

Ep #6: The Role of Listening in Case Presentation
with Barry Polansky



Full Episode Transcript

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Allison Watts, DDS

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Welcome to *Practicing with the Masters* for dentists with your host, Dr. Allison Watts. Allison believes that there are four pillars for a successful, fulfilling dental practice: clear leadership, sound business principles, well-developed communication skills, and clinical excellence. Allison enjoys helping dentists and teams excel in all of these areas. Each episode she brings you an inspiring conversation with another leading expert. If you desire to learn and grow and in the process take your practice to the next level, then this is the show for you. Now, here's your host, Dr. Allison Watts.

Allison: Welcome to *Practicing with the Masters* podcast, I'm your host, Allison Watts, and I'm dedicated to bringing you masters in the field of dentistry, leadership, and practice management to help you have a more fulfilling and successful practice and life.

It's Dr. Polansky that's speaking and he is currently the owner of Niche ... how do you say it Barry? Niche?

Barry: Niche.

Allison: Niche Dental Studio with his son, Joshua Polansky. He's been married to Madeline, his wife of, you said it was 39 or 40 years now?

Barry: It will be 40 years in August.

Allison: 40 years.

Barry: And we don't believe it.

Allison: [Laughs] Bret and Joshua are his two sons. He loves health and fitness, reading, writing, and he's an avid practitioner of Bikram Yoga. The hobby that has consumed him and his wife for the last 15 years or more, actually, probably 17 or so years now, is breeding, raising, and showing boxers, the dog.

Barry: Dogs.

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Allison: Yeah, the dogs.

Barry: Not Mike Tyson [laughs].

Allison: [Laughs] So I am thrilled that everybody is here. I am so happy that Barry agreed to speak tonight. We were thinking that Barry's got a new book out, we might talk a little bit about that or case presentation. We also talked a little bit about ... what did we say we might talk about Barry? There was something else that we ...

Barry: Blogging.

Allison: Blogging, yeah. I thought that was an interesting topic. Barry blogs, is really a consistent blogger, and I find that amazing. So, what do you want to start with, Barry?

Barry: Well, you know, your webinars or teleseminars are concerned with transformational leadership.

Allison: Yes.

Barry: When I spoke last time, I made the point that one of the hallmarks of leadership, matter of fact, I think it's the most important thing a leader has to do is, is to be able to present. That word means so many different things, but basically it means to communicate. He's got to communicate ideas.

So when I wrote the book, *The Art of the Examination* I kind of cut it short and I felt that that was more of a process that I use in my practice. Kind of like a system to bring patients through. From the new patient, all the way through the case presentation, but I never really got to write about the art of case presentation. So it was a natural follow up to write this second book, *The Art of Case Presentation*.

In the writing of it, and I did so much reading, it took so long, because as you said, Allison, I do a lot of reading. I get lost, it's

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like a magical mystery tour for me. I go from book to book trying to figure out and to see if there's any connection. I read so much about presentation in general. When I first started out the book was going to be about a presentation process as well, a kind of system of how I do it in my practice. Then somewhere along the line I discovered more than anything else, is that, I'm always presenting.

As a matter of fact, presentation never stops. It's so much part of leadership that it begins even before the patient is in the practice, all the way through until they either accept or deny it, whatever. But you're still presenting all the time. Actually the presentation that you're making is you. You're the presentation. All of these things started coming up in my mind during the writing of this book.

One of the chapters is called "Doctor, you are the message." Everybody's looking for the key to presentation. How do you get that patient to say yes? I don't know if there is any one particular way to make a patient say yes. But I know there's a lot of marketing terms. There's ways to let people know, like, and trust you. I'm sure everyone has heard about those three words, they're big marketing terms. There is no formal presentation that could make somebody know, like, or trust you. That's part of leadership. You learn that it never stops, you're always presenting all the time.

Going into blogging for a second. I think blogging is a great, I think it's probably the most effective form of social media. I blog more consistently now, that was the word you used Allison, because consistency in blogging is important. For a dental practice, my blogs are not about my dental practice. My blogs are out there for the dental community. I do have a blog for my dental practice also.

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But basically, we've all heard the word content. Whatever it is we're trying to communicate can be put into this package called content. Then how we deliver that content, whether we do it orally or we do it through a blog, is another representation of some type of a presentation about you and your practice. Or you and whatever message you're trying to convey to your audience.

For example, I write a blog post and it has an idea or an insight that I'm giving to the dental community. Then I throw it out there and I hope that that blog post creates a conversation. So writing becomes a conversation, just like my presentation verbally or orally to my patient is part of a conversation that I start and that the patient picks up on.

Through the conversation, a relationship is developed. Through the reading of the blog, a relationship is developed. When patients read your blog, or if they're directed to the blog, then they have a chance to develop a relationship with your practice. You see?

