

# President's Column

## LEADERSHIP IS EARNED NOT GIVEN AWAY



*Dr. John Diggins*

During the past year I have spent time reflecting on the subject of leadership and the future of the dental profession. In searching for a new executive director, CDA and its corporate members examined in depth the type of leadership that would be required to steer us through the next decade. And in devising a new CDA strategic plan, the leaders of organized dentistry looked closely at the forces and sources of change facing our profession.

This strategic plan was formally adopted at the interim meeting of the board of governors in March. During that meeting delegates broke up into small groups to analyze and suggest changes to the plan. The active involvement of these people ensured that numerous modifications were brought to the draft plan. Those present came away with a heightened appreciation of

the challenges and the opportunities facing the profession in the years ahead.

The concept of leadership is central to the new plan. Our vision for the future of the dental profession is captured by the phrase "Leadership in oral health care for Canadians — ethical and contemporary, caring and responsive." This is how we want our profession to be perceived by society in the year 2010. During the March meeting, great emphasis was placed on the leadership role played by the individual dentist in the delivery of oral health care. The maintenance and development of this role is the number one issue being articulated to me by dentists across the country.

Our profession faces a clear choice about how we deal with the forces of change. Stated in the extreme, we can either be passive and let these forces dictate to us, or we can all take a true leadership role and shape the environment of our profession so that we achieve our vision for 2010 and beyond.

To chart a different course for our profession, I believe every one of us has the responsibility to exercise a degree of professional leadership that may not have been called for in recent years. It was okay in the "good old days" to allow a few to manage the affairs of organized dentistry. But with the winds of change gathering speed, we have to mobilize as never before.

I have seen statistics recently which indicate that some dentists choose not to join dental organizations because they see no personal benefit in supporting them — they feel they can go it alone. This sense of alienation from the mainstream of organized dentistry is extremely worrying and has the potential to sap the energy of the profession and its organizations.

Society has allowed us to decide who joins our profession, what they learn in

dental school, who gets disciplined, and how we practise. Formerly we were able to conduct all of these vital affairs without outside scrutiny; now we share these responsibilities with others for the sake of external accountability.

To create a preferred future for our profession, we have to rise to the challenge of leadership, individually and collectively. Think back over your life and recall those people who you looked to for leadership — the role models that have inspired you. I'll bet you see people who are trustworthy, who had your best interest at heart, who provided a vision of better times ahead when you were uncertain. Many of the attributes of the great leader are those of the ideal dental professional.

I believe there is a wealth of leadership talent among dentists that can be better harnessed to generate the preferred future for our profession. This leadership can be exercised in small ways every day in our practices and in how we touch the lives of members of our communities. I want all Canadian dentists to think and act as leaders. As leaders our actions and words will reflect not just on us as individual dentists but on the profession as a whole. If we think and act like leaders, we will continue to be recognized as such by society.

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Association*