

The Self Actualized Dentist

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ABSTRACT

This article delves into the concept of the self-actualized dentist, exploring the integration of professional fulfillment and personal growth within the dental field. Drawing inspiration from Maslow's theory of self-actualization, this study examines key characteristics that contribute to the development of self-actualization in dentistry, along with its correlation to patient outcomes. By examining the journey of the self-actualized dentist, this research sheds light on the transformative potential within the dental profession.

Keywords: Maslow's theory; Self-actualized dentist; Dentistry

Discussion

The pursuit of self-actualization, as defined by Maslow, entails becoming the best version of oneself by maximizing potential and striving for personal ideals. In the context of dentistry, the concept of the self-actualized dentist signifies achieving professional excellence while fostering personal growth. This article investigates the factors that define the self-actualized dentist and explores the positive impact of this approach on patient outcomes.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SELF-ACTUALIZER:

In his pyramidal theory of the hierarchy of needs, Abraham Maslow expanded this idea into the context of a worker's motivation and placed self-actualization at the top. He conducted research on various notable individuals, including Albert Einstein, and proposed the following traits as those of an actualized person:

- An acute sense of reality, awareness of others and their circumstances, and the capacity for good judgment.
- The capacity to understand people's motivations and weaknesses and to accept oneself and others for who they are. The ability to make decisions without prejudice and affected only by one's own critical and independent thought.
- The aptitude to form opinions independent of cultural norms and opinions and to do so critically and independently.

- A natural desire to stay loyal to oneself and resist cultural pressure.
- A natural drive towards leaving an impact on society that will outlast oneself by pursuing a "mission" that is greater than oneself.
- Having a few close, intimate relationships rather than a myriad of superficial connections.
- The ability to see the beauty of life and have 'peak' experiences of unspoiled joy at simple things with a sense of the ridiculous and the ability to laugh at oneself.
- The ability to feel whole as an individual without the need for someone to complete oneself.
- A keen sense of empathy and sympathy for those around and for humanity, at large⁹.

Self-actualized dentists possess innate qualities that set them apart. They exhibit empathy and a drive to contribute meaningfully to society, emphasizing a mission greater than themselves. Their ability to cultivate deep and genuine relationships surpasses superficial connections. Additionally, they find joy in life's simple moments and experience peak moments of unspoiled joy. These traits contribute to their holistic development and fulfillment.

How Can a Dentist Actualize?

Professional Self-Actualization:

Continuing Dental Education: The self-actualized dentist invests in continuous learning, embracing novel techniques, technologies, and research findings. This commitment ensures the maintenance of high-quality care, fostering personal and professional growth. By pursuing excellence in their field, dentists not only enrich their practice but also derive satisfaction from their contributions to oral health.

Positive Practice Environment: Creating a positive practice environment is essential for fostering self-actualization. Self-actualized dentists cultivate a collaborative and supportive workplace culture that encourages open communication, mutual respect, and professional growth among team members. Such an atmosphere enhances job satisfaction and contributes to the dentist’s overall well-being.

Personal Self-Actualization: Achieving personal growth is paramount for the self-actualized dentist. Balancing professional responsibilities with personal interests nurtures mental well-being and guards against burnout. A harmonious balance between professional responsibilities and personal interests leads to improved mental health, job satisfaction, and overall quality of life.

Philanthropic Self-Actualization: Beyond individual growth, self-actualized dentists recognize the significance of contributing to their communities. By giving back through volunteer work, mentorship, or educational initiatives, they amplify their impact, leaving a legacy that extends beyond clinical practice.

Self-Actualization Action Framework⁹



SELF-ACTUALIZATION AT THE WORKPLACE:

Tools for Career Growth: One-on-one conversations with dental practitioners can help clarify professional development goals and career progression objectives. Mentors can be assigned to help guide and support growth both with young interns and established clinicians. Hospitals can even institute programs that will allow high performing part time consultants to get absorbed into the system as full time doctors.

Internal Training: Organizational trainings and seminars led by subject-matter specialists in specialized fields can help aid dental practitioners in improving both hard and soft skills including teamwork, public speaking, and communication.

Actualizing the Self: Embracing self-actualization involves the harmonization of these dimensions: professional, personal, and philanthropic. By intertwining these facets, dentists create a holistic approach to their careers, enabling them to flourish in their roles and as individuals.

Why Should the Dentist Self-Actualize?

Physician burnout is a pressing concern, leading to cynicism, exhaustion, and a sense of ineffectiveness¹. Studies show that dentists are not immune to burnout, with the pandemic exacerbating stress levels². The consequences of burnout on dentists’ mental health and physical well-being are alarming, contributing to a higher prevalence of stress-related disorders and emotional illnesses^{3,4,5,6}.

