



Unleashing Your Potential Weekend:

Empowering, Developing and Supporting Dental Hygiene Leaders

By **Carol A. Jahn, RDH, MS**

The weekend of November 13, 2009, brought together more than 40 dental hygienists from around the country for ADHA's Unleashing Your Potential (UYP) leadership development weekend. For the 2009 conference, 22 individuals were selected to attend along with members of the ADHA Board of Trustees and Governance Committee. Unlike past events, such as the Constituent Officer's Workshop (COW), the application process was opened up to all current and potential leaders at the component and constituent levels.

The conference was changed to better reflect ADHA's vision of "creating a community for all dental hygienists and investing in their future," said Pam Quinones, RDH, BS, ADHA vice president. "Leadership is about being a part of a community and leading the community forward. What better way to invest in our members' futures than to offer a leadership weekend? The UYP weekend helped member attendees improve not only their ADHA leadership skills, but personal skills as well. As an association, we want to empower, support and develop our members, and this weekend was an opportunity to do that."

Empowerment

According to some of the UYP attendees, simply learning about the conference was empowering. "The first time I read about this conference, I wanted to go," said Laurel Bleak, RDH, president of the Los Angeles, Calif. component. "It sounded like something that would be an interesting opportunity, and I just wanted to be open to where it might take me. I never had thought much about my leadership style before attending UYP. The programs presented made me realize that for me, it is a collaborative and an organic journey. Keeping your eye on the desired outcome is important as well as being open and fluid to how the path might change along the way. It opened me up to notice what you might see along the way, the challenges you may need to work through, and how you might change during the journey."

Angela Pavicic-Demko, RDH, currently president of the Ohio Dental Hygienists' Association, had heard other past leaders from Ohio rave about ADHA leadership weekends. "They all said how great it was; that they learned so much and met the most wonderful leaders from throughout the country," she said. "I wanted to be a part of this experience. The information at UYP helped me personally with leadership, even more than I first thought. I wrote a lot of things down, and I review the information several times a week. This way it sticks in my head so that when I am dealing with certain situations or individuals, the words will flow out."

For Janeime Asbury-Brown, RDH, of Georgia, the empowerment process began at the Center for Lifelong Learning (CLL) at the 86th ADHA Annual Session last June. "My journey to UYP started when I attended my first annual session this summer in Washington, D.C. I enjoyed meeting dental hygienists from all over the country who seemed genuine and honest and importantly were open to talk with me about how they became involved with ADHA. Even though I am a member, I was uncertain of how ADHA could help me personally as an African American. I had never seen any representation of minorities—specifically African Americans—and I wondered about their policy on diversification. At annual session, I was able to speak with several minority women who have in the past held officer positions. Their passion was like a spark for a deep-seated desire to become more involved. I was inspired, and it was at that moment I realized that my membership was going to be whatever I made it to be. Sometimes, as a minority, you don't always want to be the trailblazer. Now at board meetings in Georgia, I make it a point to speak with people I don't know. UYP gave me that confidence. Most importantly, I learned that if you want to change the way something is going, you can't wait for someone else to change it. You have got to move forward and make it happen yourself. UYP also gave me the ability to push my comfort zone boundaries to be able to communicate with those that initially may seem to be very different than me."

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Development

Part of the weekend's learning focused on enhancing communication skills, especially when dealing with conflict. Pavicic-Demko said that she found she is dealing with people and situations better as a result of UYP. "When a person or a situation was difficult, I used to just ignore it," she said. "I deal with it now. It's healthier. Assuming things can create many negative feelings. Learning to speak up a bit more on my part has been difficult for me. But I realize if I want to grow, I needed to learn to do it. You get nowhere keeping your thoughts and ideas to yourself."

Bleak also found the communication piece helpful. "One of the best parts was the mixing of ages and experience," she said. "At the workshop, we were able to discuss some generational differences and issues that may lead to conflict and how to work them out. I can use this information and my experiences at the meeting to help reach out to our newer grads."

For Asbury-Brown and Pavicic-Demko, UYP motivated them to want to help members feel more included in state activities. Pavicic-Demko said, "I am going to try and make sure that our board meetings have a friendlier atmosphere for board members and guests. I will work on some improvements in mentoring new board members and helping our students."

Asbury-Brown wants to develop an atmosphere of greater transparency at board meetings and their state house of delegates. "It is so easy to get caught up in being busy making sure all of the technical things that go into hosting an annual session are working. In the end you, wind up appearing unapproachable. I will work with my board to help them interact with the general participants and to make sure that everyone knows we have an 'open door' policy at all of our events. The more transparent we are, the more approachable we will be."

The confidence to seek out new opportunities—particularly new leadership roles—was also an outcome from UYP. Bleak reports that she is planning on attending her first CLL at the 87th ADHA Annual Session this June in Las Vegas, Nev. Since attending UYP, she is now considering the possibility of participating at the national level in the future. That goal is shared by Pavicic-Demko who wants to learn more about serving on an ADHA council or committee. Asbury-Brown notes that one of the most important outcomes from UYP is that she has moved from thinking to acting on her goals and moving forward. "I stepped down as component president and ran successfully for president-elect of the state association," she said. "Currently, I'm looking for ways to get my fellow Georgia hygienists plugged in and included on a state level. I speak personally with new graduates about the importance of their association and the benefits of the support group that they can have. I am also the editor of our statewide newsletter, in which I place a blog about the importance of becoming a member of the ADHA and GDHA."