Allison: Yeah.

Barry: A lot of this came out for me in researching *The Art of Case Presentation*. There's so many books written on presentation. One really good book that I used was called *Brain Rules* by John Medina. It's a pretty popular book. How I came to that was a lot of books on presentation, say by Jerry Wiseman who's an expert on presentation, and there's so many. They always made references to John Medina's book about brain rules. In that book he talks about how people interpret messages in their brain, the science behind it. In today's blog post, I actually, I eluded to that a little bit.

One of things I write about in the book, and one of things I talk about all the time, is that your presentation needs to be brief,

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simple, and clear. Because the human brain can't take all of that confusion, and complicated, and things that people don't understand, and they will shut down. I mentioned that in the blog post today. I am sure most dentists in their presenting of their cases throughout the years realize that patients will have that look in their eyes, that I call MEGO, M-E-G-O, mine eyes glaze over. When you see that, that means the patient is confused.

By the way, how many times does it happen to us when we're sitting in a lawyer's office, for example, and he's describing the contract or the will your about to sign and you don't understand a thing about it because it wasn't presented properly or it was written in legalese. You know, there's a big push in this country right now to simplify everything including a lot of those legal documents so people understand them. I think there's a website called InPlainEnglish.com and that's exactly the point. We've got to communicate with are patients, or anybody, in plain English briefly, simply, and clearly. You know who gets this better than anybody else?

Allison: Who?

Barry: The marketers. The people who own Porsche and the people who own Cadillac and Lexus dealers, they understand. They do something called neuromarketing. They go beyond the eye and they enter into the consumer's brain, and that's what neuromarketing is. That's what we have to learn in dentistry.

I don't knock this because I'm a dentist and I've been using photography for years, but I think that's the dummy default, to think that we can sell dentistry by using beautiful photography. I think it is an effective tool but I think too many dentists rely on it too much. I don't want to be misunderstood here to think that photography shouldn't be used. It definitely should be used and

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has a great place in dentistry but it shouldn't be used as a crutch. You see?

Allison: Are you saying marketing like to the public or marketing when you're speaking to your patients?

Barry: To your patients.

Allison: Okay.

Barry: To your patients. You know, we pull out our before and afters and we assume that just because we show before and afters and it's beautiful dentistry that the patient is going to accept the dentistry. But there's so many other factors and so many other ways to build trust to get that yes that we are looking for besides just showing a before and after picture. The presentation is a lot more complex than just showing a before and after.

One of things is that when people look at before and after ... you know what I liken it to? It's like telling somebody to quit smoking. They never do. Why is that? If you tell them that, "Well, look what happens when you smoke, you get lung cancer." But they don't stop. Why is that? Because the answer is that they never get lung cancer. The brain sees that as the other gets lung [cancer].

Allison: Yeah.

Barry: Yeah, somebody else gets it. It's a stranger. But if you could somehow show them that they will, they will, that they can see themselves get lung cancer, then they'll make a change. Then they'll accept what you're saying. You know who knew that? Charles Dickens knew that. He wrote a story about that called the *Christmas Carol*. You remember that? You remember what visited Scrooge?

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Allison: Yes.

Barry: In his dream? The Ghost of Christmas Past, the Ghost of Christmas Present, and the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come.

Allison: Mm-hmm.

Barry: And he woke up the next day and he changed. And he changed not because he saw somebody else; he changed because he saw himself in the future. If we can do that somehow to show our patients what will happen to them in the future you'll get change. That's a big difference.

Allison: When you said the thing about the lung cancer, a part of me, when you said someone else gets it but you need to make sure they understand that they will lung cancer, I thought, like, ew, that almost had a little feeling in me like, I don't want to use a fear tactic.

Barry: No.

Allison: You know, it has to be genuine, right? We're not talking about that of course but that was the thing that just kind of popped in for me, I just wanted to say it. You can address it if you want to [laughs]. If you think it is worthy of addressing.

Barry: Well, the question you're asking is how do you do that without making somebody feel bad. Well the answer to that, and the way I do it, is I do it through story. Because story affects the emotions. We use a lot of analogies, a lot of metaphors, and that's a skill in itself.

Allison: I was going to ask you, that's something that would be valuable to learn and how do you develop that?

Barry: Okay, whoever was on the call at the beginning of the call, I mentioned the word called practice.

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Allison: Yes.

Barry: You practice storytelling. So how do you practice storytelling? How do you practice? Storytelling is a creative act. The way you practice storytelling is you practice the other things that all dentists know they should be doing. You practice listening. The more you listen and the better you get at listening until it becomes almost automatic, then you don't have to think about listening. The benefit, or the bonus, to practicing listening is your creativity opens up. The analogies and the metaphors and the stories come to you because you've listened. Am I making sense for you on that?

