

Many of you know that I am a college basketball fanatic for many reasons. I grew up playing B-ball in pick-up games, school teams, or intramurals. You could always find me daily on the playgrounds, in gyms, or on driveways with garage mounted hoops.

Pardon the pun, but this sport has afforded me many ups and downs throughout the years. From making the team, to being cut from the team; or from making a winning basket, to missing a last-second, game-winning foul shot.

I've experienced all of these, and I am thankful for all of my experiences.

Even when I transitioned from player to observer, and went from pro basketball follower, to college b-ball fanatic, experiencing everything from exhilaration to disappointment during each game, I was thankful to be a part of the sport. Thanks to my achievements and challenges in basketball, I recognize the truth in “the thrill of victory, and the agony of defeat.”

Now, I know it may be a little too dramatic for a president's yearly report to be quoting that particular adage, but we must be forthright in our analysis of our organization. Let's feel the pride of our achievements while acknowledging the challenges that we still face. During my year in office, I witnessed both, just as I have witnessed both on the basketball court.

Admittedly, I spent less time this year on b-ball and more time at the AGD offices. So, instead of analyzing the game plays, I've actually spent some time analyzing the AGD.

In particular, I've been struck by the symbolism that our AGD logo offers the organization. I look at the AGD logo and imagine that the three lines crossing the middle represent our three most important areas: Advocacy, Education, and Membership. Now, I am not entirely sure that this was the original purpose of the brand logo, but it certainly seems fitting.

In terms of Advocacy, we are absolutely fully supportive of the American Dental Association as THE organization that represents the **entire** dental profession, just as we are THE voice for general dentistry.

In 2010, we stood toe-to-toe with a powerful corporate entity to gain a decisive victory for general dentists. Our success with the Invisalign requirements was a great achievement. But we still face the challenge of outside groups with special interests in unsupervised midlevel providers that have threatened individual states, and even gained a foothold in some. In Connecticut, we assisted our Trustee Maria Smith in strongly opposing the passage of a state dental association resolution regarding this issue which unfortunately passed. We have much to be vigilant and proactive about—that's why victory with Align is just the beginning!

(Acknowledge Advocacy Team)

In order for us to continue to succeed as the VOICE of the general dentist, the AGD created an Advocacy Fund last year. Already, just since the beginning of 2010, we've raised \$63,000--and that's with less than 40 percent of our members having contributed. We must use these funds to ensure that Align is not one of few AGD victories on behalf of our members, because state boards, Institutes of Medicine, and special interest groups and foundations will not allow us to be complacent. I strongly encourage all of you to participate and donate in this week's Regional Relay and make it one of many victories to come. Visit the Caucus Support Office or the Delegate Registration Desk and contribute to the Advocacy Fund today.

While the AGD is the VOICE of the general dentist, the bedrock or history of this organization is as the recognized authority on quality continuing dental education. We represent those in our profession who are dedicated to the highest standards of care through their commitment to continuing education. Our reputation allowed us to achieve AGD CE tracking via our transcript recognition in 49 states. Though there is one lone state still out there, which will remain nameless, that is keeping us from a complete sweep; it's still quite an accomplishment, of which I am very proud!

In a few days, we will all bear witness to the fact that we have less than 5 percent of our membership attending our own Annual Meeting & Exhibits. As the leaders within this organization, we must lead by example! We know our reputation for quality CE is proven each year, as it will be again in a couple days at this year's annual meeting. Attend the courses, volunteer as a course manager; support our organization's reputation for quality education. No council works harder than our AMC to come up with ideas to attract more of our members to the meeting. However, it's time to do what we are best at, and that's innovative thinking. WE must be creative and look at totally different approaches to our current annual educational commitment. We've set the standard for all other meetings through the years, and it's time to create a new standard.

As an organization with a reputation for quality education, it is no wonder that we've attracted Headquarter staff that is highly talented, motivated, and *educated*. Our current Headquarters staff has some of the most talented individuals I've worked with throughout my career. I couldn't always say that. **And** I consider **that** a great achievement by the organization. Yet we stretch these individuals to limits of productivity with a multitude of priority projects. Then, many of those projects are delayed or even scrapped because of a need to cut expenses as a result of a budgetary process that cannot accurately predict spending due to a discordant program and fiscal year. We are smarter than that! The bottom line is that we need to find a better process so that we can truly rise to, and accomplish, our potential. The Board, through its strategic task forces that Dr. Elias will lead, has accepted the challenge to implement change and then it will be up to all of you to facilitate it. In your House of Delegates Evaluation, you will

be asked for your thoughts on moving the House of Delegates. Be sure to share your honest opinions with our Task Force on Governance so that we can take the appropriate actions.

Speaking of our potential, I perceive the third line in the middle of the “A” to be membership. Yes, we represent those in our profession who are dedicated to the highest standard of care through their commitment to continuing education. Yet, our stellar group only represents 25 percent of the entire general dental community. (Tell story of legislator and percentage of voters.) We must do better in maintaining and growing our numbers to be a much larger stellar group!

