

**Ep #55: Increase Happiness, Fulfillment, and Income  
with Dr. Alan Stern**



**Full Episode Transcript**

**With Your Host**

**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: Dr. Alan Stern graduated Queens College, CUNY. I don't know how to appropriately say that. Do you say CUNY or do you ...

Alan: City University of New York.

Allison: Okay, and VCU school of dentistry. He has practiced dentistry for over 35 years. In his time as an associate and three decades in his own practice, Dr. Stern has stepped up, paid the price and learned success. He has studied at the Pankey Institute along with masters of operative dentistry, practice management, aesthetics, sleep disordered breathing and the oral systemic connection. He has lectured throughout his career on subjects ranging from occupational hazards of dentistry, depression awareness and suicide prevention, hiring and motivating a winning team. Most importantly he has learned the life lessons that enable him to use his knowledge to enrich the lives of all those around him, from patients to team, from aspiring dental students and now to the entire dental community. Dr. Stern, I know I have, and I'll call you Alan. I know I have sure enjoyed you, the conversations that we have. I feel like I've known you my whole life.

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Alan: Thank you. Same here. I think our mindsets are very, very similar. We've both learned a lot. We're both teaching a lot. It's just so wonderful to be here. It is truly an honor and privilege and I really do cherish this opportunity.

Allison: Absolutely, and you've earned it. You've well earned it. I actually want you to start by ... I know I just gave your formal bio, but as we spoke on the phone you shared a little bit about your story and I think, you know, everybody can hear about our successes but I think sometimes it's just as inspiring or even more so to hear about how you got where you are. I'd actually like you, if you don't mind to share a little bit about how you got here and why you're so passionate about the subjects that we're going to talk about tonight.

Alan: Sure. You know, sometimes I get up in the morning, I look in the mirror and I'm just amazed that have this passion and this energy on Monday mornings that I never thought I'd have, but how I got here is interesting. Let me just start out by saying, my life has been a perfect storybook, said no honest person ever. Adversity is a part of life, and once you understand that you're vulnerable and you embrace that, and use it as an opportunity to grow, that's a really, it's a point where magic starts to happen.

I opened my practice, dead cold in 1987 and struggled along the typical route, working outside the office a few days a week and building my practice, always looking for opportunities to grow and I made some good decisions. Going down to study at Pankey with people like Sandy was a really good decision, but I've made some other decisions that were not that

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good. My own decisions, which I own, which I made all by my very self and stuck to, created some adversity to me. They created financial adversity. They created practice adversity and they created, oh my goodness gracious, what in the world am I going to do adversity.

There were days when I woke up, not that long ago, and I'm thinking what is going to come of today? Will I be able to pay my bills? Will I, how many patients and I going to see? What are patients going to think? Will they accept my treatment? Oh my goodness gracious, what's going to happen? There was tremendous financial pressure, and some business things happened, which caused me to leverage myself a little bit. I found myself, I don't want to say being a victim because I'm not a victim, but I had some bad advice that I took, or should I say advice that was not right for me, given by people who either didn't understand my needs and wants, didn't want to know them or perhaps I couldn't express them as well as I could have.

Anyway, they were my decisions and I found myself in a hole and you know what, when the student is ready, the teacher appears. Some really phenomenal advisors came my way. I had to do something that was reality based, but it was quite a blow to my ego. A couple years ago I sold my house because the debt load hit ... The cost of living here in New Jersey is quite significant, and that debt load was hurting me terribly. I unloaded my house. My kids were out of school. We didn't need the school system anymore. We moved into a townhouse and we're living very comfortably, very nicely and all of a sudden I realized, hey, there's money in the bank.

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There's cash in my pocket and there's money now to save and invest in myself, in my practice, in my future, and all of a sudden, magic happened.

The adversity of looking at a financial challenge all of a sudden turned into a triumph over it. My practice grew. The pressure came off. I'm able to present to patients in a relaxed manner. I'm able to run around and learn what I want when I want with who I want. All of a sudden, instead of seeing ... We always see challenge. Let me just interject that. There's challenge every single day. My life is not a storybook. I'm saying it now, but it's pretty darn good. I'm capable of rising to my challenges now.

I'm able to practice the way I want. We're happier than ever. We're stronger than ever. I invested in, both my wife and I invested in nutrition and in personal training. I believe you saw the picture of what we looked like five years ago and what we look like now.

Allison: I did.