Allison: Okay, so you're saying if you practice listening as almost like a practice, right? Like we talked about yoga. Then that skill, it opens up your creativity. If you practice listening, it opens up your creativity. Help me understand that.

Barry: Okay, so when you can turn a skill like listening or questioning or active listening into an automatic response, then your brain doesn't have to work in overtime thinking about what am I going to ask next. What am I going to ask next? All of sudden your brain can relax and all of these mundane activities, which include listening, can go on automatic pilot during that process because your brain is not working in overdrive. Your creativity opens up and you begin to visualize things like analogy and you begin to describe things in ways that patients understand better.

You stop describing things and using a jargon or showing pictures that confuse people, or showing X-rays that they've never seen before. You can describe things in word pictures that they understand because you're free to understand them yourselves. In other words, before you can tell a story, you

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have to describe everything to yourself. In order to do that, you've got to be free in your mind to be able to see it yourself.

Allison: Okay, so if you're thinking, then you're not going to be doing this.

Barry: Well, right, exactly.

Allison: The mind is busy, but if your mind is ... Yeah, okay, that makes sense.

Barry: I had a patient last week who came in from another practice. He was changing dentists and the condition of his mouth was pretty bad. He had a lot of hopeless teeth that had to come out, but he was really concerned. His main concern was fixing his upper six anterior teeth because they had visible caries. That was what he was concerned about. But the dentist he had come from was so adamant about taking out these hopeless teeth. Okay?

He knew those teeth had to come out but he didn't want to get them out first. He wanted to address his appearance first. Well not only did I do that, but as I was sitting listening to him, because I knew I was going to do that, I told him, I said, "You know, let's assume for a second that I was a fireman going into a burning building. The first thing I did was I would take a look at some teeth that I can save and some people I can save, and some people that, they had been consumed by the fire. Who would I save first? Where would I go first?"

Allison: Yeah, save the ones that can be saved.

Barry: Save the ones that can be saved. We'll come back, that's call triage. But I didn't use the word triage. I just described the building to him. But you can see the look in his eyes as I was describing the building. It was almost as if he were in the building himself. So we were in agreement right there that we

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were going to save the ones that could be saved, and we'll come back and pick up the other bodies later. You see?

Allison: Mm-hmm.

Barry: Because I understood and listened to him and described his mouth to him as if it were a burning building. Now we have that metaphor, both of us, to talk about as he comes in all the time, as his building gets cleared out.

Allison: Cool. Yeah.

Barry: Yeah, but some dentists don't feel that they can grab those metaphors right away, that they can tell those stories right away. There was a time that I couldn't either but I can say right now they come to me more readily. They come to me because I'm sitting very relaxed and listening to the patient. I am deeply involved with the patient, and you practice that. You practice listening. So when I say to a dentist, are you practicing dentistry or how do you practice dentistry?

Allison: [Laughs] You do it, you really aren't practicing like you said, you're doing it on patients in the moment. It's game time all the time.

Barry: It's game time all the time. And you're not listening, and you're moving from one place to another but you never practice it. So when you go to yoga and they tell you to do the triangle pose posture, for those yoga practitioners on the call, you may not do it right one day but you might do it right the next day. Then you might go backwards and forwards, but it takes practice to learn these skills. Listening is a skill.

I go to so many meetings, I hear the same thing all the time. Well you really got to sit and listen to your patients but I never hear anybody say, well how do I do that? How do I develop that skill? The answer is practice. You see?

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Allison: Yeah. Well I was thinking when you were saying that you practice listening, I was just imagining my little brain trying to, while the patient is talking, trying to figure out what analogy could I use? Or what story could I use? Or, you know, instead of really listening.

What you're saying, which I've heard many times before, that when we work, work, work, work, work, and then we take a break and we go on a vacation or we rest or something, that's when all the creativity comes. It's when we're relaxed and when we're not trying, right?

Barry: Let me ask you a question. When do you have your most creative thoughts?

Allison: Honestly, either when I'm exercising or I'm out in nature.

Barry: Okay, but a lot of people say ... and I agree with the exercising one. Okay? A lot of people say in the shower. People have a lot of creative thoughts while they're taking a shower. So I always wondered, why is that? When people take a shower in the morning, the number one, the survey said the number one answer of what they're thinking about is what they're going to do for that day. You see? The number two answer I won't mention on the phone call right now [laughs].

Allison: [Laughs]

Barry: Anyway, shame on you.

Allison: [Laughs] You started it.

Barry: Okay. Anyway, the point is, Thich Nhat Hanh, the Buddhist monk.

Allison: Yes.

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Barry: He talks about a word call savoring, when you savor something. An example he gives, he talks about eating a raisin and savoring a raisin. But he also gives the example of taking a shower and taking the time to not think about anything and just savor the shower. When you do that, you don't think of anything in the shower, that's when your creativity stirs, because your mind isn't on anything. It's on just savoring. When that happens, that's when your creativity is at its best.