In the last year, we’ve increased our member research and strengthened our benefits package to include valued offerings like AGD Patient Alerts, a free appointment reminder system launched at this meeting last year. Similar offerings cost general dentists upwards of \$3,000 a year. That’s a great benefit to our members and it speaks directly to the value of AGD membership. (Kudos to Akseizer and IT staff). It’s another great achievement for our organization! Yet, we just missed our membership retention goal this year. We lost more than 4,000 members in April. We, as leaders, must renew our commitment to membership. Each and every one of us must become an ambassador of retention as well as a recruiter for this organization in order for us to succeed.

We are all members of a team here – the AGD team. We need to make this team the strongest it can be to strengthen the voice of general dentistry.

Which brings me back to basketball.

The truth is, I no longer enjoy watching *professional* teams play, only college teams.

Because the manner in which professionals play is perfunctorily. There is no real zeal or extreme energy. Whereas, for the most part, college players play as if each game is for the championship.

I tend to believe that this is true of volunteer leadership as well. We’re not the pros, we’re the all-out-for-victory college kids. I recognized the championship-nature of some of our team members at the last AGD council meetings. So many of them are amazing and driven and excited!

But the truth is, in recent years, the roster of highly interested, experienced, available individuals has been sparse at best. This is not a challenge for us alone, it is a challenge for all associations due to changing expectations and the time commitment that the positions require. Unfortunately, it results in the recycling of the same- people, which many times does not allow

us fresh, forward-thinking, or high productivity. We **all** must take responsibility for the future of our organization's leadership and create a concerted effort or plan to develop new leaders!

And, you know what? My basketball analogy rings true here, too!

I still get frustrated when I see the "ball hogs" who refuse to pass to the open man on the court. Instead, they'll take shot after shot, convinced that they are the only ones who can make baskets. I still envy those players with pure, natural talent, who make the game look easy by effortlessly scoring whenever they want. And I have great respect for the consistent blue-collar player who is dependable, hard-working, and consistent in his performance.

In basketball, those players who are acknowledged as top scorers are, for the most part, shooters whose percentage of made versus missed shots clearly supersedes all others on their team. You can virtually count on them to score during every game—and they will have the most points. Yet, no team will consistently win if they only have one player capable of scoring.

So, the other players on the team must contribute in order for them to win. On any given day, you can watch the "hot hand" player. Someone who is "in the zone" or is "feeling it" and they virtually cannot miss. But, then during the next game, that same player can be totally off and cannot make a shot to save his life.

We have shooters at the AGD, the movers and shakers who we know will throw out a lot of ideas and input. Sometimes, they miss the shot, but generally they are the highest producers of activities and programs in our organization.

We also have the blue collar volunteers, who participate at all of our events and activities. These are the implementers, and more often than not, they are the reason the job gets done. They may not shine as bright as the shooters, but nonetheless they are critical to our productivity.

Finally, we have the "hot hands." Those are the rising stars who on any given day offer stellar contributions, or champion a cause, and instantly become our go-to people. AGD needs to evaluate how it identifies, recruits, trains, and offers members the opportunity to serve the organization in a way that is palatable to our potential new leaders.

As with most team sports, for volunteer organizations to succeed, we need all of these players. We cannot have just one type of contributor, we need all three. Good coaches know that they must change up their line-up to offer different players the opportunity to be "the hot hand" of the day.

Now, the highlight of the college basketball season is the NCAA tournament, “The Dance”, March Madness. So, what differentiates the teams who make the Final Four and play for the championship in the tournament and the teams who don’t?

Well, some teams are just stacked with All-American caliber players. You almost expect them to be there: the Connecticuts, the Kentuckys, the UCLAs, the Texasases, and , yes, as much as I hate to admit it, the Dukes, too. But then there are teams who are considered the Cinderella teams, or the blue collar teams. These are the teams like the Butlers, the Gonzagas, the George Masons, and, yeah, the Marylands!

They arrive at the mountaintop, thanks to extraordinary coaching, sheer determination, desire, focus, “hot hands”, and a total team effort.

Our AGD is both of these types of teams. We have all-stars who are prominent in other groups and are well-respected throughout the profession, and we also have under-acknowledged, but incredibly hard-working overachievers, who are supremely focused on our specific mission.

Let’s revisit the AGD logo and its three lines crossing through its middle and think about them in terms of basketball players. So, obviously, education is our star. It is the reason for which our organization was originally created and successful and it remains our top scoring potential for recruitment of new members. Then, Advocacy would be our hot hands – our succeses are based on sheer determination, desire, focus and a total team effort. Most importantly, we have Membership. Membership is our workhorse of the group; it’s the reason that everything get’s done.

In the most recent tournament, the final game pitted a perennial powerful team, the Duke Blue Devils, against the great, but not as marquee, Butler Bulldogs. It was a great game. It was not as great as Maryland winning the national championship in 2002, but, still, it was a great game. Butler took everything that Duke threw at them and gave it back, carrying the game to overtime and only losing by an inch off of a last-second shot. (How many of you would have loved to see that shot go in??)

The AGD has participated in some great match-ups as well, including with Align, the New York State Board, even the ADA at times. We welcome the competition against marquee opponents. We play hard, and we celebrate our successful wins. Even when we are not as successful in our effort, we maintain pride in our beliefs.

