

Silver Linings

By Dr. Kelvin P. Mah



Even in nature, life cannot thrive without hibernation. Seasons come and go, and with them bring unfettered growth, followed by a state of rest and hibernation before Mother nature begins humbly yet purposefully sprouting new life again.

This year has taught me that you cannot have continued growth without experiencing some period of inactivity or rest. My business was closed for three months, a quarter of a year!

Upon reflection I see now that I was moving through the world prior to Covid in a very accelerated way. This period of hibernation led me to reflect on what I was doing, how I was doing it, and most importantly, why I was doing it. I was left with this intense feeling of anticipation of future growth and change. A metamorphosis, if you will. Just as nature morphs as it emerges out of hibernation and enters a new season of prosperity and life.

In my eyes I see the challenges of the past year in a positive light. Challenges force growth, it forces change. Both are necessary in bettering myself, my business, and the services that I can provide to my patients. By facing the challenges that Covid-19 has presented, it gave me the opportunity to do just that.

When I focus on addressing the recipients of my actions, whether being my own team or my patients, I see them almost as one of the same, as my family. The realization dawned on me that I needed to provide this family with some key elements in order to go forward in these uncertain times. First and foremost, my focus was on reassurance. Specific guidelines in the industry were changing on a daily basis and I saw my role as the consolidator of the diverse information. I was tasked with the job of presenting this information in a matter that made sense for my team and my patients. From a safety perspective, there was a lot of fear in the unknown and this made relaying information in a clear and concise way extremely important.

The next thing I needed to provide, which supersedes everything else is making sure that there is a high degree of trust. Not just between me and my team but between me and my patients as well. I realized that for me to garner and earn that trust, it was integral that I provided a forum where I could listen to comments and concerns from those around me.

With all of my newsletters, which I regularly sent out during our closure, there was always an invitation for my patients to contact me personally, whether by text or by call, which planted the seed for many thought provoking conversations. What started out as conversations surrounding safety concerns relating to Covid-19, branched into something much more personal and offered me a glimpse into the lives and families of my patients. What I learned about those conversations was the importance of listening. Not with the intention of formulating a response, but to listen with an open heart and empathic mind to really understand what that individual is trying to express. When you open up a path of communication that comes from a place of genuinity, that intent leads to meaningful conversations every time. It speaks to what we are all going through and my personal journey of discovery to realize that there is so much more to what we do than simply the healthcare side of things. Fundamentally, my work is about the human connection.

Reassurance, trust, delivering on my mission statement, all of these things would be futile if I didn't use them as a vehicle to strengthen my relationships. For me, the efficacy of the connection between patient and provider or between team members is completely dependent on the purity of that connection. I imagine it almost like an electronic connection. Where you have rusty wiring, you can have a connection but it is poor. The message may come out the other side fragmentary. Or, I could have something that is pure gold with a connection so strong that it leads to this conduit of ideas and intention, that is transmitted instantly with purity and thought. This pause in time has given me the opportunity to take a step back and refine my connections. Upgrading my wiring to gold, ensuring clear and unjaded connections between my team, my patients, and myself.

With these new connections, my team was comfortable to share their concerns with full transparency and without fear. This resulted in a strengthened and united team before we even set foot back in our office.

The relationships I have built with my patients and my team have filled me with a strong sense of gratitude these past months. The privilege to deliver my services to my wonderful patients has always been my driving force for doing what I do. I have the best patients in the world, and they afford me the opportunity to connect with different people every single day. We share this exchange of intention, ideas, and emotion, making these people more than just patients, but a part of my family.

One of my biggest lightbulb moments during this time has been the realization that my mission statement “Enriching lives one smile at a time”, was more true than I had ever thought, because actually each smile enriches my life more than I can put into words.

I realized if I used my mission statement as a reference point or a hallmark for governing my behaviour, it would always lead me down the right path. It provided me with a lighthouse during a storm. When my ship or business felt lost or off track, I would look at my mission statement as my beacon and it would always take me home to port. That metaphor has been really reinforced during these times, and has made me grateful to have such a solid mission statement that I not only believe in, but live and breathe as well.

Enriching lives means I am enriching mind, body and spirit, at least I have that potential, we all do. I realized I could help people just by having an open conversation and allowing another

human being to fully express themselves. That's one of the most wonderful gifts another human can provide to someone else. If I provide that opportunity for someone to speak and express themselves, I feel like I am helping them and I can carry their insights with me every day, expanding my views and understanding of the people around me. It just so happens that we are in this place called a dental office where we provide this service called dentistry. But that's not what we're doing. That's just part of our tool kit. We form connections, in doing so we build reassurance and trust. We honour our vision and feel gratitude and privilege to be able to deliver on those things. It's beautiful.

Each and every interaction that has been a result of these strange times has further tightened my team and aligned us deeper into our patients' lives. The silver lining of these times is that we can use it as a vehicle for transformation to strengthen the relationships that matter most to you.

By hearing my story hopefully it can inspire you to think about your own challenges and identify areas of growth in your own life, your own teams, and your own practices. Perhaps we can grow together.



Dr Kelvin P Mah is driven to “enrich lives, one smile at a time.” He believes in helping people – not merely treating problems – and takes a dedicated, personal interest in the health, wellness and happiness of each individual patient. His award-winning Smile City Square Dental practice reflects an organic and zen-like atmosphere of warmth and relaxation. He is also a graduate of UBC’s prestigious Dental School and is an instructor with the Frontier Institute, which offers postgraduate programs in advanced cosmetic dentistry. Learn more about Dr Mah and discover the transformative possibilities of modern artisan dentistry at www.smilecitysquare.com, and visit Smile City Square Dental on Facebook at www.facebook.com/SmileCitySquare.