CORRELATION BETWEEN EMOTIONAL STABILITY AND PATIENT OUTCOMES: Research underscores the link between emotional intelligence and patient satisfaction⁷. Dental students with higher emotional intelligence scores exhibit better patient satisfaction ratings. The ability to manage stress, adaptability, and overall emotional well-being positively influences patient experiences. This correlation highlights the far-reaching impact of the self-actualized dentist on the quality of care and patient outcomes⁷.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This author has created and published a “Self-Actualization Action Framework”, in conjunction with a “Self-Actualization Checklist”⁸, which can assist in connecting the factors from the Checklist to “Actualizing Tools” that hospital and clinic managers can use to engage with dentists to help them actualize themselves.

360 Degree Relationship Guide: Counseling sessions with licensed psychotherapists can assist in addressing clinic disputes and learning more about the personalities and working styles of coworkers, managers, and team members. Psychotherapy and counseling sessions with hospital/ clinic managers and the other regular employees on the team such as hygienists, technicians etc. will help in better team and relationship building.

Employee Innovation: Internal competitions to cultivate creativity can motivate dental practitioners to develop creative answers to clinical and operational issues. The establishment of internal clinician think tanks in the hospitals will encourage innovation. Dentists should not be forgotten in initiatives like this. They should be encouraged to contribute their ideas.

Social Engagement: Establishing clubs for hobbies and sports within the organization will aid in promoting social contact and cohesion. To encourage introverted dental practitioners to open up and create social relationships, peer and mentor support groups can be formed.

SELF-ACTUALIZATION IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Work-life Balance: As dentists are prone to occupational injuries like neck pain and muscle stress, they should be encouraged to take regular breaks between patients just to relax. The clinic or hospital should have accommodating physical spaces for exercise and relaxation. The part time consultants should not be forgotten at social events and family days at the hospital, so that they too can bring in their relatives to meet their co-workers and learn about the work that they are doing. This would improve organizational loyalty and citizenship behavior by improving team bonding.

Developing Judgement and Empathy: Through training seminars on interpersonal abuse and toxic relationships, dental practitioners can acquire judgement in understanding individuals. Educating them to recognize dark personality traits like narcissism and megalomania in themselves and others while teaching them to build emotional intelligence and empathy will build greater emotional intelligence across the hospital or clinic and improve patient care and outcomes.

Self-actualization related to Society and Environment

Encouraging dental practitioners to volunteer for a range of environmental and social initiatives that personally interest them may prove useful in helping them bond with other healthcare workers with similar interests within the system.

SELF-ACTUALIZATION IN KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION

In order to properly prepare exceptional dental practitioners for career advancement to management roles in hospitals, funding should be provided for courses that enhance transferrable skills in critical thinking, critical reading, numeracy, etc. To promote a culture of learning, dentists should be encouraged to do courses and seminars on topics that individuals are personally interested in, even if they are not linked to their clinical work. This investment by the hospital or clinic would encourage dentists as it demonstrates that the organization has faith in their abilities.

SELF-ACTUALIZATION RELATED TO THE SELF

Developing Self-Esteem: dental practitioners can be encouraged to attend motivational speaker-led workshops and seminars to help them develop their sense of self-worth. Counselling sessions with qualified counsellors can address and resolve issues related to low self-esteem.

Developing Cultural Sensitivity: Increasing cultural sensitivity involves educating dentists about various cultures and holding workshops where they can learn about the history, cuisine, lifestyles, and customs of their coworkers' and patients' cultures. Lectures on how to converse with people from different cultures by being aware of slang, cultural allusions, and verbal and nonverbal cues can help create bonds within the team and improve patient satisfaction.

Developing Humour: Creating clubs for humour and laughter throughout the hospital is a great way to bring out confidence in workers. Encouraging a sense of humour by posting jokes in the

company newsletters and putting up posters with funny stories in the treatment rooms and on the intranet can contribute towards a positive work environment. On the other hand, educating the doctors about the hazards of crude, unpleasant humour can significantly decrease opportunities for misunderstandings and disagreements.

Developing an Appreciation of Beauty and Simple Pleasures:

The hospital or clinic should encourage the creation of nature groups and regular employee outings to picturesque beauty locations to appreciate nature. Establishing art displays and promoting frequent trips to local exhibitions and galleries will foster a sense of and appreciation for beauty. These activities can also serve as team building exercises to promote cohesion between the doctors and support personnel.

Developing Fitness: Fitness development involves giving dental practitioners access to hospital gyms and other exercise facilities as well as training in diet and lifestyle choices.

Developing Spirituality: Clinics can invite lecturers and experts to discuss spirituality and religion in order to develop worker spirituality. Encouraging the doctors to ponder existential issues and delve into spirituality would serve to help them discover their life's purpose and to get inspired to pursue it.

Using the aforementioned framework and checklist, hospital and clinic managers can endeavour to attract and engage the best dental practitioners by giving them the opportunity to achieve self-actualization while on the job.

CONCLUSION

The journey toward becoming a self-actualized dentist entails aligning professional excellence with personal growth and contributing positively to society. By embracing intrinsic motivation, fostering deep relationships, pursuing continuous learning, maintaining work-life balance, and giving back, dentists can transform their careers and lives. The self-actualized dentist model not only leads to greater fulfillment but also enhances patient care and outcomes, thereby elevating the dental profession as a whole.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no conflict of interest.

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