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Florida Dental Laboratory Association
325 John Knox Rd,
Building L, Suite 103
Tallahassee, FL 32303
Phone: 850-224-0711
Fax: 850-222-3019

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focus Staff

Christina Welty
Executive Director & focus Publisher
christina@fdla.net

Kristi Demuth, CAE
Editor
editor@fdla.net

Maureen Turner
Advertising Sales
advertising@fdla.net



Looking Ahead: Building What Comes Next

By Alexander Wuensche, CDT

FDLA President



As we approach the end of 2026, it is a natural time to look back at the year behind us—but, perhaps more importantly, to look ahead at where our industry is going.

This has been an interesting and, for many, challenging year in dental technology. Depending on whom

you speak with, you may hear very different stories. Some laboratories are extremely busy, struggling to find enough qualified people and capacity to keep up with demand. Others have experienced noticeable slowdowns and are asking themselves what the coming year will bring.

I believe this contrast tells us something important: there may no longer be one single direction for the dental laboratory industry. Technology continues to change how we work. Digital workflows, automation, AI, new materials, centralized production and changing relationships between laboratories, clinicians and manufacturers are creating opportunities—but they are also forcing us to make decisions.

More than ever, laboratory owners and technicians need to ask themselves: What kind of business do we want to be three, five or ten years from now?

Trying to be everything to everyone may become increasingly difficult. For some laboratories, the future will be specialization and high-value services. For others, it may be efficiency, scale and automation. Some will focus on becoming deeply integrated partners with their clinical customers. Others may develop entirely new services and business models.

There is no single correct answer. But not choosing a direction is also a choice. I believe the same is true for our association.

Over the past several months, your FDLA leadership has been having important conversations about what the Florida Dental

Laboratory Association should look like in the future. What does membership need to provide? What should education look like? How do we create greater value for laboratory owners, technicians, manufacturers and industry partners? And how do we build an organization that reflects where our profession is going—not simply where it has been?

I don't want to reveal too much just yet, but I can tell you this: we are working on something new. Think of it as a remodel of the FDLA.

We are taking a fresh look at how we connect our community, how we provide education, how we engage our members and industry partners, and how we make our annual meeting an event people genuinely look forward to attending.

That brings me to 2027. Our next annual meeting will take place June 4–5, 2027, and I encourage you to put those dates on your calendar now. We want next year's meeting to be more than another industry meeting. We want it to be a place where the dental laboratory community comes together to learn, exchange ideas, build relationships and have meaningful conversations about where our businesses and our profession are headed.

Over the coming months, you will begin to see more of what we have been working on. For now, I will simply say this: expect some changes.

As we close out 2026, I want to thank our FDLA members, Board of Directors, volunteers, exhibitors, sponsors and industry partners for continuing to support this association and our profession.

The dental laboratory industry is changing quickly. That can be uncomfortable—but it can also create tremendous opportunity for those willing to adapt, specialize, collaborate and move forward with purpose.

My theme when I began this presidency was that we can build something bigger together.

As we head into 2027, I believe that message is more important than ever. I look forward to showing you what comes next. 



FDLA Mission

Advancing the individual and collective success of Florida's dental laboratory professionals to enhance oral health care.

Values Statement

INTEGRITY - being honest and open in all that we do

LEADERSHIP - being the guiding light in a changing environment

RECOGNITION - honoring those committed to our industry

SAFETY - promoting safe and quality driven manufacturing practices

INNOVATION THROUGH COLLABORATION - fostering an environment where creative and inspiring ideas are encouraged to enhance patient care



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Beyond the Bench

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO COMPETE IN TODAY'S MARKET

It's tough to compete if you don't understand the landscape, and the landscape in dentistry has been changing.

Dental School Grads

There has been an average of one new dental school a year opening since 2008, which has allowed for an increase in enrollment. Last year, the number of graduates topped 7,000 for the first time and is projected to reach 8,000 before the end of the decade.

Historically, dentists were male and Caucasian, but the demographics have changed significantly. Female predoctoral students have outnumbered males for nearly a decade and the trend continues and nearly half of all dental students are racial minorities. These two shifts have an impact on what we see in today's practices along with economic changes.

Over half of all grads say they plan to go into private practice. The historic pattern of private owner, solo dentist practice has changed, and the path to practice ownership is showing some

Dental spending has increased and is projected to continue.



