

BUILDING A BETTER YOU

Grow Your Gravitas

What makes a person stand out from other attendees at a continuing-education course, a dentist's open house, or a convention reception? In most cases, it's gravitas.

Gravitas is a Latin word meaning stature, demeanor, experience, and dignity. Successful leaders have gravitas. Political commentators often use the word because politicians without gravitas lose elections. Leaders without gravitas lose their followers.

Last year, I spoke at the Yankee Dental Meeting and met Dr. Jean Furuyama at one of those beautiful, albeit huge, receptions. Jean was memorable. She discussed dentistry, her experiences in Japan, and her goals for women dentists with excitement, poise, and eloquence. Jean, your AAWD president, has gravitas.

In your life, gravitas means self-confidence, self-knowledge, and self-discovery. It's a major component in allowing you to lead your dental practice successfully. Whether you have just celebrated your 20th anniversary of practicing dentistry or this is your first year out of dental school, as female professionals, projecting your gravitas is vital.

The tough news is, there is no "Gravitas Fairy Godmother" who goes around sprinkling gravitas powder on your brain, heart, and soul. You can't get a "Gravitas Certificate" online or by attending a half-day continuing-education course.

The encouraging news? Gravitas is not a function of age, fame, money, or your job title. Gravitas is a function of awareness plus time. According to the *New York Times*, President Bush is a current example of gravitas growth. In the Oct. 12, 2001, editorial titled "Mr. Bush's New Gravitas," he is described as "more confident, determined, sure of his purpose, and in full command." In essence, Bush has grown his gravitas since ascending to President of the United States of America.

My gravitas journey began when I stopped teaching communication courses on the college level to pursue my dream of speaking professionally. I understood that I needed to speak about what I'd earned the right to talk about via my occupation, background, and education. However, to be memorable, I needed to stand out. I needed gravitas.

I am a native Texan. I am a first generation American. I am a second generation Holocaust survivor. I am related to Albert Einstein.

I realized at the beginning of this journey that this unique legacy would probably be great for my speaking career. But I was not ready to talk about my legacy from the platform. I lacked gravitas.

For several years I took notes in my brain, my heart, my soul, and my journal. I watched phenomenal speakers. I attended conventions and worked with speech coaches. I observed colleagues whom I wanted to emulate and those I did



Karen Cortell Reisman, MS

As president of Speak for Yourself®, Ms. Reisman provides keynotes, workshops, and consulting. In the past 12 years, she has spoken for many dental associations and is a visiting faculty presenter at The Pankey Institute. She works with dentists around the country to help them improve their communication skills. Contact Ms. Reisman at karen@speakforyourself.com.

not. I sought advice from peers I respected. Over time, more of “me” showed up on the stage. My legacy is now a key part of my presentations.

It may not take you years to grow your gravitas, but it does take time and awareness to gain stature, demeanor, experience, and sense of self. You don’t have to put this on your “to-do” list for tomorrow. Just keep this quest in the back of your mind as you move forward.

Here are some ways to grow your gravitas:

- * Continue your education by reading, training, and staying current in dentistry.

- * Write in a journal and record your growth.

- * Be active in your dental associations and attend the meetings.

- * Observe with purpose. Find those who do and don’t have gravitas and figure out why.

- * Get feedback from your mentors and peers.

I welcome you to this new column in *Woman Dentist Journal*, and I look forward to sharing information on communication, leadership, presentation skills, and team building in future issues.