risk."*

*"Our K-12 system continues to wallow in mediocrity and now higher education is suffering from the same condition."*

*"The tide continues to rise, the rot is creeping upward, and time is running out."*

So, let me remind you one of the reasons why I am here: "The rot is creeping upward, and time is running out," and so it is for dental education as well.

We suffer from aging physical and clinical facilities that must be updated for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Technology, while helpful in the education process and integral in the practice of dentistry, demands a constant stream of money to fund upgrades and new equipment. This is one of the more challenging effects of the continuous advancements of technology. Often technology becomes obsolete soon after development! Unfortunately, it is the nature of the technology beast but it is an educational must-have, and students cannot graduate and enter the profession with training in antiquated methods, equipment, and facilities.

We must face the reality that state governments are providing less and less, on average only 10 to 20 percent of a dental school's total budget. This is one of several reasons why current tuition rates have skyrocketed. But if you think education is expensive, try ignorance, and mediocrity is just not good enough.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is no doubt in my mind, and hopefully yours, that our dental education system has entered a crisis situation. Now you can see why *Dental Education: Our Legacy – Our Future* was created. We needed to start a nationwide dialogue about these challenges.

*Dental Education: Our Legacy – Our Future* wants to unite you and this entire profession across this great nation of ours to start a movement of change to ensure the future of our profession. We need your support and we need your voice to communicate the true nature and crisis-level of this situation. While our failure to support the future of dental education is serious, it is not impossible to overcome.

Tolstoy reminds us:

*“Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.”*

You might be thinking, “Art, where do we start? Who do we talk to?” It all starts with change. Changing our perception of dental education; changing our relationship with dental schools, the dental industry, and the profession, changing our approach to charitable giving, and creating change within ourselves; changing the way we educate students.

We are on the brink of a movement that will have awesome and long-lasting results for our profession. I do not have to tell you, the leaders of our profession, why a strong dental education enterprise is essential. We need to remind our professional colleagues that the future of our profession, as a respected and learned profession, is uncertain and that a dynamic and progressive dental education enterprise secures the integrity of our profession.

I have 60 years of dental education experience, 28 of those years are as a dean of a dental school. I have seen first-hand the positive and tremendous results of charitable giving and a humanistic educational model. Unfortunately, I also know the repercussions of doing nothing.

Doing nothing is not a choice here. Mediocrity is just not good enough. I believe in securing the dental education system for a long future and I believe in securing dentistry as a respected, medical profession. My dental education has made me into the person that I am today. It has allowed me to help, treat and serve patients and given me a brotherhood in dental education that I am proud to belong to. I believe together we can make great things happen.

Let me share some thoughts with you about making a difference. As leaders, I thought I would share with you something that I read recently about living a life that matters and have used several times. Hopefully it may be new to you. I do not know the author, but I believe it contains a series of powerful statements and it reflects on 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. And so to will be 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 is the lives you touched along the way."

As you heard in my introduction, I have received distinguished alumni awards from four universities and the dental school at the University of the Pacific was named in my honor. I need to have you realize that although these are significant awards and deeply appreciated, what means more to me than anything else in life is when an individual says, "*You made a difference in my life, you touched me*" – that is when I know, and that is when you will know that you have lived a life that matters.

Living a life that matters does not happen by chance. It is not a matter of circumstances but one of choice. Congratulations, 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, have healthier lives, walk a little taller – and you will know in your heart that you have made a difference.

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