



Dr. Don Friedlander

Dentistry's New Collaborative Culture

I recently finished reading *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*. This book explores the globalization of the economy, in particular how the burgeoning of technology, the instantaneous nature of communication and the increasing portability of people and ideas are having a profound effect on the world of business. It then presents a case for mass collaboration and offers pertinent examples where collaboration by businesses and professionals across disciplines has resulted in success in dealing with these global pressures.

The book immediately brought to mind my own experiences as a member of the Tripartite Task Force — a group created at CDA in 1999 to examine the roles and relationships between CDA, the corporate members and the dental regulatory authorities. The recurring theme of the task force recommendations was that the Canadian dental profession required increased and improved collaboration. I still firmly believe that the successful future of the profession lies in embracing a truly collaborative culture.

What does it mean to be truly collaborative? According to the authors of *Wikinomics*, staying globally competitive involves a combination of understanding the environment, accessing global human capital as required, and creating wide alliances among a broad range of industries or associations. In dentistry, we still have a tendency to limit ourselves to internal capacities and vertical structures. However, the level of nimbleness, flexibility, creativity and connectedness required to compete in today's environment is rendering this approach obsolete.

Dentistry needs to embrace collaboration to adapt to the challenges of globalization. As the world shrinks and global changes have more profoundly local effects, we need more collaboration, both within the profession and with external partners, to stay competitive and rel-

evant. We must engage with these partners and co-create solutions, ultimately delivering more value for our members. These new partners could potentially include government, public groups (e.g., First Nations' or citizens' coalitions), regulators, educators, industry, patients and even potential competitors.

As a single association, CDA simply does not have the internal capacities to adequately manage the future challenges on its own. We should be looking to create alliances across borders, disciplines, cultures and sectors while also providing a platform for participation. Collaboration means more than being transparent and accessible; rather, it means being an association that is completely open to outside ideas and human capital.

I believe we can achieve greater success by opening our doors and welcoming input and innovation. This will allow our association to access new scientific and technological advantages rather than trying to perform all the required research and tasks on our own. The real promise of embracing collaboration is that the collective capacities, wisdom and resources created through horizontal networks of associations can generate much more value for our members than one association working on its own.

The proposed new membership and governance model for CDA is a significant move forward in signalling a new era of improved collaboration within organized dentistry. The new model will allow your associations to identify and solicit wider input on professional issues that are most important to corporate members, specialists, students, academia and individual dentists. There will need to be constant communication between national and provincial committees, along with the sharing of knowledge and purpose. This new direction at CDA promotes the coordination and combining of resources with our corporate members to provide the best service to the profession.

During my time as CDA president, one of my key roles will be to support a paradigm shift in who and how we serve. I would like CDA to be an agent of collaboration, using this new way of doing business to serve and support the corporate members, to act as a facilitator and advocate for national issues, and to keep Canadian dentistry informed about the national and international knowledge environment.

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