We are a focused and determined group when we have a clear view of the game. Sometimes, though, we forget to play our own game and we react to what others are doing. But what we should be doing is keeping our eye on the ball. We need to stay focused on our mission, execute our own game plan proactively and not react to someone else’s. Knowing our sport is

basketball, and not football, for example, is critical. We are a general dentist organization and therefore we must remain proactively focused on that role.

With each win or success, the crowds will grow more engaged in the game. Just think about what *our team* can achieve with 50, 60, or 70 thousand screaming member fans! By remaining focused, I am not saying that we turn away from every new opportunity. I frequently hear people say that the AGD should stick to being a CE organization and leave advocacy to others. To people who are proponents of the AGD as solely a CE organization, I say that we will continue to emphasize CE as our core value and treat it with respect and commitment to maintaining the highest standards of professional care to the public. However, we will not back away from those issues that challenge our professional abilities or responsibilities that dentistry has entrusted to us. We are the gatekeepers and facilitators of care, and quarterbacks of the dental team.

In the same vein, the separation of governance from the Annual Meeting & Exhibits is not the prominent factor that lessens the integrity of our meeting. The truth is, we have done virtually everything we can to create the preeminent educational meeting and we still do not garner more than 5 percent of our membership to attend. However, we may have an opportunity to end a trend that stifles our programming due to its dependency on governance being six months removed from program implementation.

We must become proactively focused like some of the greatest coaches of college basketball: The University of Kansas Jayhawks' Bill Self, UCLA Bruins' Ben Howland, Duke University Blue Devils' Mike Krzyzewski, and University of Florida Gators' Billy Donovan and, of course, Gary Williams.

In addition to watching basketball, I watch a lot of movies. I watch adventure, science fiction, comedies, and inspirational or motivational tear-jerking movies. As a group ice-breaker at the most recent Legislative and Governmental Affairs Council meeting, Dr. Mike Bromberg asked all of the participants to identify their favorite line from a movie. Many famous lines flooded my mind, too, and I realized that I had to share them with you. So, here goes:

The more involved we all become in organized dentistry, the more we will understand the differences between fact and fiction. Becoming involved in the AGD should include participating in the organizational philanthropies to create a culture of philanthropy within our organization. We must be the voice that encourages our members to contribute to both the Advocacy Fund and the AGD Foundation. We must be the leaders that highlight these two programs and make their importance visible to our membership.

Our organization strives to find the facts and it doesn't fear some Jack Nicholson-like Few-Good-Men-group who says "You can't handle the truth." We are committed to not only seeking the truth, but standing behind it, and then promoting it at IOM hearings, state board appearances, or meetings with other allied health professional groups. "Handling the truth"

also means being willing to listen to our members. We have to prioritize our programs based upon market research. The results may or may not validate what we think, but we must adjust accordingly. Even in the topic “du jour” of midlevel providers, there are varied opinions of the “truth”, and our responsibility lies in the search for what truth is best for the public we serve.

My little Star Wars friend Yoda says, “There is no try, do or do not”. The AGD does not *try* to be the advocate for the general dentist, we *do* it. We stand up to corporate entities, we develop position papers on access to care solutions or implant dentistry education, and we defend the dental team concept and proactively oppose unsupervised midlevel providers performing dental procedures.

Many of our sentiments about service in the AGD can be summed up by Al Pacino’s lament in Godfather 3, “every time I tried to get out they kept pulling me back in”. Truly, we have all served willingly and with great satisfaction from the privilege of working with incredible individuals. I am thankful to all of you who encouraged and contributed toward my 30-year leadership journey. And I can assure those of you who may be intimidated by the workload and responsibilities along the way that it is absolutely worth all of the sacrifices and effort.

Leadership in the AGD is an incredible gift to give and to receive. In addition to dentist leaders, we appreciate non-dentist leaders like constituent executive directors and staff. I would be remiss if I didn’t mention Bernie Taylor. Bernie has been the executive director for Oregon for 35 years and during that time has had perfect attendance at the AGD House of Delegates meetings. She is currently facing health challenges and for the first time in 35 years, she is not joining us at this meeting. The rose placed at each executive director’s place is there to honor and acknowledge her service and accomplishments. On behalf of the Oregon constituent, and all of the constituent executive directors, I would like to ask each of you to keep Bernie in your thoughts and prayers.

Speaking of leaders that have contributed monumentally to the AGD, I’d like to take a moment now, to recognize a few leaders in our organization who are no longer with us.

Finally, I challenge each and every one of you to stay focused on our mission and not be sidetracked by sidebar agendas. Be energized and embrace the new strategic plan, support incoming Presidents Fares Elias, Howard Gamble, and Jeffrey Cole, and be active team members. Beat the bushes for this great organization and maintain every member you can to strengthen the voice of general dentistry. By doing so, you’ll allow all of us in private practice to continue to do what we do everyday. And, you’ll be making absolutely sure that we will fulfill my Star Trek hero Spock’s prophecy for the AGD’s future: “To live long and prosper!”