

# What a career in dentistry demands:

## Good judgment

Exercising good judgment means exhibiting humility. Accept that you don't know everything, and when you make a mistake, for example, in choosing a staff member that's not the right fit for your patients or practice, learn from it by promptly correcting it, reflecting on how you would handle it differently in the future, and then move on.

## Organization

Being organized is a skill that's important in every aspect of your life, and particularly so in your career. When you've established a clear set of goals for yourself and your business, you are less stressed, more productive and, most importantly, you have the time to focus on providing quality care to your patients.

## Critical thinking skills

Critical thinking—the art of using reason to analyze ideas and dig deeper to get to our true potential—isn't about thinking more or thinking harder, it's about thinking *better*. It requires discipline, motivation and the ability to take an honest look at a particular situation, even when faced with an uncomfortable reality. It's about questioning your assumptions, adjusting your perspective and understanding your own bias. It's also about putting yourself in other people's shoes, understanding all of your options and being willing to fail until you succeed. As a dentist dedicated to improving the level of oral health care available to your patients and all of society, critical thinking is an important skill to possess.

## Professionalism

Maintaining a professional persona is critical to becoming a successful dentist. You must be competent, reliable, honest, accountable for your actions and be able to remain cool and calm under pressure.

## Negotiation skills

Being a skilled negotiator is critical in most professions and dentistry is no different. Whether it is managing expectations around employee salaries or discussing fees with insurance companies, being an active listener, maintaining emotional control and upholding your ethics are vital to successfully negotiating any situation.

## Networking skills

To build up your reputation, credibility and, ultimately, your client base and practice, dentists must be comfortable engaging in different networking opportunities and situations, keeping in mind that the most effective networking is not solely about you and your needs. Successful networking involves asking someone else what they need and connecting them with someone you know and trust. Most importantly, networking is about giving first, without the expectation of something in return.

## Manual dexterity

Superior eye-hand coordination as a dentist is critical to ensuring the safety of your patients and the integrity of the profession.

## Maintain continuing education requirements

As a dentist, you must be committed to constantly expanding your knowledge base and skills, and in turn, passing along that newly discovered wisdom to other colleagues to advance the profession of

dentistry. The best way to enhance patient care is to dedicate yourself to evolving your own understanding of the profession and the needs of your community.

### **Leadership**

Leadership experience is an important aspect of your application to dental school and in your training to pursue your goal of becoming a dental professional. Showing leadership experience on your application will make you stand out from other applicants and show you are actively preparing for your future as a dentist and a leader in your community. Leadership comes in many forms and you are encouraged to be creative with your leadership experiences. Undergraduate college campuses have a number of resources to help you gain leadership experience through various organizations and student programming. You don't need to be the president of every club to show you have leadership experience, however. Even if you are just a member of a club or organization, you can offer to lead an initiative of that club such as a community service day, a study group or a fundraiser.

### **Community service**

Good grades and high DAT scores are not enough to get you into dental school. It is important that you are a well-rounded applicant that participates in meaningful activities on your college campus and within your community.

Dentistry is a service-focused profession and dental school admissions officers look for students who demonstrate their promise to serve the community throughout their lifetimes. Many dental schools include community service in their mission statements and often have partnerships within their communities to provide care to underserved populations in school clinics.

There are endless options for community service work, but you should find a project that fulfills you and motivates you to continue your work in the community. Your passion for community service will be clear to admissions officers if you genuinely enjoy what you are doing, and this will ultimately help your application to dental school.

### **Research**

Research experience is not a requirement for admission to dental school, but may add an extra layer to your application if the institutions you are applying to have a research focus, or if you are particularly interested in research.

Most schools recognize that it is not possible for all students to have research experience prior to dental school, as not all undergraduate institutions have research opportunities available to students. You should do research if you are interested by it, not solely to enhance your application to dental school. While many students think that lab research is most important, experience with social science research is just as fascinating and valuable.

### **Building relationships**

The dental profession is based on relationships and connecting with others, such as your patients, their families and the community as a whole. Dentists are able to connect with and help people different from themselves, and make their patients feel comfortable during treatment. Dentists often interact with patients one on one, which makes dentistry an intimate profession. It is important, as an aspiring dentist, that you are able to connect with people and make them feel at ease around you.

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