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NEW DAYS—NEW WAYS

For almost a decade, Americans went on a spending spree. Retirement plans, 401K's, and bank accounts flourished with or without much management. Life was good. Thoughts of fiscal responsibility were far from our minds as the financial sector ballooned with com-

plex instruments meant to keep us confident, but ignorant of their implications.

Cosmetic dentistry was all the rage. Every week, ABC's exceptionally popular *Extreme Makeover* program presented amazing transformations as medicine and dentistry changed peoples' appearance and health, encouraging every viewer to consider improvements of their own. The resulting interest drove patients to our doors and changed the way dentistry fit into people's priorities and lives. For the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD), this meant record levels of membership and a heightened interest in what our organization had to offer. The dental community embraced the prosperity cosmetics offered and almost everyone wanted to learn what we seemed to know.

We overlooked the possibility that something other than the soundness of our programs and organizational strength could pose a threat to our Academy. In many ways, we thought that the recipe for success was inherent in our product and that prosperity would go on forever.

Then reality hit the AACD. Our nation's economy called a "code blue" as we learned that two costly wars and an array of financial instruments that not even experts could fully explain could make our economy collapse like a house of cards. As Americans focused their attention on dealing with the resulting economic hardships, spending habits changed. Luxuries were eliminated; necessities took priority. *Extreme Makeover* remained on television but its *Home Edition* focused on changing the living conditions of the needy and worthy—not restoring their appearance.

These universal changes could not help but impact the AACD. Although we have felt the effects from this economic downturn less than others, we still recognized our obligation to review how we run our Academy and how we serve our members. Understandably, the circumstances under which we must now function have brought

many issues to the forefront that we had never had to confront before.

Interest in cosmetic dentistry reached a peak during the *Extreme Makeover* phase. It still exists, but it has changed. Cosmetics are now in the mainstream, and patients and dentists alike are addressing esthetic issues in a different manner. Cosmetic dentistry is no longer segregated from other aspects of dental care. Rather, it has been incorporated into all areas of dentistry. Patients expect their dentists to be cosmetically competent and to bring esthetic considerations and expertise into any of the treatments they provide.

That said, it is time for us to "up our game." The knowledge we have gained over the past 25 years is unsurpassed. Yet we must acknowledge that the world has changed. We must repackage our efforts to share this knowledge with the rest of our profession. And through it all, we must remain organizationally efficient. Going forward, we must implement the following priorities:

1. Member Value: Simply stated, when members feel that organizational benefits are worth the price of their dues, it is easy to keep membership levels high. Especially in times of economic difficulty, the perceived value of membership must equate to more than simply dues paid. Increasing member value must be a dominant commitment. We must prioritize and work hard to continually upgrade the benefit of membership in the AACD. Efforts to make our credential stand for something significant in dentistry must continue. Building significance beyond our Academy would be an accomplishment of historic proportions.

Member value is what will determine our success in the future. Nothing else comes close. People must see new ways in which our organization can help them prosper; new ways that put into practice our core values of inclusion, education, diversity, and community.

2. Leadership: Like many associations, AACD is challenged in finding individuals willing to participate in leadership and philanthropy. We work hard for volunteers for our Give Back a Smile™ program, which forms the heart of our charitable program. Applicants for Board and Committee positions, while strong, would certainly benefit from more involvement. Our organization needs every member to find his or her own way to participate by contributing in at least one area of service. If we assume that others will take on these tasks and that we as individuals are not needed, our Academy cannot fulfill its potential.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE CONTINUED

3. Critical Issues: Several important issues that have been simmering for years have recently risen again in the Academy, sparking passionate debate. These issues are a result of legitimate attempts by members to guide the AACD toward a more successful future. Most often, organizations rely upon their bylaws to help them sort through discourse or difficult dilemmas; however, these events have led us to understand that our governing documents need critical attention because they sometimes provide little guidance when certain important questions or issues arise. This year, several of these issues arose:

- Increasing the pool of candidates eligible to serve our Academy as Vice President, President-Elect and, ultimately, President by:
 - Expanding the two-year Board of Director (BOD) service requirement to include other areas of service, such as the American Board of Cosmetic Dentistry (ABCD), Board of Trustees (BOT), and/or other committees.
 - Eliminating the Accreditation requirement so that General members may be considered.
 - Broadening eligibility beyond dentists and laboratory technicians.
- Eliminating AACD membership requirement as a prerequisite for pursuing Accreditation.

Recognizing the need for extraordinary study of these critical issues, I chose to appoint an ad hoc committee, the Review and Advisory Commission, whose duty is to examine all of these issues. The Review and Advisory Commission will examine and deliberate all facets and perspectives of these propositions and any related issues and will put forth a comprehensive report to our Board of Directors and then to our membership at our Annual Scientific Session in Grapevine, TX. The Commission comprises AACD members who represent different eras and areas of our Academy. With this information, background, and thoughtful evaluation in hand, our membership will be in a better position to decide how to proceed, knowing that the issues have been thoroughly discussed and evaluated in an open, honest, and healthy forum.

With all the aforementioned challenges, you might think that I am worried about the future of the AACD. That is quite untrue. Although we face challenging times, we have an Executive Office staff that is the envy of other organizations. Although we have fewer members applying for leadership positions than we had hoped, we still have an excellent new generation of leaders coming up that will keep the Academy strong.

In past issues of our newsletter, the *Academy Connection*, I wrote about the excellent service of this

year's BOT and ABCD. I would also like to acknowledge the thoughtful dedication of our BOD. They have demonstrated a great passion and resolve to guide our Academy through the challenges presented. I cannot say enough about my pride in working with them. Having watched them learn and better understand the process, I have full confidence that what they experienced this year will serve them well for the rest of their tenure.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge that it has been an honor and privilege to serve the Academy as your president. This is my last President's Message for the *Journal of Cosmetic Dentistry*. I hope that I touched on subjects pertinent to the issues we faced this past year. Although we have gone through one of the worst economic times in our nation's history, we have the foundation set to focus on giving our members value, thus positioning our Academy for a great and prosperous future. I look forward to seeing you in Texas!

My best wishes to you and yours,



Michael R. Sesemann, DDS
President
AACD Accredited Fellow
GBAS Volunteer
