

A Personal Mission Statement

Remember the adage, “Women have to work twice as hard to be considered half as good”? Dr. Lois Frankel writes in her bestseller “Nice Girls Don’t Get the Corner Office,” “It’s a myth that people get ahead because they work hard. The truth is, no one ever got promoted purely because of hard work. Likability, strategic thinking, networking, being a team player are but a few of the other factors that go into crafting a successful career.”

Rather than “work hard,” here is the secret to “work smart” — Think strategically by developing your own personal mission statement that focuses on your work and your life. As successful dentists, you probably already have office mission or philosophy statements. A personal mission statement is a bit different. Writing this type of statement offers you the opportunity to establish what’s really important to you. It’s important to think strategically about yourself, and there’s no better time than now — the beginning of a new year.

The biggest benefit for you is that your personal mission statement will define what’s good enough for you.

“Women are like little ants,” Dr. Frankel says, “working, working, working.”



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Once you’ve established what you want, you can know when you’ve achieved it, and you can stop asking yourself, “Umm, is this good enough? Am I good enough? Have I earned enough?” You’ll know it, and it will be enough. You can leave your office, your home, or both and feel good.

❶ Examine your baggage

In a *New Yorker* magazine cartoon, four people are waiting for their luggage at an airport baggage claim area. The caption reads, “Here’s the baggage you’ll never lose,” as the people grab their respective suitcases with these labels attached: “Never forgave my mother for discontinuing ballet classes in second grade,” “Hate my child for being just like me,” “Jealous of my brother for being more successful,” “I grew up poor so I can never feel financially secure.” Each bag is labeled with injuries, injustices, and grudges that they and we all carry wherever we go.

As difficult as it may be to “examine your baggage,” you will understand yourself better by figuring out what you are already

carrying around.

In your professional world, you may be lingering over the loss of a patient to another practice, not getting the prestigious award, or the subtle lack of inclusion on a CE program. All of these bags can cause self-defeating behavior when allowed to fester.

What are some of the things you're still angry or troubled about? What baggage do you have that you'd like to lose?

Write it down. Try to figure out how to grow from the experience and move on without dragging around multiple rolling bags.

② Identify past successes

Where have you been personally successful in recent years? These successes could be at work, in your community, or at home. Write them down and see if there are any common themes.

③ Define what you want from work

As part of this personal mission-statement exercise, write a letter to yourself dated January 2008. What exciting and realistic picture do you see for your office in three years? Keep these in mind: your gross income, net income, number of employees, amount of office space, location of your office(s), and why people will want to work for you. Review this letter at the beginning of each year. You'll be surprised and pleased with your progress.

④ Define what you want personally

Sit down in a quiet, calm place and answer these questions: What does personal success look like to you? What are your criteria for personal success? Make up your own definition

of success, then compare your progress against your own parameters — no one else's.

⑤ Write it down

Be true to yourself. Don't come up with a statement that appears to be what your parents, spouse, or friends expect of you.

I wrote my personal mission statement more than a decade ago while sitting in the antique lobby of the Menger Hotel in San Antonio, Texas. It's not meant to be carved in stone, and I have tweaked it over the years. This statement has helped keep me grounded, focused, and satisfied with my accomplishments.

Happy New Year! I wish for you in the coming year what you wish for yourself.