

Professional Practice



From Clinical to Corporate: A Story About Consistency, Persistence, and Patience

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CDHA members are often interested in alternate career paths in dental hygiene. Our new Professional Practice column features members who are employed in non-traditional settings and provides insight and information on what you might need if you are considering a similar path.

I graduated from dental hygiene school in 2007 and, shortly after, was hired by a large, fast-paced general practice in South Surrey, BC, where I stayed for almost 9 years and honed my skills as a clinical dental hygienist.

I worked at a great office, although I knew early on that I wanted to do more with my career, but wasn't exactly sure what. I took the time to understand what my strengths and interests were, as well as researching what alternative roles were available to dental hygienists, which eventually lead me to the decision I wanted to work in corporate dental industry as a territory manager.

Once I knew that I wanted to be a territory manager I had to figure out who I wanted to work for and what products I wanted to represent. It was important for me to work for a company whose values were aligned with mine and whose products I actively recommended and were backed by strong research. With these as my criteria I narrowed my selection to 3 companies I wanted to represent.

From that point, I knew I had to take action. I had the clinical dental experience, but I lacked the business and corporate experience needed to make the transition to the corporate world. I knew that, in order to have a chance of obtaining a position as a territory manager, I would need to



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stand out. Some of the actions I took included completing my degree, obtaining a national sales designation, conquering my fear of public speaking, networking at dental conferences and events, and actively seeking and applying for job opportunities.

This consistent and persistent action then lead to opportunities and experiences such as working as a partnership dental hygienist at the Pacific Dental Conference, becoming an educator for a dental implant company speaking throughout North America on regenerative therapies and implant maintenance, and writing articles for national dental and dental hygiene publications.

After four years of expanding my skill set, investing in myself, and gaining experience outside of the operator, my top choice called me for an interview. Following multiple rounds of interviews, I was finally hired as a dental territory manager in Vancouver, BC. The first few months as a territory manager in the corporate world came with growing pains and a steep learning curve, but once I had the hang of it, I went full force and in my first full year won "Rookie of the Year for North America" and was recognized as a high performer.

Since 2015 I have represented the same company and brand, although my role has evolved over the years. Today I am in a national position as the stakeholder engagement manager for both the professional oral care and skin care portfolios. My role is focused on daily education and professional relations with both the oral care and skin care stakeholders. This position allows me to combine my strengths as an educator with my ability to connect with people and my interests in learning about new innovation, products, and leading-edge research.

My days vary and I am usually in one of two places: in-field across Canada or in the office. In-field you can find me either visiting schools and educating students, connecting and engaging with key opinion leaders on collaborative opportunities, or speaking, managing, and providing support at conferences and other sponsored events. The other place you can find me is in-office completing administration work, identifying and planning strategic opportunities, collaborating with cross-functional teams, reviewing presentations, and/or training new team members.

It is an exciting role that is multifaceted, encourages me to think critically, and makes me feel I am making a difference by providing evidence-based education either directly or indirectly to health care professionals across Canada, which ultimately improves their clients'/patients' health and lives.

I have experienced many high points and successes in my career, but have also had my fair share of challenges, setbacks, and rejections along the way. What has gotten me to this place today? It wasn't that I was the smartest, most experienced or even the most educated. I believe it was my tenacity and commitment to my goals to continue to take action and accept every challenge as an opportunity to learn and grow.

So for those of you who are thinking of alternative roles as a dental hygienist, you can do it! If you are serious about being a dental hygienist in the corporate world do your research, network, take action, and don't give up. Remember, time is going to go by anyway so you might as well be working towards your goals!