

**Howard Gamble, DMD, FAGD  
AGD 2011-2012 President**

**Presidential Address  
2011 AGD Annual Meeting & Exhibits  
San Diego, Calif.**

Good Morning.

I would like to begin by thanking Fares, my fellow members of the Executive Committee, and the Board of Trustees for the dedication and untiring effort they have given during the past year. I would like them all to stand and be recognized.

I'd like to thank you all for your dedication to the Academy of General Dentistry. We have had a great few days here in San Diego and I look forward to an equally great year. But, before I move from this platform into my presidency, I'd like to share some memories with you. I have had the privilege of serving on many councils and committees during my 32 years as a member of the AGD.

One of my greatest privileges was being the chairman of the first AGD Communications Council. I had the unique opportunity to chair the first-ever AGD electronic council meeting, along with the members of the Communications Council at the time.

We did not stop there. That same council had the ADA join us in the AGD board room to conduct the first live webinar for both organizations.

I later had the privilege of directing the ADA Council on Governmental Affairs in the first electronic council meeting of the ADA. My involvement in those events stands out in my mind to this day. They were profound, ground-breaking events in which I and the AGD led the way.

I shared those memories with you not to convey just how far we've all come technologically. I am sharing them with you so that I can impart a great piece of wisdom I once heard: Never allow your memories to be bigger than your dreams.

Don't get me wrong here. Just because we do not want our memories to be bigger than our dreams does not mean that we should forget our past. Another wise person once said if we do not learn from our history, we are destined to repeat our mistakes. In today's world, we must be ever vigilant to avoid making mistakes. There are many outside forces waiting to take advantage of our profession.

We can be proud of our past. In fact, in order to succeed today, we must be true to our roots. We're taught from a very young age that a seed which falls on barren ground cannot develop a good root system. And when confronted by the sun, it will quickly wither and die. But healthy plants, plants made from nurtured seeds, grow strong, far-reaching roots, and survive the greatest storms.

No, the AGD should never forget our past, and we must remain true to our roots. And, that's easy to do because it was a seed well-nurtured by eight members led by Thaddeus "Ted" Weclaw, so that we could grow to have strong roots in quality education. For us to remain strong through the storms that have and will challenge this great organization, we must never abandon our roots.

When I joined the AGD many years ago, there was a distinct culture within the organization. It was unmistakable. The members created an extremely strong, unified, AGD family. I was honored to become a part of that family.

But there came a time, perhaps some of you recall, when the AGD went through a period of change. The organization underwent some dramatic adjustments to reinvent itself. Not surprisingly, there was too much change too quickly and it didn't work. I believe that's because we weren't true to our roots. But the organization persevered.

I am pleased to say that the feeling and the culture that I was so honored to be a part of long ago has been restored to the AGD—we are a strong, unified family, we have an executive director who respects us and wants to be a part of us, and we must continue in that direction. Chuck has also assembled a dedicated team of staff members who work with the members and leaders of the AGD to advance our goals.

If we ignore these great roots of ours, we are destined to repeat our failures. So, we cannot ignore the past, we cannot change the past, but the future is ours to mold. The future is ours to develop. And the future is ours in which to create our dreams.

The AGD's mission is to become the recognized voice of the general dentist. We are the only organization that legitimately can be the recognized voice of general dentists.

We are the Academy of General Dentistry. However, in order for us to succeed in truly being the recognized voice of the general dentist, we simply must accumulate a majority of the general dentist market share.

We do not have that distinction now. Today, as I stand before you, there are 141,200 general dentists in the United States and Canada. 33,140 of them are U.S. AGD members, and 1,259 of them are Canadian AGD members. So, that means that the AGD represents approximately 26.8 percent of the U.S. market and 7.1 percent of the Canadian market.

Market share, member totals. What does it all mean? Well, some of you may see those numbers and think that it represents great future potential for growth; I see it as a number that does not represent the majority of my fellow general dentists. A number—I must say—that allows others to challenge our true right to claim that we represent the voice of the general dentist.