Alan: We've made some changes. The other thing we'll talk about a little later in the discussion is your physical health and what you put into your body tremendously affects your day to day attitude, on a biochemical basis and on a psychological basis. When I sold my house and left it, it was a very sad day, but intellectually, it was a day when I realized that I took reality by the horns and I dealt with it. It was a major turning point for me because, hell, no pressure. No pressure. The mistakes that I made are the mistakes that I made, that I owned, fully 100% and I reacted to them, finally in a rational manner. All of a sudden, things turned in a much more delightful direction, so life is good.

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Allison: Is there a difference ... I'm sorry. I was just thinking, was there a difference between what you were saying to yourself, like mentally? You felt like trapped? I mean obviously the debt load was a real thing obviously but, sort of tell me a little bit more about what was happening with you from a thought perspective before and after.

Alan: Perspective before and after. When blow after blow came to me, some of that stuff, I couldn't control by the way. There was a nervousness. There was inner tension that was resonating inside of me and once all that was unloaded, and once I saw that my personal and professional cash flow were doing well, everything relaxed. I was excited. I really am, I'm very pleased Monday mornings. My energy level is very high whereas Monday mornings previous, I had some real lows. My self talk went from what's going to go on today? How am I going to handle things? To let me get up in the morning here and let's see how much good I can do, because I'm quite capable of it. It was really dramatic.

Allison: I know you enjoy actually speaking about dealing with adversity. Is there anything, I mean obviously that's an example of that. Is there anything else you want to share about that story or any others as far as what we need to know about dealing with adversity or what you wanted to share about that?

Alan: Adversity is part of life. You know what? If we go way, way back to our training and some of us get the message in dental school that if 360 degrees of margin are not perfect, and every aspect of occlusion is not 100% the world is coming to an end. In fact, if those sins are committed, that we are inadequate. You know what? The exact opposite is true. First of

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all I am quite enough as I am. Number two, anything that comes up short in life is simply an opportunity to get better tomorrow. That's all it is.

There are very few mistakes. If you look back, if any of us look back at our careers and even our lives, I dare say that there are very, very few mistakes that we could make that are catastrophic. There are some, but by and large in a professional setting when we sit down with our very best effort to do something that we've trained for, that we've educated for, indeed we're going to be not perfect. In fact we're going to be not perfect 100% of the time, but every little flaw, every little imperfection is one opportunity you can grab and say hey, let's make that better.

We can indeed triumph over these things. Allison, you and I have talked about some of the examples I've run into. Is this an opportunity for me to talk about that a little bit, some of the people that I've encountered other than myself?

Allison: Oh sure, absolutely, I do want to say if you guys have any questions or comments, you can push \*2.

Alan: Absolutely. Push it. I'm ready, I'm ready. If there's something I'm missing here, because I can ramble, then please anybody out there, including you Allison, just direct me anywhere that you think I should go. I have a couple of really good friends. There are some weekends when I am asked to serve US military and I go out to different military bases and I have a ton of fun treating soldiers in the National Guard of various states. I've been up as far as Massachusetts, down as far as Arkansas, and mostly here in the New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania area.

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I ran into a wonderful young lady who is an assistant who came into Camp Smith up in New York at seven o'clock on a Friday morning. Happy, cheerful, chipper. She had just come in from being out most of the night, from retrieving her pets from her home, leaving her husband who had been shall we say less than honest with her in a marital relationship and also putting substances into his body that perhaps you and I would not introduce. When she decided that she would leave, he reacted a little bit violently. This young lady came into work after encountering that adversity with a smile on her face, with energy to work and never once, never once ... She talked about it but she didn't let it define her.

That stunned me. I had to give her a hug and I had to tell her that she taught me more than most people in an academic setting could ever have taught me. I thought if this person who faced an adversity that you and I could never imagine, she can live a life and pursue her happiness, why can't we? My very good friend, my dental school classmate was a guy named Roy Shelbert. Allison, do you know Roy?

Allison: I do. Yes.

Alan: Roy and I are very good friends. When you sit in a lab in a dental school with somebody for four years, you get to know them very, very well. Roy is a remarkable human being. Roy's story, hugely successful practice in rural Virginia. Roy was tried and convicted of Medicaid fraud back in '08, '09 and served 19 months in federal penitentiary. His career was you would think destroyed. Convicted felon, lost his licence and Roy took the lemons that God have him, turned it into lemonade because Roy has dedicated his life to helping others avoid the errors that he made.

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Roy is flourishing in the wake of adversity. He took that and he ran with it. Roy has a beautiful story to tell and the outcome of it all was incredible for him. Here's some people who have looked at things so severe, looked them in the eye and said, no I'm going on to live my life. When we as dentists come up against assaults on our self esteem, whether it is the complexities of practice or whether it is a case that didn't come out properly in our opinion or in a patient's opinion, yeah okay. Grow with it. Don't let it define you. Let it challenge you. That's what we do.