Support

In alignment with helping developing leaders feel supported, a conscious decision was made to include ADHA Board of Trustees and Governance Committee members in the conference. The ability to meet so many incredible leaders from across the U.S. and learn from them was echoed by many. Pavicic-Demko was thrilled to have the opportunity to spend time with ADHA President-Elect Caryn Solie, RDH. "Going on a walk around the city with Caryn Solie, I was able to get to know her a bit, hear her thoughts and learn about some things she would like to do with her year as president of ADHA," she said.

Asbury-Brown shared a room with ADHA District Trustee XII Susan Savage, RDH, BSDH, and said, "My roommate was the best of them all. She shared her personal life stories with me, a stranger, and let me know that I am not alone in facing the challenges on how to accomplish enriching my profession while balancing family life at the same time. Sometimes when you see



Attendees, left to right: fifth row: Sandra Tesch, RDH, MSHP; Victoria Richards, RDH, BS; Catherine Ellington, RDH, BS; Amy Grant, RDH; Brenda Rischar Wiesen, RDH; Melissa Deyo, RDH, BS; Laura Blanton, RDH; Melody Hanus, RDH; and Eileen Clodfelder, LDH. Fourth row: Mollie Kieffer, LDH; Susan Savage, RDH, BSDH; Laurel Bleak, RDH; Kathleen Inman, RDA, RDH, BS; Cristina Bordabeheres, RDH; Norine Dowd, RDH, BHSC; Brenda Platz, RDH; and Jennifer Vega Lamb, RDH, MPH. Third row: Rita Sheaves, BSDH, RDH, PhD; Valoree Newton, RDH, BS; Carol Jahn, RDH, MS; Stacey Bahre, RDH, BS; Jill Grassmick, RDH; Janeime Asbury-Brown, RDH; Carole Danielson, RDH, MPH; Ester Ball, RDH, BS; Sandra Stramoski, RDH, BS; and Diana Saylor, RDH. Second row: Helena Tripp, RDH; Angela Pavicic-Demko, RDH; Elizabeth Nies, RDH, AS; Louann Goodnough, RDH, BSDH; Dinah Auger, RDH, BS; Sharon Zastrow, RDH; Melanie Swain, RDH, BS; and Marge Green, RDH, MS. Front row, Ann Battrell, RDH, BS, MSDH; Caryn Solie, RDH; Lynn Ramer, LDH; Sonya Greco, representing sponsor GlaxoSmithKline; Pam Quinones, RDH, BS; and Hope Garza, RDH, BS.

people in leadership positions, you tend to think they are almost superheroes, so to speak. But we all have a lot in common. The wealth of knowledge and experience that was within the group made me feel like I had a new group of supportive sisters all who encouraged me to not limit myself and to step out in the forefront of ADHA life. I have found many challenges to enhancing my professional life. Not many people in my life understand my drive and passion to progress forward. The group that attended UYP made me feel as if I weren't alone."

One of the things that Bleak liked was that there were a variety of dental hygienists in attendance. There were new grads as well as very seasoned hygienists, hygienists of all ages with different generational career expectations, clinicians and educators. She said, "Whether you are just out of school, starting out in leadership, or are a seasoned leader, you will benefit from attending UYP. There is a lot of opportunity for mentoring. You will meet interesting hygienists and have an opportunity to learn leadership skills as well as having time to personally talk with ADHA staff and officers. Whether you are thinking about taking a leadership position or are a veteran leader, you can take something home from this workshop."

Final Thoughts

"The best part of UYP was seeing all the leadership potential out there," said Quinones. Elisabet Rodriguez-Dennehy, one of

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as well as our body of knowledge as a result of increased evidence-based research. Through collaboration, the mouth reconnects to the body and the health care team becomes a totally inclusive entity.

Consumer demand will have a direct impact on the career paths that evolve for the dental hygiene profession. The shortage of dentists in the United States, coupled with the increasing population, will serve to further increase the need for the utilization of dental hygienists for preventive and therapeutic services as part of an interdisciplinary collaboration. There will be an increased demand for restorative providers to fill the void of too few dentists. The advanced dental hygiene practitioner will serve to meet this need.

As dental hygienists, we must seize the opportunities to fully realize our potential. Whatever career path you choose, membership in your professional association is key to getting your voice heard and becoming a player at the table as the game of health care reform unfolds.

Tammi O. Byrd, RDH, is the CEO/clinical director of Health Promotion Specialists, a state-wide school-based dental sealant program in South Carolina. She practiced clinical dental hygiene for over 20 years prior to starting her business. Byrd is a past president of ADHA and currently serves as one of two delegates for ADHA to the International Federation of Dental Hygienists and as chair of the South Carolina Regulation and Practice Committee. She is also active with the American Association of Public Health Dentistry.

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the weekend presenters, agrees. "The potential for leadership in the conference was outstanding," she said. "It was filled with what I call the 'typical' women—diligent, smart, committed, interested and eager to decipher the mystery regarding leadership and how to make it work for them." Quinones found it obvious that the attendees really wanted to be there, and their enthusiasm was contagious. Rodriguez-Dennehy agreed: "The group wanted to squeeze every minute left of the conference! I felt a lot of authenticity in the room and a real need to discuss issues that could lead to better understanding and collegiality."

Quinones noted it as well. "I observed that the attendees quickly warmed up to one another and how safe and comfortable they seemed. You could see the different personalities and leadership styles begin to work together. As I reflect back on the weekend, the message I took away was leadership is about teamwork, working with all types of individuals and generations. I will be promoting UYP everywhere I go. It is an opportunity not to be missed."

Carol A. Jahn, RDH, MS, is a lifelong ADHA member who has had many roles and elected positions including ADHA treasurer. Currently, she is ADHA's representative to the International Federation of Dental Hygienists and serves on its Governance Committee. She is employed by Water Pik, Inc. as senior professional relations manager. She can be reached at cjahn@waterpik.com.

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