If you can take those moments when you're doing your examination, pre-clinical examination, and talking to the patients, and then just relax and everything is on automatic and there's nothing else to think about, that's when your creativity will be at its best.

Allison: Yeah, you're saying be present. It's part of it for sure, right?

Barry: Be present and be relaxed.

Allison: And be relaxed.

Barry: Be present and be relaxed. In the book, and when I speak, I always talk about the pre-clinical examination and I always tell people to use improvisation to do a pre-clinical examination. I think I spoke about that on the last call. One of the things about improvisation and the technique is to have no agenda. To have no agenda. I don't know, and I was as guilty as everybody else, you have to run a practice and you have to produce a certain amount of dentistry and we're all production oriented. So we have an agenda when we go in to meet a patient. But what I'm suggesting is to have no agenda.

Allison: Yeah, I love that.

Barry: That's a little bit counterintuitive.

Allison: Right.

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Barry: But you're going to be hard pressed to find a lot of dentists who will walk into a room with a new patient without an agenda [laughs].

Allison: Well you know it's funny, we did a listening exercise with Mary Osborne and I remember thinking how hard it was, and we were just role playing. But it was role play with somebody that was a new patient and the question was, tell me about your health in general. I'm the person asking the question and the other person answering.

It started to feel like a real life situation. I started getting stressed out. I started thinking about the time, and am I going to get all the legal stuff that I need in order to be, you know, am I going to have all the medical history that I need in order to have the appropriate documentation? And be covered legally if something happened? I mean, it was crazy. She was just asking us to ask that open-ended question and let the patient talk. What we found, of course, was that most of them don't go ... The time takes care of itself and they actually probably covered more information than we found out when we had our printed form.

Barry: And you'll be surprised where the conversation goes.

Allison: Oh, yeah, absolutely.

Barry: That's the really interesting part. If you really want to have fun doing this, and I know Mary's exercise, I've been doing it for years. It's a great exercise, it's a listening exercise. But those are the rules of improvisation. Where one person asks a question or begins a conversation and the other person, the rules say that you cannot negate what that person says. You must accept it. Whatever it is, it must be accepted. Then you ask another question, going back, and then the conversation

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takes off. You know who does this better than anybody is people like Drew Carey, if you watch that show.

Allison: Oh, yeah. I love that show.

Barry: Even better, go watch old Seinfeld reruns. The conversations that occur between George and Jerry are incredible because they're improvising throughout the whole show. That's how I learned improvisation. I was watching Seinfeld for a long time [laughs].

Allison: Well I'm amazed that you're aware that that's what they're doing. I was not aware that is what they were doing.

Barry: Yeah, that's a presentation in itself, watching those shows. Everything is a presentation. Even your commercials on television are a presentation. Advertisements are a presentation. They're getting a message across, somehow. When you start, when you begin to see that whatever is out there is content presented in a matter to get a message across, then you start to do what I call a meta-analysis. So I analyze exactly what is going on.

It's like watching a movie and instead of getting caught up in the story, watch how the screenwriter actually put it together. Watch the structure behind it. There's a word that I use in my book a lot, the word "structure." Your presentations should follow a structure. I'm very big into, for people who read my book, *The Art of the Examination*, that was really all about structure. This way we don't get lost, it's not chaotic; we know exactly where we are all the time. Does that make sense?

Allison: Mm-hmm. When you were talking about the meta-analysis though, what I was imagining felt like you would almost expand back and look at the big picture, right?

Barry: Yeah, you just, yeah.

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Allison: But for some reason when you talk about structure, it feels like it's not the big picture, but I think it is. When you talked about it last time I got it, like, oh, this is like the little minutia of what we're saying and what we're doing. This is just a framework.

Barry: Exactly.

Allison: We need these pieces of the puzzle but they don't have to go exactly this way.

Barry: Mm-hmm.

Allison: Right?

Barry: Even as a speaker and you put a presentation together to speak in front of a group of people, putting that presentation is similar to putting a presentation together for a single patient in your practice. It has to follow a structure. When you go to see dental presenters, you can always tell the good ones from the ones who didn't put the time in because you can see the structure. You can see the story unfold.

I have my favorite dentists who presents and I am in awe of them because I walk out of the room after listening to them and I say, "You know, they're great because they're empathetic." There's a word. You know a presenter or a leader who takes the time to make sure that his message is delivered briefly and clearly and simply, is really showing empathy. Now that's a good insight. Because don't we talk about empathy all the time? Empathy for our patients? And our audience, because they're our audience. If we take the time to design a presentation and deliver it in a matter that they get, then I don't think you can be more empathetic than that.

Allison: Yeah.