It's been the story of this part of my career, and once I learned that lesson, I have been able to do things I never imagined I could do. We look at the other side of that coin, the guys and gals who are listening who are Pankey folks, who knew the wonderful, beautiful, brilliant Andrea Beerman. She was a dear friend and an inspiration to me, a teacher to me, who unfortunately ended her own life at the age of 34. This was a loss to anybody who had even met her for five minutes, let alone got to know her.

The adversities, nobody will know the adversities that Andrea faced or the demons that challenged her, but we do know that dentists and doctors are number two behind cops and soldiers at risk of suicide. We must be aware of that. We must put it in perspective and we must take care of ourselves. If in fact we are looking at imperfection, adversity challenge, in such a way that we contemplate these things, we need to know that there's help and understanding on the other side of this. We need to take that help and bolster our health. It's critical because every one of us, every single one of us has so much to give.

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My story is overcoming adversity, real and perceived. My story is overcoming self esteem, real and perceived and understanding that I'm in this thing and that every single one of us who walks into a dental office is in this thing to do some good. Once we understand and once we understand that we are capable of changing people's lives, and once we understand who we are and what we are here for, and every one of us is here for something different, but when we understand ourselves and what drives us and what makes us happy, we can flourish. I can flourish at age 63. Anyone can flourish at age 33, and we can actually get excited over what we go to the office on Monday morning to do.

Allison: Do you want to talk a little bit about that Alan? I know you're really passionate about that, about people really knowing who they are and what makes them happy. Do you want to give us some insight into how you learned to do that or how you, when you share that with people, how you recommend they really get to know who they are and what makes them happy and what they're here for. Do you want to share a little bit about that?

Alan: Sure, and you know what? What we're here for may even grow and evolve as we get older and more experienced. Bear that in mind, that our mission, our purpose can change as we do. We all change. Our nature and our human nature stays the same all of our lives but what we're called to do may change as we develop as professionals and as human beings.

For me and what I learned from people like Sandy, this thing, this profession we have is about one thing and one thing only and that is relationships. For me having a relationship based practice where in the

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classic teaching of Dr. Pankey, know your patient, know your work, know yourself and apply your knowledge, is fundamental to who I am and who I want to be professionally. That may not hold true for everybody, but when I look at my life and I look at the high points of my existence, of everything that I've been through, my consistent theme for myself personally has been that love, that acceptance of others.

For some people it could be the perfect restoration. For some people it could be a financial pinnacle. For some people it could be a material conquest. For me it's a love of other people. It's doing what I can to make somebody's world better, knowing inside that that patient or that person in my life, whoever it might be is looking at me and really loving me for making their life better. If we examine ourselves very closely, very carefully in a nice quiet room, look at the highlights of our lives and see if we can't find a consistent theme, we can use dentistry.

The nature of dentistry is such that every one of us, every one of our practices is as unique as we are. Why can't we, every one of us, take our practice and mold it around our happiness, mold it around what we're driven to do. Do what we love and never have to work a day in our lives. When we establish a good relationship with ourselves first, understand our self first, go and find the stuff within our profession that makes us happy. There's a zillion things you can do in dentistry. Pick and choose what you like to do and grow it. Then apply it for the betterment of another person or other people. How can you lose? How can you possibly lose?

Having understood that about myself, I now know exactly what I got to do on Monday morning or tomorrow morning to make myself happy by

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making somebody else's life a little bit better. Then I got a whole batch of them coming in tomorrow. Wow. Who could ask for anything better than that? What profession gives you the opportunity to create a business, a practice, whatever you want to call it, with your fingerprints all over it for the greater good? We're still, we're not imprisoned by another other than our own perceived limitations.

Take it and run man. We can really do whatever we want in dentistry. We can open a mega multi-zillion chair clinic. We can open up a three chair high touch practice or anything in between, as long as we understand the challenges involved in it. As long as we live true to our mission and don't, not masquerade as one thing while being something else. Just be true to yourself and that's what happened to me, and all of a sudden magic happened. Magic happened. The happiness, the day to day contentment that my wife and I ... My wife is my front desk person. Can you imagine being with me 24 hours a day?

Allison: You're very brave.

Alan: I think, if I could read Sandy Parrot's thought on the other end of this online conversation, he's just praying for Fran, to stay sane through all this, but you know, we're content. We found that perfect point. I'm sorry, it's not perfect. That wonderful point professionally where we're humming and I'm not going anywhere. I'm liking this stuff. I want to keep practicing. I also want to tell people, I want to let my colleagues know, yeah you can do it. There's so much nay saying, there's so much negativism, there's so much, oh these consumer forces are coming, you better get ready or you're not

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going to be able to practice like this anymore much longer. You better get ready.

