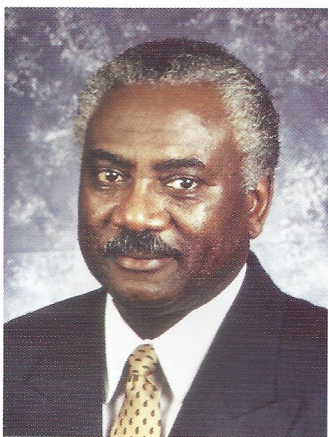


vs. Knowledge

By Wilbert Smith Jr., CDT
As told to JDT



As our industry moves to one that emphasizes manufacturing, there is a temptation to focus only on production ability when hiring a new technician. Many laboratory owners are training new technicians in only one area, such as waxing. That technician is unable to reproduce what happens before he gets the restoration in this assembly line laboratory or what happens after he has completed his part of the fabrication process.

The truth is that the ability to produce quality restorations in a timely manner rests on a technician's knowledge base. If you think enough of a person to employ them, you need to invest in them. You have to give them time to go to continuing education courses or help pay for those courses. That applies even if the new technician attended a formal dental technology program. Laboratory owners complain about how little these graduates can produce when they start, but what the owners fail to comprehend is that the technician's production ability will increase at a fast rate because of their knowledge base.

Without education, a technician has to learn on the job. With on the job training, the technician can only learn as much as their trainer wants them to know. That doesn't end up helping anyone much, because the owner may limit what they teach the technician because there is an insecurity about training new technicians too well and then they will become your competition.

Our industry is changing. It seems the days of the technician who could take a restoration from start to finish are ending. The industry should value education more, but it doesn't because it all boils down to production. There are two things that all truly successful people in the dental laboratory industry have in common: formal education and knowledge. Their education could be from a formal dental technology program or continuing education courses. Wherever the source of their education, once they have it — it is theirs forever.

The industry will be hurt when we are no longer able to produce full technicians who can fabricate a restoration from beginning to end. We will lose the pride we have for being dental technicians. Soon working for a dental laboratory could become just like working for General Motors, the technician would only be one more person on the assembly line.

I have truly enjoyed my 45 years in the dental laboratory profession and my 35 years as a Certified Dental Technician. I really believe that the CDT program has a lot of merit and will only improve in the years to come. I think that the only change I would make if I had to do it over would be to get my undergraduate degree much sooner in my career. The dental laboratory career field has been very good to my family and me and I would encourage this career for any young person to enter. **JDT**

About the Author

Smith served as a dental technician in the military and private commercial laboratories in addition to owning laboratories in Texas and California. He is planning to retire from the laboratory business in August.