

## The Marching Band Called 'Should'

**D**o you wake up to the sound of the "Should Band" stomping through your psyche? Here are some of the lyrics: *"I should do perfect dentistry." "I should have called Aunt Lil last week ... hell ... last year." "I should let Mary go; she doesn't fit in our team." "I should become a gourmet cook and have family dinner time like the Waltons did on TV."*

Welcome to the marching "Shoulds." Sometimes the band is synchronized, huge, and immobilizing. Fortunately, there are times when your personal orchestra remains quiet in spite of the usual turmoil.

What are the keys to maintaining equilibrium? How can we learn to dance with the "Should Band"? Where's the right tempo of productivity, without the metronome ticking the word "guilt"?

I posed these questions to two dynamic dentists — Dr. Gayle Reardon, a Pankey Scholar and an AACD Accredited Member, and Dr. Pat Blanton, the current president of the Texas Dental Association.

Dr. Reardon suggested that we face this dance differently depending on our age.

She said, "Guilt? I gave that up when I graduated from my 30s. What matters in life depends upon a few key decisions that we make.

"Approaching 40 helped me understand that regardless of my pursuits, these endeavors must exist *for the right reasons*. I became more aware of my desire for balance, understanding there would be creative times when I was invariably going to be out of balance. I was informed by my loving family that when I was trying to 'be all things to all people,' the people who suffered were those closest to me. The setting of boundaries and the ability to consciously identify times when I was out of balance were the lessons of my 40s."

Nearing her 50th birthday, Dr. Reardon has become more philosophical about the "Marching Shoulds."

She reflected, "I am in 'search mode,' trying to discover what God's plan is for my life. Life is short. I desire a life of meaning focused upon fulfilling God's purpose." Dr. Reardon concluded by quoting Aristotle: "Life is a gift of nature. Quality of life is the gift of wisdom."

Dr. Pat Blanton began by defining two universal truths about the "Should Band."

First she said, "I have come to realize that the 'Should Band' always plays." Her second epiphany is, "I have learned that I am capable of controlling my response to the recurring and inevitable 'Should' melody."

Dr. Blanton chose a scientific analogy to waltzing harmoniously with this never-ending music — our immune system.

She told me, "I have adopted the following strategy for maintaining equilibrium. It occurred to me that the only real defense of the human organism is the immune system. It accomplishes this amazing surveillance 24 hours per day, seven days per week, for a lifetime and only on rare occasions is it overwhelmed by events."

More importantly, Dr. Blanton has found that the immune system possesses "immunological" memory that makes the response even more precise and appropriate when exposed to a previous pattern.

Dr. Blanton applies this analogy to her own life in this way: "In my person-

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al and professional life, I have adopted a strategy of 'situational' memory. For recurring issues, I have been vaccinated against potentially paralyzing issues and my response to these themes is efficient and effective."

Her personal approach to maintaining equilibrium when confronted by a refrain from the "Should Band" is:

**I** — Identify emergent issues.

**M** — Mark a legitimate timetable.

**M** — Modify existing schedules to allow for completion of emergent issues.

**U** — Understand that all issues do not and cannot have the same priority.

**N** — Navigate with focus.

**E** — Eliminate or minimize distractions.

I offer a pragmatic approach to singing along with this permanent chorus. Draw a line down the middle of a piece of blank paper. Title the left column *Challenges I Can Change*. Title the right column *Challenges I Cannot Change*. List everything that troubles you, figuring out which issues apply to each column. Do one page for your professional world and a second sheet for your personal issues. Prioritize the *Challenges I Can Change* list and expend your energy on those items. Leave your NONsolvable items alone. This strategy may soften the volume on which situations you can change and which situations you cannot change.

Here are a few steps to make your "Should Band" waltz like Ginger Rogers flowing across the stage with Fred Astaire:

\* Recognize that the "Should Band" is part of life.

\* Figure out your own way to immunize yourself.

\* Heed Dr. Reardon's wisdom that you can't be all things to all people.

\* Follow Dr. Blanton's advice to enjoy the music along the way.

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