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- Barry: You've been on the opposite end of it, haven't you? We all have.
- Allison: [Laughs] Yes, where you're sitting in the audience and going, "Oh, God kill me now."
- Barry: Exactly.
- Allison: How long is this lecture? [Both laugh] Yeah, oh yeah.
- Barry: Or, you've gone into a computer store or a store to buy something that's a little bit beyond where you are intellectually and you're just praying for a salesman to lead you through this.
- Allison: Yeah, like my husband and I went and looked at cars and I had a guy who was telling me ... you know, my personality style is not one who wants to know all the details of how every little thing works and it just wore me out. I was just like, I don't even know what you're talking about. You know what I mean? He just lost me. So can you speak to that? Do you tailor it to particular patients or like personality styles and that kind of stuff?
- Barry: I used to do a lot of that. Right now, I'm kind of presenting as if people know absolutely nothing about dentistry. I'll just play it by ear. If they want a little bit more, I can give a little bit more. I have this phrase I've been using for years, somebody commented on my blog today, one of the posts I wrote about being above the line or below the line, and believe me, I love the Pankey Institute. And I loved everything that L.D. spoke about.

One of the things that always bugged me was this "above the line" concept and "below the line" concept, because as dentists, as human beings, we tend to put people in a box. We say, "Well, that patient is above the line, that patient is below the line." You know, we go through our practices like that but

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somewhere along the line, I realized that most of my practice the patients were neither above or below the line, they were all on the line. The thing that would get them above or below the line was me. I was the one. I was the leader. You see?

So a dentist commented to me today that he agreed with me and that he said, "Too many dentists are bringing their patients below the line." They're bringing them down by not being able to educate them, motivate them, and teach them about better dentistry. I wrote back to him that I have this phrase that I've been using for years and that is this: people are begging to be led. People are begging to be led. People want you to take them by the hand and take them to a better place. That's a belief I have.

When I walk into a store or a car dealership, like you say, I want, I pray, that that salesperson is a leader and can take me to a better place. I pray or else I'm going to get confused. When you get confused you stop. You stop, you turn around, and you walk out. You get stymied. That is the importance of leadership. That's the importance of presentation and that's the importance in having empathy for your client, customer, patient, your audience [laughs].

Allison: I would love for you to take this, I don't know if we have time, but I'm curious, Barry, about two things. When I think of leadership, I think about leading yourself and then I think about leading others. In a dental practice, that would be your patients and your team. And then you can expound from there, your labs or whatever. But really specifically, you're leading yourself, you're leading your patients, and you're leading your team.

Can you say a little bit about leading the team and can you say a little bit, like over the years about ... I feel like you're a person with good habits and self-discipline. If you're writing books, I

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can only imagine just the diligence day after day of that. So I am just curious about how you lead yourself and how you lead your team and what you see as points with that.

Barry: Well I'm big fan of Peter Drucker and you can read, I think he wrote something like thirty-eight books. You can read Peter Drucker from here until tomorrow, but the one thing I got out of Peter Drucker is that all leadership comes down to one thing, self-development and self-management. I believe that, I believe that. If the dentist isn't willing to look at himself first and develop himself first, whatever it takes, then success is going to elude him. He's not going to be able to lead somebody else if he doesn't work on himself first. You know, I believe that you learn this lesson every time you get on an airplane. Don't you?

Allison: I don't, but you do. I want you to tell me about it.

Barry: You learn it when they say, "When that oxygen drops."

Allison: Oh, the oxygen mask, yes, yes.

Barry: You know? Put it on yourself first because if you're not breathing you can't take care of anybody else.

Allison: Right.

Barry: So I believe that self-development is number one. I wasn't always like that, I wasn't always like that. I had my issues in my life, everybody does. All saints were sinners, you've heard that before? All saints, but that's for another call maybe, okay? [Laughs] But self-development is foremost number one and in every aspect physically, mentally, emotionally, in everything, in every way, if you can get ... and I can go on and on and on about this, if you can get better, continuous, and never ending improvement.

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On the last call we talked to Doc Kazen, the job of getting better in increments, slowly getting better. That's how I've lived my life for the last, I'd say about twenty-five years, but not before that. Not before that. But twenty-five years ago, I started on this journey to self-development. I can say right now that the philosophy that was taught at the Pankey Institute was right in line with that, was right in line with that. That's why I gravitated to the Pankey Institute. That's what I went down there for because behind all the dentistry and the occlusion and everything else was this whole philosophy of L.D. Pankey of improving yourself.

Remember for those people, was know yourself, know yourself first, self-development. Know your patient. When L.D. talked about know your patient, he was talking about know your audience, know the other, you know? So if you're a speaker, know your audience. The third part about that cross was know your work. He talked about the technical and the behavioral work.