Those numbers mean that during the last 30 years, despite the fact that we've distributed many membership promotions, we've developed many programs, and we've implemented many campaigns, the success of these many endeavors has been minimal.

The truth is, any success we've seen has primarily been thanks to the involvement of our constituents. We know that constituents who were actively involved in the membership efforts have been successful. The most effective recruitment tool that I've seen is a colleague's invitation to another colleague to join our organization.

I joined the Academy because two of my classmates from dental school told me that I should join. They said that the AGD would benefit both me and my practice. I had faith in them and their referral was all I needed. I'm sure they had no idea that they were recruiting a future president of the organization. But it was that easy. They are both here today and I would like to recognize them. Bill Chesser and Bobby Babb would you please stand?

If you want to help in making the AGD the undisputed voice of the general dentist, the first step is increasing your options by increasing your membership. The best recruiter I have ever known was one of our past presidents, Dr. Frank Collins of Florida, who recently passed away.

Frank always had an AGD application handy. He'd keep them in his coat pocket to offer to any dentist he ran into. The cost to the AGD for Frank to find potential new members was low—it cost him nothing to ask, “Are you a member of the AGD?” And, if the answer was “no,” Frank would initiate the recruitment process. He would start explaining why every general dentist should be a member of the AGD, and eventually he would hand him or her an application. His system was effective, cost-efficient, and simple enough for each of us to do.

To drive this point home, I'd like you all to remember a famous series of commercials that used some particular language to make its point:

- An AGD recruitment mailing to 10,000 potential members: \$6,000 dollars
- A three-minute discussion with a non-member colleague: Zero dollars
- Furthering the AGD toward truly being the recognized voice of general dentistry: Priceless!

Now, don't get me wrong—we need to continue doing the traditional recruitment campaigns that played a large role in getting our first membership increase in more than five years, this past year. But it's no coincidence that our Refer a Colleague program also grew significantly this past year. We need both our members talking to non-members and our traditional campaigns in order to grow our numbers.

So, keep that thought in the back of your mind when you go to your next local meeting. I think many of you already share this philosophy because there were 26 percent more recruiters this year than last, and that increase accounted for 2,152 new members to the AGD. We must keep up the work—keep working toward becoming the true voice of the general dentist.

Aside from taking a moment to talk to a colleague, there are other ideas surfacing to increase our membership, some that you've surely heard and some that you may not have. For many years, I've participated in discussions that led to talks about a membership category for general dentists who do not wish to pursue Fellowship or Mastership in the AGD. This is interesting when you consider all of the members who the AGD dropped in the past because the members couldn't validate the required amount of CE.

I use the term “validate” because most of us have requirements at the local level that meet or exceed the AGD requirements. It might be time for us to take another look at that and many other opportunities that we have not yet investigated.

Of course, once we recruit our members, we need to take care of them. And, our recent data indicates that we are continuing to do that. In fact, our current 89 percent retention rate exceeds industry standards. Even with this high rate, we must continue to improve by treating each member as a VIP.

One way to keep our members happy—a fact that has been proven time and again in our member research—is through heightened advocacy efforts. Our advocacy efforts will also help us become the true voice of general dentistry. As we achieve successes, more for-profit or government agencies will recognize our authority and seek our opinion. We need this to occur prior to their decision-making so that we can avoid some of the issues facing us today.

As if the legislative and regulatory arenas weren't challenging enough, now we're faced with organizations and agencies that think they know how to provide dentistry to the public better than we do. It astounds me that many of these agencies do not even see a need to involve practicing dentists in their decision-making processes as we experienced with the two IOM reports.

