

November 15, 2021

As I assume my new role as GLAO President, I cannot help but reflect on the many changes our profession has seen. Alan Watts (philosopher and author) said, "The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and **join the dance.**"

Organizations, professions and industries must continually change in order to survive and to improve. This requires individuals and organizations to respond to change. Two years into the pandemic, we have seen the evolving science with a novel virus and responded to it better than our non-scientific counterparts. The AAO was instrumental in helping us change to navigate through the pandemic. How do you view change? Do you lament and fight change or do you join the dance? Technology has changed the way we practice orthodontics and has allowed for direct-to-consumer products. The demographics of orthodontists are changing in terms of how we practice and who we are. Governance of the AAO, the way we do things, is also undergoing change.

In our practices, technology has greatly expanded, from our computers and software systems and scanners, to the increase use of clear aligners and in-house fabrication of clear aligners. The technology has become much more complex and expensive but it has simplified and improved many of our processes. Where are you in this journey? Are you fighting it or joining in? The AAO and constituents have responded by providing lectures and resources to help you on your way.

The demographics of orthodontists is not the same as when I started to practice 31 years ago. In the 1980's, there were about 10% female dental students and very few non-white dentists. Now the number of female orthodontic graduates is slightly higher than the male orthodontic graduates along with a greater number of non-white graduates. You know that men are from Mars and women from Venus but together can make great teams. Diversity of thought can make all of the difference in responding to change and finding good solutions. Working with people who think differently than you can be uncomfortable but forces you to solidify your ideas, defend them against differing ideas and forces the group to consider other options. The AAO has responded by creating an Inclusion and Engagement Task Force, A Special Committee on Women orthodontists, a Winter Conference on the Evolution of the Orthodontic Practice and creating avenues for community. Your constituency is encouraged to use the newly created tool kit to encourage inclusion and engagement. How do you view this change in demographics? Are you angry and lamenting this change or are you including and engaging the orthodontists who may be different from you?

Thirty years ago, Dental Service Organizations (DSOs) were just starting to test the waters and the majority of orthodontic residents either bought into a practice or started their own. Due to the tremendous increase in student debt, an increasing number of graduating orthodontists are joining DSOs rather than buying a practice or starting their own. We need to understand the influence student debt has on the choices new graduates make and encourage them to consider joining or buying a practice when available. If finances allowed, then most new graduates would love to have their own practices. Are you giving up the idea of selling your practice or hiring an associate or are you looking for solutions to help yourself and the next generation of orthodontists?

Governance at the AAO and at the constituent level is evolving. In the past, Trustees were elected or appointed by constituents. The flaw in that system was not taking into consideration

what type of person was needed to add differing perspectives or experience to the current board. A few years ago, the House of Delegates voted to add up to three At-large Trustees to the Board to add to the diversity of thought and expertise of the board. We now have 2 At-large Trustees on the Board offering different perspectives. Since 2013, the AAO and constituents have been discussing changes in governance and constituent reorganization. Coming full circle, we now have two constituents who have merged and the other constituents are in the process of considering mergers so that we may have a total of four or five constituents instead of eight. The constituents are finding it more difficult to get sponsor support for meetings thus placing a strain on the finances of constituents. How will you respond to those changes? Will you engage and help make the process work or will you create roadblocks to their success?

The AAO and your constituents are responding to change and are providing resources to help you in your changing environment. We should all be grateful for the hard-working volunteers who are looking out for us. My hope is that you will “plunge into change, move with it and join the dance”.

Yours truly,

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2021-2022 GLAO President

“It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change”.

Charles Darwin