And the last part is apply your knowledge, apply your knowledge. Develop the habits. That's the key to change right there. It's not so difficult they have to wow us, it's not as much discipline, I'll go back to that about practice again. It's not so much about discipline. Discipline is hard work but it's about doing it enough until it becomes a habit. Once it becomes a habit it's no longer work anymore. You see?

Allison: Right.

Barry: Writing a book is a good example of that by the way, because you've got to get into the habit of writing almost every single day. I know Debbie Bush is on the call tonight and she knows how difficult that can be. It's not hard to write as much as it's hard to sit down at that chair every night. These blog posts are

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a good example of that. I wasn't consistent when I started the blog, it was work. But now I'm getting into this groove, it's becoming a habit. I wrote a blog post today and I left the office after I wrote it and I said to my wife, "You know, it only took me a half an hour to write that thing today. I must be getting good at this." You see what's happening?

Allison: Yeah, it does. It takes time. Yeah.

Barry: You see what happens after a while. You go through the discipline and then all of a sudden all of the little things that I used to worry about, they're not there anymore. So I just write. I create a system for myself, and half an hour. That's something that would have taken me an hour, an hour and a half. It may have even taken me two days to write because I wasn't sure about it. That's just, that's practicing anything, same thing.

Allison: Do you have to look for the ideas or are they just there?

Barry: I take a lot of showers.

[Both laugh]

Allison: I'm not even going to say anything about that.

Barry: Are there any questions?

Allison: Okay you guys.

Debbie: This is Debbie. One of things that came to my mind when Barry is talking about just being relaxed so creativity would open up and then a different way of saying something or telling a story would come to mind to help with the patient. And then you talk about a shower as time of creativity. One of the things I find helps with creativity with me is to just fiddle with something, is to just play with something, and not with intention. This can be a piece of artwork construction.

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I'm wondering if this could also happen for dentists when they sit down at their lab bench? Maybe. And I'm thinking, Barry, maybe in terms of your son, he is so creative. I know it's because he's fiddling and he's doing, I mean at least I think this is true. He's practiced so much at certain eye-hand coordinations and movements and full usage that when he sits down to do these things, his mind becomes free to be creative and he has great creative motivation and response. Does this make sense, Barry?

Barry: Absolutely, as a matter of fact, you've heard the expression: child is the father to the man. Have you ever heard that expression?

Debbie: Yes.

Barry: It was the title of a Blood, Sweat & Tears album thirty years ago, *Child is the Father to the Man*. When Josh first started learning the laboratory industry in ceramics, I sent him out to Chicago. He worked with Olivier Tric in Chicago. Then he went out to UCLA to work with Ed McLaren out there.

He learned the word practice. Where they are forced to get better through practice, they don't just ... so that's what he did and I watched him practice. And even when he came and started his own laboratory, he would stay extra and work on projects just practicing copying teeth, copying teeth, waxing teeth. Then I said, "Isn't it amazing we don't do that as dentists?"

So I learned a lot from that and I watch him get lost in the work. Then he is more creative, he's more creative than I am. I know that, well maybe differently. But he's creative in the use of the camera, in photography, and things like that. Some of the things that he's done photographically are way beyond my imagination.

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So yeah that all comes from freeing his mind and getting into the work at a practice level. But we don't do that as dentists. And we're not taught that in dental school either. You know, we're taught to get to the goal line as quick as we can.

Allison: Yeah, you're right, that we're not really taught that in dental school either.

Barry: Nope.

Allison: Because I was thinking that should be our place it seems like, to do that.

Barry: Yeah, dental education leaves a lot to be desired. I really have to say that.

Allison: I agree.

Barry: Yep.

Allison: I didn't have a horrible experience like some people do but I just think it could be a lot better and a lot more uplifting [laughs].

Barry: Well the whole idea with apprenticeship ... dentists should be made to work as an apprentice for a dentist and watch him rather than just go into a practice and just start practicing. Doing it wrong and continuing to do it wrong. I'm not only talking about the technical work in dentistry, I'm talking about the soft skills because they are even more difficult. Without having a role model to look at, how do they learn that?

Allison: That's awesome. That's true.

Barry: Yeah. I mean, in writing *The Art of the Examination* and writing *The Art of Case Presentation* I almost felt like a hypocrite. Because as I'm writing it, and I think what I wrote is valid and good, I'm just wondering how many people can learn these

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things out of a book. I don't know if you can. They tell me you can. But I don't know if you can.

Allison: I think you can. I've taken some things out of books and specifically things that are structural. You know, structure, like you're saying. I think you have to go back and, like I had to change my paperwork and you know put it into my practice in the way there was no way that I could forget it.

Barry: Well, but it's such practical stuff that I mean, I always use the expression you can't learn to ride a bike in a seminar.

Allison: Right.

Barry: You know? You got to go out and ride the bike, and fall down. Someone's got to pick you up and someone's got to show you, give you the feedback.