Yes, we got to change. We got to adapt to the changing marketplace, and we have to adapt to a changing mindset, but there is no reason why we can't retain our core principles in doing so. I know 30 years ago when I opened, advertising ... Only the bad boys were advertising, and it was a very crass thing to do.

Allison: I remember that too.

Alan: Oh my God, I didn't dare hang out an advertising sign and be, the rest of the dental community would shun you like a pariah. Well, in that respect the world has changed. You better have a website. You better have a website that reflects who you are. You better get your message out because the truth is, with advertising, every one of us has a lot of good to give, on whatever level we choose, but if no one knows we're doing it, how are we going to do somebody some good? In that respect the world is changed, but we can apply the beauty of dentistry and the beauty of our own individuality in our message. Nothing wrong with that.

Allison: Well, it's definitely to me, I feel like it's necessary because there's plenty of people doing it and if you're not ... You know, if you're one of the good guys and you're not advertising thinking if you build it they will come, because that's how I used to be. I had all the people I respected didn't think it was a good thing. There were some people in my area that were doing it that, I mean not to say anything bad but sometimes it's better

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for the patients if they have options. If they don't know you're there, they're going to go to the one that they do see all the ads for.

Alan: That's right. Let's jump to something, as long as you talk about the other guys. One of the traps we get into is looking at ourselves in relation to other people. You can't do that. Well you can do it. You can do whatever you want, but it's a dangerous thing to do. The perception of what other people are doing can really hurt you especially if your self-esteem is not ideal or optimal.

I come from a background and I'll bare this because it's fine and I'm not the only one who comes from a background of a little bit of shaky self-esteem. Going into dental school, some of the messages I heard, whether they were by intent or not, because I've reached a point where I know that most people do the best they can, whether they are parents, friends, teachers, dentists, patients. Most people do the best they can in the role that they're playing, but sometimes you get the message in school that you're not worth a whole lot.

When that happens you start comparing yourself to others who you think are better. The fact is that we are all, if I can be just a little bit humbly religious, we're all made in the image of God. Every one of us has a huge amount of worth and comparing yourself to somebody you don't know 110% is not fair to you. It's not fair to anybody else. When you look at the guy who can brilliantly and masterfully complete a roundhouse bridge from two to 15 flawlessly or so you think. When you look at a person who lives in a home that is supposedly bigger and more beautiful than yours or drives a

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car that supposedly is bigger and more beautiful than yours, you do yourself a disservice.

Because number one, you don't know what price that individual paid and number two you are not that other individual. You don't think like them. You don't work like them. You don't grow like them. You grow like yourself. One of the things that I learned, and it was a very hard lesson. I will admit that I learned that lesson well into my adulthood, but when I learned it, life got a whole lot better. That the only think I need to compare myself to is myself yesterday. If I'm better tomorrow morning than I was this afternoon, I'm doing fine. In professionally, psychologically, emotionally, financially, everything.

Let's remember that yes indeed there is competition in our field. Yes we have to be heads up. Yes we have to get our message out, but please don't look at anyone else and start to compare yourself. You're going to get caught in a dangerous rut. Just bet better tomorrow than you are today and you're going to be just fine. In fact you're going to flourish.

Allison: Yeah, it's even ... It's funny. There's somebody on the call here I was talking to yesterday and she's learning how to do more comprehensive dentistry and she was talking about, she's seeing things that she didn't see before. It's actually bringing up some guilt and shame about feeling like she's maybe done some supervised neglect over the years with her patients. I was just ...

Alan: Yeah.

Allison: It is so easy to beat ourselves up also.

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Alan: You know, when I got my first set of loops, I used to joke around and I used to say, and I tell patients ... I have a very, very close rapport with most of my patients. We have so much fun in the office. Some of the people who know me know some of the jokes that I tell chair side and they're absolutely cringing as I talk about that, but you know, when I got my loops I'd kid around with my patients and I'd say now I can see my mistakes up close and person.

They're not mistakes. You're better today than you were yesterday. Because you're learning comprehensive dentistry just means that your future's brilliant. Are you familiar with the Tucker study clubs? The Tucker [inaudible 00:28:40] study clubs?

Allison: I don't think so.

Alan: You want to talk about frightening. I was turned on to the late, great Dr. Richard Tucker was the gentleman who introduced exquisite gold, cast gold techniques.

