

LIVING YOUR STRENGTHS

# MY JOURNEY TO DSO “FRACTIONAL” CHO (CHIEF HYGIENE OFFICER)



By  
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It was the first day at my new job. Of course, I'd had new jobs before, as a clinically practicing dental hygienist. I had also spent years as a dental hygiene and full practice consultant. I was no stranger to new situations.

I accepted this job as the Director of Dental Hygiene for a large (100+practice) DSO (Dental Support Organization). Yikes – a DSO, really? I was dubious and overwhelmed. At this time, the concept of “onboarding” did not exist. So, there I was, at the corporate headquarters, wondering what to do with myself. I don't think the company knew what to do with me either. They just knew they needed hygiene help. And I felt like a deer in the headlights, getting a drink from a firehose!

My career started out as a junior in college. I already had completed two years of general studies at Florida State University. Having decided on a career in Dental Hygiene, I wanted a school that would offer me a bachelor's degree after I completed another two years of hygiene curriculum. The Medical College of Georgia was my answer with its new, three-year-old, hygiene program. I was one of a total of 13 students. We all graduated and passed our boards.

I was very lucky to land a great first job. It was in the most prestigious suburb of Atlanta, Buckhead, where the governor's mansion is located. I was also lucky to have,

as my dentist, the chairman of the prestigious Atlanta Hinman Conference. It was here that I garnered the chairside experiences that:

- Prompted my interest in, and lifelong quest for, effective communication soft skills.
- Provided the content for my first article, published in the (now extinct) Journal of American Dental Hygiene.

I went on to practice clinically in a variety of dental practices. I hated the boredom of prophys all day. I loved the extremes.

- I loved Perio and would rather do SRPs all day long. At one practice, I enjoyed a remarkable hygiene assistant, and we developed a remarkable periodontal program.
- Utterly surprising, I also loved pedo. Answering the request for temporary help from a friend who was a pediatric dentist, I said, “OK, but only for a few days, because there is no way I'm working with kids all day!” Well, days turned into a few years. Clinically pedo prophies are a snap, nothing challenging there. What I was shocked to learn about myself was that I loved the behavioral challenges of working with children. My dentist friend was amazing in his

communication skills, and I became so as well.

During all of my hygiene practices, I also yearned for something more creative. So, I experimented with all kinds of classes and hobbies. I took photography, Chinese Brush Painting, gardening, cooking, and writing. I also took a class in Ikebana, the art of Japanese floral design. I fell in love with that and have become a lifelong student, achieving Master Level. I also started writing (non-dental) and getting published in a few magazines and Atlanta newspapers.

Then I made a dramatic departure – figuratively and literally. I sold everything and moved to Hawaii - no, not for a job, but for love. I moved to paradise, on the Big Island of Hawaii, to be with my then-boyfriend (now husband of 30+ years). My boyfriend/husband had built our house on the ocean, and he built me a very cool outdoor writing desk on a screened-in porch where I wrote travel articles.

I also drove regularly to the other side of the island to study tropical floral design at Kona's most extravagant and beautiful hotels. Together we grew many varieties of tropical plants and flowers. I also worked diligently on my suntan and afternoon cocktails.

You may be wondering if I practiced any hygiene there. The answer is no. I even let my license expire. I do NOT recommend this! Always preserve and protect your license(s) for which you worked so hard.

As much as we loved paradise, family and personal issues called us back to the mainland. Back in Atlanta, I had a thriving business creating fabulous floral designs for special social and corporate events for years. Then that pesky dentist friend kept bugging me to help him. (What! You let your license expire! Are you crazy?!) License reinstated, I temped for him. I also ran into a future dental mentor who said I would make a good consultant. To which I replied, "Me? Never!". Never say never.

What I eventually discovered was that I love mentoring as much as I love flowers. And my mentoring took me in many directions. I worked with a wonderful team of hygienists developing hygiene coaching programs. I practiced hygiene and full-practice consulting. I honed my speaking skills, speaking nationally and internationally (Australia, New Zealand, Colombia). I authored the books and coordinated programs:

- Selling Dentistry – Ethically. Elegantly. Effectively.
- Meetings Make Money – Productive Dental Meetings for Best Dental Practices
- Bloom – Nature's 5 Steps to Cultivate the Power of Your Potential



I learned:

- Corporate structure
- How to work with various corporate departments
- New business skills
- How to embrace, assess, and implement new technologies
- The power of networking

Having the ability to supervise and oversee hundreds is a bit like having your own personal laboratory. I could quickly determine what worked and what didn't, giving me almost instant results which enabled quick course corrections. I was accumulating a body of knowledge that would prove successful, repeatedly and predictably.

I have seen the DSO – good, bad, ugly. I'm happy to witness, and contribute to, the ethical evolution of group dentistry. Group dentistry/DSOs are here to stay. I know the foundational pillars that make them ethically successful, starting with a healthy and comprehensive hygiene department. So, my next new business venture is offering my services as a "fractional" CHO (Chief Hygiene Officer).

As badly as emerging DSOs need a game plan for growth, a Hygiene Director/Leader/CHO is often just not in their budget. Fractional C-level executives, typically former executives, provide their expertise for a fraction of the time and cost of a full-time chief officer.

As a fractional CHO, I'll utilize my past DSO experience to teach young DSOs how to create a hygiene department

that is profitable, patient-centered, consistent, and scalable.

While I will still continue my case acceptance coaching (Selling Dentistry), this next evolution of fractional DSO CHO is a logical next step in fulfilling an important DSO need. I'm thrilled to get started.

If this sounds like a zig-zag career path, it's because it is. The Japanese have a mythical saying that evil spirits travel in a straight path. Hence the Zig Zag Bridge is a charming and popular feature in Japanese gardens. While the bridge may seem to meander meaninglessly, it does indeed get one from the beginning to the destination, albeit the stops and turns in direction. Each zig or zag delivers the person on the path to a different visual perspective.

The Zig Zag Bridge has, in many ways, reflected my path in my life, and my career as a woman in dentistry. While many folks know early on their path/career/ life direction

and stick to it, my path has criss-crossed through various passions, paradigms, plans, purposes, and places. And while my various "distractions" at the time seemed like a different path altogether, in retrospect, my zigs and zags have all contributed to where I am today and where I want to go tomorrow – my destiny as a woman in dentistry, and as a DeW.

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*About the author:*

*Janet Hagerman is known as THE Case Acceptance Coach for dentists and their teams. An international speaker, author, and consultant, Janet is the author of numerous articles, podcasts, webinars, and the signature books and programs Selling Dentistry, Meetings Make Money, and BLOOM. Janet is known for helping others to cultivate and bloom the power of their potential.*

*\*See my DeW article Feb 2017 My Zig Zag Path <https://dew.life/2017/02/03/my-zig-zag-path/>*