Allison: Well that's true I went to a lot of courses too, to learn a lot of that stuff hands on.

Barry: And then you go back and you practice and you may be doing it wrong.

Allison: Right.

Barry: Unless someone, you know, you did it right during the seminar but who's watching you now? You know?

Allison: Wow, yeah.

Barry: Well that's where practice comes in. That's where practice comes in. We have a lot of tools today where we can use, between Skype and showing other people. That's something that Josh does all the time with other technicians, throughout the world, as a matter of fact. They're always Skyping and showing each other their work and criticizing each other's work. That's an amazing thing to me. I'm almost jealous of that. Josh

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has a friend in Australia and one in Germany. These are world class technicians and they're constantly critiquing each other's work. That's amazing to me.

Allison: That is amazing.

Barry: Yeah.

Debbie: That goes back to, you can't practice in isolation.

Barry: Right, exactly, exactly.

Allison: Mark's on the line too. Mark Battiatto are you there?

Mark: I'm taking my notes. I was just listening and I know you read this book already, Barry, because you are always ahead of me a little bit, just a little bit. I was reading *Icarus Deception*, you know, the last Seth Godin book. You've probably read that, right?

Barry: Yeah, *The Icarus* ...

Mark: Yeah, *Icarus Deception*.

Barry: Right.

Mark: He was just talking ... I don't know, did you read that?

Barry: My favorite character, Icarus, he flies too close to the sun. He burns his wax wing.

Mark: Right, but the other part of it is that, they don't talk about, is that if you fly too low to the water you don't get enough lift from the air so you'll drown. It's like what you were just saying. If we're not going to practice and go into the self-development, then you can't get any lift.

I just like the way he presented the whole concept, that we're artists. When you own a business you have to look at yourself

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as an artist and we don't look at it that way. We look at it as we're a business owner. But an artist is constantly recreating, you know? It's a great book because it talks about, a lot of things in that book, about kind of where we are as a world and what we need to do to stay in a private care practice. I mean, he doesn't talk about private care, but really he does. Because he says if you want to not follow the masses, like you've heard, when you follow the masses you follow the asses. You've heard that before.

How do you stand in this difficult period where ... this can be one of the greatest times in dentistry. You read that book, you really start to see, wow I can stay, I can thrive in dentistry and still make it a great profession. I'm going to have to do things differently; I'm going to have to do what you just said. Practice and get into self-development and look at other things, improve myself and stretch myself. But I like the book, because just what you said, one percent a day, just take a little bit every day. Just one little thing each day. He says, "Do one thing you're scared of doing every day." I think you talked about it in the last call about that.

Barry: Seth Godin, I hope a lot of people are familiar with him, he's a great example of somebody who's promoting entrepreneurship throughout this country with so many books that he's written. He's the modern day Zig Ziglar. Actually that was his hero, he talks about Zig a lot.

For years, even while I was a dentist, I was always confused about the word creativity. I was just confused about it. I thought creativity belonged in the hands of an artist or a writer. I didn't know what that meant from a practical standpoint. But what Godin is talking about is that we're all creative. Creativity belongs in our lives especially for a leader or an entrepreneur, which is what we are.

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Mark: Yeah, right.

Barry: So we've got to get comfortable with that word creativity. It's not just about sitting down and drawing a picture or writing a song. It's about running your life and it's about running your business, it's about creating a life for yourself.

Mark: Yeah, we're all artists, even being creative in listening. Like you were talking about earlier, how can we be more creative in listening? What do I need to do as a person, as a dentist, as a human being, as a spouse, to be creative with my listening? Maybe I have to just look the person in the eye a little bit longer or put down my iPhone. You know what I mean? What do I need to do to be more creative?

Barry: One of my favorite authors is Atul Gawande are you familiar with him?

Mark: I don't know if I am.

Barry: He wrote a very popular book called *The Checklist Manifesto*.

Mark: Oh yeah, yep.

Barry: Yeah.

Allison: Yeah.

Barry: A lot of people, it's running through dentistry right now, and it is a very good book. But he did write a book before that, which is great as well. It's called *Better*. The whole basis behind that book, he is a surgeon, and he was concerned about making himself better. That's what generated *The Checklist Manifesto*. The fact is that he always wanted to get better. That's a very good book as well. Gawande is a very good writer. But again, getting better, how can we do something better?

Mark: Yeah.

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Barry: These blog posts, they run together, but I wrote a blog post this week about a kid who came in to my practice who was really, really bad periodontal disease and caries and we just had to get him cleaned up. So I sent him to the hygienist and he was in his second appointment and I walked by the room and I look in the room and I was curious to see what was going on.