Allison: Oh yes. I have heard of it. Yes. Yes. Now that you say that.

Alan: Here's little old self-esteem me, and I joined at the urging of a very dear friend of mine. She's a great dentist. She told me about Tucker and I wanted to be a better operator. The Tucker group is based on getting into a room with a dozen or so other people with a mentor, a world class mentor. I had the great privilege of learning with Dr. Warren Johnson from the Seattle area and we'd fly Dr. Johnson in, into New Jersey and we would prep. We'd bring the patient in. We'd prep them under the most ideal conditions possible and then we would photograph every step of our work

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and put it up on a big screen in front of all of our colleagues and have the master, Dr. Johnson, critique us.

Here I am, cringing on this. He would critique our work and I would feel like, oh my God. I'm so imperfect. I could have done this, this, this and this better. Every month, month after month, oh Alan you did it again. Oh my goodness, when are you going to get it right? One day, in the clinic, after a critique session, I went over to Dr. Johnson and I said, hey Warren, what does it mean ... All these little things happened. Tell me what the consequences, because I'm doing this stuff in my office without you watching over my shoulder. He said, "Well, your stuff's going to last 49 years instead of 50. You're doing fine."

It was the most positive slap in the face I could have received from a fabulous mentor because we're all doing fine. Because you're doing better tomorrow doesn't mean you did lousy today. You have another opportunity. Doctor, student of comprehensive dentistry, to go back to your patient and say, "Hey, you've been my patient for x number of years. We've been together a long time and we've done some stuff. How about if we take a step back and take a comprehensive look at you and see if we can't predict your dental future and see how you want to go about it?" Keep it positive because you're better today. You're learning. Embrace it.

Shame, shame is okay as long as you know how to use it. Keep it to yourself and embrace it and understand that it's an extraneous emotion that needs to be put in its place and instead use it as opportunity for growth. Guilt, take it from the son of a Jewish mother, forget about it. Just, guilt, my office is a guilt free zone. Allison have you had patients come into

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your office and say, "Gee doc, I'm ashamed of my mouth. I'm really ashamed to be here." Has that happened to you or is it only me?

Allison: Well they usually don't say it, but yes they have in so many words there is definitely quite a bit of shame and guilt in the dental [inaudible 00:32:10].

Alan: Yeah, and they've said it to me out point blank. I will either depending on who that person is, I'll either joke about it or I'll tell them point blank, this office is a guilt free zone. You, Mr. Or Ms. Patient are honoring me by asking me for help. Don't feel guilty about that. I'm humbled and honored because you're here. If I could apply that, and all of us ... None of us want our patients to be ashamed. Hell, if we shame them, they're going to run away from us. We won't be able to do them some good, so none of us is going to want our patients to be ashamed or guilty. Why should we want ourselves to feel guilty about anything? Same rules.

Allison: I definitely don't think we want to. I think it's probably very, an unconscious old neural pathway.

Alan: Yeah, and I'm hardwired for it. I recognize it, and we all get that little lightening bolt, that little feeling in our throat, that little rush of adrenaline in a negative way. We need to train ourselves, just as we've trained ourselves to recognize dental conditions in other human beings, just as we've trained ourselves to understand what our bodies are telling us, we have to understand what our brains are telling us and adjust to it. Recognize it and deal with it.

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It's very important. Don't feel guilty for going into your office and attempting to make another person's life better because you're going to do it right almost all the time on some level. Remember ladies and gentlemen, in our minds we are wired such that 999 compliments plus one complaint, we tend to think of one complaint. It ain't real. The reality is that for every one complaint there are 999 pats on the shoulder. Do it for yourself.

Allison: Yeah. We were talking about brains and the body and I thought that was going to be a good segue for you to talk a little bit about what I would call taking care of the golden goose, but you know ...

Alan: Brilliant lead in Allison. You're hired. Brilliant.

Allison: Well, I know that there were some things that we wanted to talk about tonight. You know we led into this by saying what dentists can do to increase their happiness, fulfillment and their income. I know that definitely you feel strongly that physical health and I think brain chemistry has a lot to do with it as well. I do want to just say if you guys want to raise your hand, press \*2. We're just going to keep going, but if you want to raise your hand, I will definitely call on you and you can ask or comment. Let's do that. Let's talk about that.

Alan: One of the big, the huge pieces in this for me is my physical being and what I eat, what I put into my body. It's too bad we can't put up that picture, but I'll share a story. My daughter is a two time all-American softball player. She won a national title with her junior college team back in 2010. In early 2011, they had a ring ceremony. My daughter is a very beautiful young lady, but dressed in softball attire, playing her best, she

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does not look like, she didn't look like a girly girl. She looked like a world class athlete, which she is.