But, much like our efforts in membership, our focus should be at the state level. Most of the power to affect change is at the local level. That's why I am encouraging each of you to train and assist your constituent members. The AGD has resources that you can use—do it; don't wait for someone else to do it. In my state, and I would suspect in yours, it is the AGD dentists who are more knowledgeable and willing to lead on the various issues. It's what your members are asking for, and it's what your profession needs in order to succeed.

We recently created an AGD Advocacy Fund to allow the AGD to assist constituents with state issues. I want to thank those of you who have already contributed, but, in order for our funds to make a difference, we simply need more contributions. The fund is not large enough to assist the number of constituents that need advocacy assistance. So I am asking for your help: Contribute to that fund and by doing so, bring us closer to being the true voice of the general dentist.

On the national level, we are a smaller organization compared to some others. As an example, we have 37,000 members—compared to 40 million members of the AARP. But just like David and Goliath, we can still win. Instead of attacking with brute numbers, the AGD has created innovative strategies throughout our recent past to create partnerships and organizational relationships that make a difference which we did so effectively this past year when going up against companies like Align.

In 2009, the American Dental Political Action Committee, or ADPAC, board of directors invited the AGD to select a member to serve on its Board. By 2010, the AGD representative became a voting member of the ADPAC Board, as did the representatives of the American Association of Endodontists, and the American Academy of Periodontology. Our dental organizations must work together to carry our message forward or else we will become splintered and ineffective as medicine has done.

It's only a matter of time and commitment until we truly become the voice of general dentists. It's only a matter of time until our dreams become bigger than our memories.

An important point that I haven't touched on yet, and one that has helped me and can help all of us make our dreams bigger than our memories, is our support. The AGD needs the support of its members to become the true voice of general dentists. And, as I stand before you today, I can say that I needed the support of many of the AGD's members to reach this position, as well.

To get to this point, at this podium, I needed several different types of support and I like to think of my support as my three families. At this time, I'd like to thank the members of my three families.

First, my immediate family. It's so important to have the support of your families, in particular your spouses, as a dentist, as a member, and as a leader. Many of you will remember another significant event in my life. In 2005, I received the AGD Distinguished Service Award in Anaheim. As Sherry and I were preparing to leave for the airport, she had a stroke. Recognizing the symptoms, I quickly got her to the hospital. The emergency room nurse was a patient and the niece of my chairside assistant. The head nurse on her floor was a long-standing patient. Leaving her in their care, I flew to Anaheim two days later, received the award, and immediately returned home. She recovered fully and has been much of my strength through the years. There is nothing like the support that I have received from my wife, Sherry. And I thank her for that.

Sherry has also been known to run defense for me. When I was the Mayor of our fair city, she received a phone call from an irate citizen because the fire department was flushing the

fire hydrants to insure adequate water pressure in case of a fire. Stirring the sediment in the lines made his water dingy and he was very unhappy. Sherry reminded him that the newspaper had carried a notice informing citizens about the process. He went on to say he did not think I was being a good mayor, to which Sherry responded, “You do not sound like much of a prize yourself!” and then hung up the phone.

Our second family is our practice family. Our staff members who work diligently on a daily basis to make sure that our practice is successful. They work with us day in and day out—and that’s no short order. It also includes our many faithful patients. Dentists enjoy a relationship with their patients, which is unparalleled in any other profession.

And our third family is the AGD family. The camaraderie I’ve found in the AGD is unlike anything anywhere else. Throughout my time as a member, as a council member, as a council chair, as a Delegate, Board, or Executive Committee member, I’ve met and been influenced by many extraordinary colleagues. To each of you—you know who you are—I say, “Thank you.” I wouldn’t be here without your incredible guidance and support.

Everyone in this room has been and is a part of the support system for this great organization. I would like to thank each of you for your support of the AGD and its many great leaders—past, present, and future. It is your support and your future support that this organization needs to accomplish a goal that we all share: To become the true voice of general dentists. So, let’s put on the gloves and get to work.

Let’s pledge now to never let our memories be larger than our dreams.

Thank you.