I walked in and I said, "Terrance, have you been flossing?" And he says, "Oh, yeah, just what you said." I said, "Well that's all well and good, Terrance, but why do you have all that blood all over you?" He says, "What do you mean?" So I said, "Well let me see you floss." So I said to my hygienist, "Can we have some floss?" And she's about to cut off the floss and I said, "Oh, no, no, give me the whole dispenser." I handed him the whole dispenser and he grabbed it and he took off about, I know you know the answer, he took off about three inches, right?

Allison: Oh my gosh.

Barry: So he was getting it wrong right from the beginning. He was getting it wrong right from the beginning. My role, in order to create him into a better patient and make him better, was to actually sit down and teach him all the nuances in flossing. I had to train him how to floss.

Mark: You had to bring up the ghost of Bob Barkley to him, Barry.

Barry: Yeah, right. Well the point is, how many hygienists, how many nurses give instructions to patients without sitting down and telling them exactly how to do that? Then coming back next week, because I have a reminder to go back into the room when he comes in next week. Here's a phrase I used with him and a phrase I use with everybody nowadays: I'm going to check for mastery. I'm going to make him a master flosser. But I

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can't make him into a master flosser unless I check for mastery. I have to check him.

Mark: Yeah.

Barry: Or else he is not going to improve. Just like I won't improve at my yoga practice, or my writing, or my listening, or my questioning, or my storytelling, you see? You only become a master by slowly getting better every day. He has got to get better at flossing. I've got to help him. My hygienist has got to help him. We've got to sit and watch them do it. Because ultimately, he's going to save his own teeth. I'm not going to save them for him. That's what oral hygiene instruction is all about. It's not showing somebody something once and then forgetting about it. But that's creative instruction. That's creative teaching.

Mark: Yeah, and it takes energy. You have to be willing to give the energy. That's why when you talk about that book *Better ...* why don't people get better? Well it takes energy to get better and it takes energy to listen. It takes energy to improve. Unfortunately, many people don't. You've got to hang around the people that want to, you know like these calls. I always leave just more excited.

And that thing about getting better, Deb and I were in with a practice the other day and these two doctors, one's seventy and the other is forty, and they're father/son. The father still, at seventy, he listens like he's thirty. He's always looking to get better.

Barry: Is that in Birmingham, Alabama? We're you in Birmingham, Alabama?

Mark: No, no, no, but Deb, it was kind of interesting because Deb is always like ... her motivation is she has a fear of not getting

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better. So she's always wanting to get better. I think that's kind of like, I have that too a little bit. I don't want to not get better. It's almost a fear to drive me to continue on. I guess some people, I don't think that fear is a bad thing. I think it can make you look deeper. I think that you sometimes get [speaking at same time] ... yeah, go ahead.

Barry: Yeah, like I said. Everything you wanted to know about leadership, Peter Drucker said, "It's all about self-development." If you go back to *The Road Less Traveled*, it's another book M. Scott Peck, he talked about, he gave one word also. His word was laziness, which is what you're saying. It takes energy. But M. Scott Peck he talked about being lazy. Then he also used another word, he used the word called gumption. A leader had to have gumption. Just saying the word gets me energized. Am I right?

Mark: Well it's funny you said that word because that's the word that Godin says in his last book, you've got to have grit.

Barry: Grit? Whoa, whoa, whoa, see Seth Godin he steals everything. I know where he steals that from, okay?

[All laugh]

Barry: He stole grit from the people over at the University of Pennsylvania, Martin Seligman's group, and Angela Duckworth, the positive psychologist, she wrote a whole paper on grit. That's exactly correct. Grit is a word that's used in positive psychology.

Mark: Yeah, another great book is *The Art of War* about resistance. Have you read that one?

Barry: Sun Tzu.

Mark: It's *The War of Art*, I think.

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Barry: Oh, *The War of Art*, Steven Pressfield.

Allison: Yeah, *The War of Art*, yeah.

Mark: Yeah, great book because that's what we're dealing with, the resistance in ourselves, you know? Of not trying to improve and we have to fight that and want to better ourselves.

Barry: Yeah, *The War of Art*, that's Steven Pressfield. Actually, that book really helped me become a more disciplined writer. The one thing I remember about that book is, don't prepare, begin. Don't prepare, begin. You know? Or if you're falling, dive.

[All laugh]

Barry: Some of my favorite quotes.

Allison: Well thank you guys all for being on. Barry, I really appreciate it. I'm indebted to you and I always enjoy listening to you speak. You're a treasure.

Barry: Well, the show must go on.

Allison: Yes. Absolutely.

Barry: The show must go on.

Allison: Thank you for having gumption and grit tonight to come and do this for me. All of you who are here, obviously, we're preaching to the choir.

Mark: Way to dive in. Way to dive in, buddy. That's it, I'm diving.

Allison: All right, goodnight.

Barry: I'm glad I had the opportunity.

Allison: Yeah, thank you so much everybody, goodnight.

Mark: Thanks, Allison.

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