What they did in the ring ceremony, they decaled the team bus with pictures of all the players and Tracy went ballistic because the picture was not flattering to her as an attractive young lady but very flattering as an athlete. It just didn't look good. Fran and I took a picture pointing at that picture of Tracy on the bus and we're laughing. I look at the picture and I'm 35 pounds overweight, and looked at my protruding belly and I said some things that you can't say on radio or probably on a stream cast, and I just ...

Allison: Not live anyway. If I could edit it out you could say it.

Alan: No. No.

Allison: I don't know when you're going to say it or i could beep over you.

Alan: I'm not going to ... Sandy Parrot knows what I was saying, but I'm not going to say it. This was totally unacceptable. That was also at a time when I was feeling pretty lousy about myself. I said, this has got to stop. I engaged a nutritionist and I went to the nutritionist and I told him, you know what I wanted. He asked me a lot of questions and then he read me the riot act. He just said if you're going to change you've got to change what you're doing. He gave me some reading to do. He gave me some guidelines and over a nine month period of time, I dramatically changed, A) what I ate and B) what it did for me. Since that time, I've refined it. I hit a pinnacle of 19% body fat from I think I was up to about 31. It's getting better. It's getting better.

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Then I engaged a personal trainer. I was always exercising but I didn't know what in the world I was doing. I engaged a personal trainer and my shape changed and my tone changed and holy moly, I feel good. Lost four inches off my waist, bought new clothes. People are looking at me, asking me what I did. My wife followed suit and we've both turned on to good health.

I am more productive now. I have more energy. In the office, out of the office, my attitude ... Part of my turn around absolutely had to do with what I was putting in my body, because it does affect the brain. I eat all day long but I eat good stuff. I am feeling really good about myself in every respect, having looked at that picture, having seen how vulnerable I am to becoming obese with all the concomitant risks that go with it, to understanding that vulnerability and doing something about it.

Life has changed in a most fantastic way. I have a friend, a friend of mine is a disability insurance guy. His mantra is if you had a machine that printed out money day in, day out, wouldn't you do your best to A) maintain the machine and B) insure it? Well yeah. Well that money machine is your body. That do-gooding machine is your body. That loving machine is your body and I mean that in loving humanity. Please this is a family show here. That machine is that approximately six feet of bone, water, muscle and soft tissue that you are given and the better you nurture it, the better you take care of it, the better it's going to function in ever sense of the word.

If you're going to practice dentistry and if you're going to preach health ... Now our dental school instructors in our own less than friendly way said, oh you better maintain good dental health or no one's going to

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listen to you. Better floss your teeth or else. You better do this or else. Well, you know if the better you maintain your oral health, yes, the better role model and example you're going to be for your patients. The better you maintain your oral health and your physical health, imagine what you can do for your patients when you're that way.

I had a shocking experience in the last seven days that brought me to tears. Two of my patients who I know very well ... One of them has been with me for 20 years. The other one's been with me for about five. One woman, a white morbidly obese gal is looking at me through this metamorphosis and she's asking me all kinds of questions. I led her down the sleep apnea route. We worked with that a little bit and then I laid it on her. She's about my age, and I said to her, if I can do this, why can't you? If I can get in shape, why can't you? We need you. We need you and you need you.

She came in last week. She went the bariatric surgery route because she was way out of control. She's down 60 pounds in a rapid period of time. She took 20 years off of her appearance. She looked 20 years younger and she's smiling cheek to cheek. I didn't do the surgery. I didn't teach her what to eat, but she looked at me and she said, "Alan you got me started on this. It's you that was the inspiration." I saved a life by saving my own.

A young man lost 40 pounds. More energetic, more productive, happier and he looked at me and said ... The guy's 20 years younger than me. He said you're my role model. You did it. I knew I could do it. In taking care of yourself, you add a whole new dimension to your practice. You use

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your credibility as a doc to do so much ... Improving someone's oral health and function is profoundly important. We all know that, but we could save a life at the same time as we save a smile or save an occlusion or save a joint, a jaw joint.

There are so many levels of benefit to doing this. I confess when I go out and do some of these things for the military, I'm doing dentistry seven days sometimes in a week. Yeah, so? I have the energy for it. It doesn't deplete me. It energizes me. I get a thrill by it and yeah I sleep at night but I can do this.

Allison: What are the three things anyone can do to protect their most important asset? I'm guessing sleep is one of them also.

Alan: Diet, exercise, social connectedness.

Allison: Okay.

