

Dear Chris,

How are things with you and your lovely family? I was in Nashville for Dortch's funeral. Did not see you, but asked about you.

Manny Vargus asked me to write a letter for students who are interested in becoming a dentist and wondering how selling can be of benefit to them. So here goes.

Everything I learned from selling has been used in my personal and professional life. I recently gave some advice to my son on how to curtail his spending during this recession that I used when selling. As to dentistry, one of the greatest traits one can have is the ability to meet someone and be able to convince them you are sincere in a short time. This is learned in door to door selling better than anywhere else because you don't have a lot of time to waste in small talk. Also, many colleagues I have had over the years have had poor business skills. It is not taught in dental schools nor medical schools, and that is one reason many professionals are the target of financial merchants trying to peddle their goods. A dental practice is both a profession and a business. If the business part is not run properly, the professional part suffers. When I talked to patients about their dental needs I used the same technique I used in selling: FIND THE NEED AND FULFILL IT. I would give patients two or three options for treatment-either of which was ok with me-and allow us to jointly make a decision. Then we would determine just how they would pay for the services. Talking about money is very difficult for many professionals. They have some strange thought it is not professional to discuss money, but it was easy for me because of my Southwestern experience. Consequentially, my accounts receivable were negligible. I have been able to retire on my schedule because of planning from my first day in dentistry- by saving and managing money. Only 15% of dentists are able to retire when they desire, according to the American Dental Association.

I suppose the greatest thing I attribute to my time with Southwestern was the confidence that I could be successful in anything I wanted to do. If dentistry had not been my calling, I knew I could sell anything and find success there. In fact, I have enjoyed, on occasion, demonstrating my skills to a group of folks by asking them to pick any item and I would make an instant sells talk for it. As remarkable as this might sound, I believe everything we do is some form of selling. I teach the largest Sunday School class in my church, and my preparation and presentation are a form of selling--as are all ministers' sermons. Selling is such a noble art, and I am indebted to Southwestern more than I can ever say.

May God Bless,

Joe Laton
Chapel hill, NC.