Alan: That is from ... That's not my original thinking. I'm not that smart, but if you read the book "Younger Next Year" by Crowley and Lodge ...

Allison: Yeah, that's a great book.

Alan: That is a great book. What you put in your body is absolutely critical. The way you move that body around ... You know we are anthropologically hunters and gatherers. That's what we were built to be and on a cellular level, your body understands that it is purposed to move. Do your cardio. Your body also does not know how old it is when you're exercising. I can out workout most people 20 years my junior, easily. My muscles don't know

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that I'm 63 years old. I'm not going to tell them. I'm not going to give them that message. Biceps, you do not belong to a geezer. You've got work to do.

Social connectedness. We are a social species. We are tribal. Years ago, I had a rabbi change my life. One of the things he said to the congregation and I am sure ministers, pastors, priests, preachers will say also, if you go to church, if you go to synagogue, you will live longer. When I heard that I just thought, you know, what a crock. All this guy's doing is trying to draw people back so he can do whatever it is that a clergy person does, but the data is clear that if we have a well grounded piece of social connectedness, and religion is one. Any type of community that you may be in, whether it's an academic community, a Pankey study club, a book club, whatever it is that's a rock solid community.

I am blessed with a group of friends from college. We've been together for over 40 years. We are brothers and sisters in the truest sense of the word. That is Fran's and my consistent always there for one another community. You need to be rooted in something. It doesn't matter what it is, but social connectedness is an extremely important part of this vibrancy, this vitality that we all want to have. Don't be alone. Don't isolate yourself. Go out and participate in things. It will enhance your life as you enhance other people's lives. Very important.

The three things to protect that machine, that thing you have on lease for hopefully a very, very long time. Diet, exercise, social connectedness, and if you don't know how to do it well, get a coach. The best athletes in the world, the best actors in the world, have coaches. Hell the best dentists

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in the world have coaches. They're called mentors. If you want to learn how to work out, get a coach. Everyone here listening has some type of degree in biology, physiology, chemistry. We don't have degrees in nutrition. We don't know everything. Get over it and use that understanding that you don't know everything.

I got a nutrition coach. My wife got a nutrition coach. We know a lot but we don't know everything so fill that void in with world class knowledge when you can get your hands on it. If you can't find a coach, find a book.

Allison: There's something also about having to, not having to answer to somebody but there's an accountability or when you pay for something.

Alan: Yes.

Allison: Different than being accountable just to yourself.

Alan: You bet. It makes a world of difference and it's kind of like, the nutrition coach that I had was not the right one for Fran. He relates to people much differently. The nutrition coach that Fran took on is very right for her, just like you and I can't be everybody's dentist. There are some patients who are not going to be for us. Yeah, okay that's fine. You find the right coach for you and make your improvements. Figure out what do you want to make better tomorrow.

Instead of feeling inadequate because you don't know everything about comprehensive dentistry, you don't know everything about nutrition, you don't know everything about exercise, you may be a little bit overweight. You're feeling down and out. God forbid you're depressed. You

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don't know everything, so find a coach to improve you in that facet of your life that you want to improve, and then take that message out to the world and help everybody else.

Allison:     Awesome. You know, we are actually out of time and I really want you to share in closing, and if anybody has questions Alan said he would stay on, if anybody wants to you know ask any questions or make any comments but last time we spoke Alan, you shared with me what you called your declarative. Which you have ... I forget what was the setting that you created that in? It's like a proclamation statement, right?

Alan: Yeah. If I can shout out to one of the ... I have ... You know I've run into so many fantastic people in my journey and I am so lucky, so lucky to run into you, people like Sandy, people like Marilee Sears. God, I'm going to leave somebody out but I'll tell you I was with Mary Osborne who's become a very dear friend of mine and I was at a seminar with her and Joan Undershoots called "Leadership and Legacy." Having found my calling, having understood that I'm driven for something, I came out of this seminar and Mary and Joan asked us, all of us in this seminar, to just declare what it is you got out of it and what we learned about ourselves.

What I learned and it has ... None of what we've talked about by the way has anything to do with technical dentistry, which is really interesting. That all falls into place once you understand who you are. The declarative I made at the end of this thing was ah, let me continue to improve as a force for good wherever I go, no matter how excellent or flawed I may be. That's what I want to be. That is, that's where I'm going the rest of my life.

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Allison: Will you say that one more time?

Alan: Let me ... And this is mine personally. This is, everybody ...

Allison: Yeah, I love it.

Alan: ... Really needs to understand this for themselves, but ...

Allison: I just want to hear you say it one more time.

Alan: It's a good thing you didn't ask me to sing because then you wouldn't be asking me to repeat anything, and if Parrot is on the other end, he's saying or tell a joke. I know Sandy. But let me continue to improve as a force for good wherever I go no matter how excellent or flawed I may be. That's the theme ... Every morning I open my eyes, I have this written in every room in my office. I look at it, I look at it all the time because that is really the essence of what I've discovered of myself and what my calling is, both to my patients and to my colleagues and of course to my family and my friends, my wife, my children.

That's what I want to be and I'm not perfect at it. We make mistakes everyday and sometimes I'm pretty darn good at it. I just want to be better at it tomorrow than I am today.

Allison: Wow. I certainly experienced you that way.

Alan: Every one of us can do that. I'll leave you with ... This is not about me. This is about learning who we are as we grow professionally and understanding without any doubt that this profession is still a vehicle for us to make an incredible difference for every person we encounter, whether

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we're masters of comprehensive dentistry, aspiring masters of comprehensive dentistry or just beginning. Anywhere along that continuum, we have that ability. Don't lose sight of that.

Allison: Hold on, somebody's raising their hand. Hello. Who is that that's from New York?

Mike: This is Mike Lewis.

Allison: Hi Mike.

Alan: Hey Mike, how you doing?

Mike: Hi Allison. Alan, I think I was sitting next to you at Mary and Joan's conference when you said that.

Alan: You certainly were. Yeah.

Mike: I appreciate that. This was a great presentation you gave. Thank you very much.

Alan: Well, thank you Mike. I think I'm in a little bit better emotional condition than I was when I read that thing. It was really, as you well know, that was a very deep meaningful, intense three days and the end of it was incredibly emotional. Mike, what I appreciate also was the bond that we all formed and that we can ... I can't wait to get out there again.

Mike: Yup. It was great. Thank you for ... Hey, Allison thank you for asking Alan to do this. He's a new person I met a year ago, so it's been great. Thank you.

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Allison: Yeah, thanks for being on.

Alan: Thank you Mike.

Allison: Thanks Mike.

Mike: Yup.

Allison: All right. I re-muted him, but I think I'm going to go ahead and open the lines. Alan, I feel like we're ... is there anything you want to say to complete? Oh, Barry. Okay, I unmuted you Barry.

Barry: I'm unmuted. I wanted to make sure that Alan knew I was on his call. I got home in time. I didn't want to miss this, and a shout out to you Mike. I haven't seen you in a while. Yeah, great job. We spoke about a month ago I guess.

Alan: Yeah.

Barry: I was looking forward to hearing what you had to say. You were right on.

Alan: Barry, you're one of those guys that I've encountered in my journey. Your contribution to my profession growth is clear and unmistakable. I am so grateful Barry.

Barry: Well, thank you. Thank you.

Alan: Thank you.



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Allison: Barry, I'm glad you were here. We actually, Alan and I just were talking ... We were saying nice things about you the other day when we were getting ready for this call.

Barry: I thought I had a shiver up my spine.

Allison: You did.

Alan: Most of the things we were saying were nice Barry.

Allison: Yes, it's true.

Barry: Well, I wanted to let you know that I was here tonight and you did a great job.

Alan: Barry, thank you buddy. Thank you so much.

Barry: Okay.

Allison: Thanks Barry. All right guys. I'm going to unmute everybody. If anybody, you guys will all be open.

Alan: May I just point one other thing out. The people who've chimed in are people that I know very well and just are some of the most splendid people to grace this profession and have shown me an awful lot, but if you guys, if a veteran's out there. If you know people who need this message, I'll talk to anybody. I really will. I want people to know that we can do a whole lot of good, especially those who think that they're burning out as I thought so, as I thought a few years ago. We can do this and we can really influence our colleagues to make their lives better and in doing so make patient's lives

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better and make dentistry better. We really can do this, so if my message would be helpful to anybody you all know or if there's anyone listening where I've struck a chord, find me. Because I'll talk to you.

Allison: Do you want to share your email or phone number or anything?

Alan: Contact at alansterndds.com. A-L-A-N S-T-E-R-N. Contact at Alan, A-L-A-N S-T-E-R-N D-D-S .com. I'll be really glad to speak with anyone. My office phone number, 732-493-8030. Fran will answer the phone. She'll know exactly what the call would be coming from. I can help. Let me help. All right.

Allison: Thank you.

Thanks for listening to *Practicing with the Masters* for dentists, with your host, Dr. Allison Watts. For more about how Allison Watts and Transformational Practices can help you create a successful and fulfilling practice and life, visit [transformationalpractices.com](http://transformationalpractices.com).