Dental School Students

56%

increase in first year enrollment into dental school over the past 20 years (2005-2025).

56%

of dental school graduates are female.

46%

of dental students are "minorities."
25% Asian
11% Latino/Hispanic
6% Black
4% bi/multi-racial

delays. In the past, most graduates achieved practice ownership less than 10 years post-graduation. The ADA reports that only about a third of graduates are practice owners in the same span of time now.

It is important to note that over 80 percent of dental school graduates have student loan debt of \$300,000 on average. That means they enter the workforce with a loan payment of between \$2,000-4,000 each month.



Private Practice and Ownership

53%

of grads plan to go into private practice. Up from 47% (2014-2021).

63%

of graduating dentists were owners between 5-9 years into practice (2006 - 2010).

33%

of graduates between 2011-2015 were owners by 10 years in practice.



35%

of female practicing dentists in 2025, increased from 16% in 2001.

67%

of dentists are Caucasian.



There are approx. **61** dentists per **100k** people in the U.S.



Dental Spending

\$165 billion 2022

\$189 billion 2024

paced to surpass **\$200** billion by 2030

The Demographics in Practice

There are just over 200,000 dentists in the U.S. The number includes specialists and it has remained relatively flat. Although we have seen dental schools graduate more females than males, 35 percent of dentists in the workforce are female and you should expect that percentage to continue to increase. Most dentists are Caucasian, but it is interesting that about 19 percent of dentists are Asian, compared to the U.S. population for Asians being around six percent.

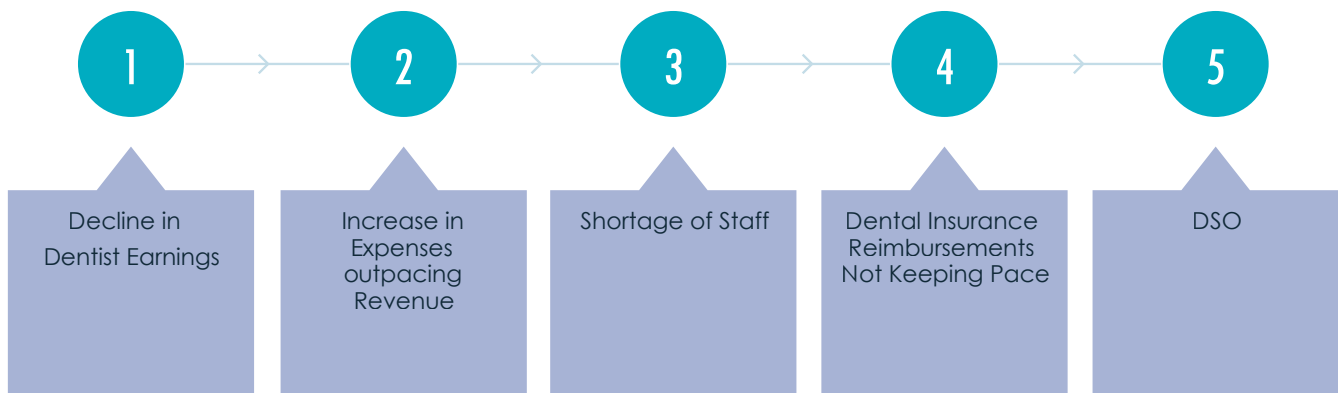
Dental spending has increased and is projected to continue. Dental is a mere four percent of total national health expenditure and 80 percent of dental spending is out of pocket or

insurance with the largest volume increase coming from pediatrics, which is likely attributed to the government expansion of Medicaid.

The Squeeze

The data is interesting, but it doesn't tell the story of why you're feeling increased pressure on the laboratory level. There are five factors present for dentists which are directly impacting market conditions, and you can likely identify with most of them: decline in their earnings, expenses outpacing revenue, staffing shortages, low dental insurance reimbursements and growing DSOs.

The Squeeze Factors



DECLINE IN EARNINGS – Said in simpler terms, your dental clients are experiencing a decrease in their pay. Between 2010 and 2024, dentists' earnings have steadily decreased. The most significant change is for dentists who are in practice more than 25 years. In the past, they were the highest earners and now they are the lowest – to put it into perspective, they went from about \$280k a year to now \$184k on average. Dentists with up to 10 years in practice earn \$214k and the highest earners are those between 11 and 25 years in practice, the peaks of their career, with \$228k, but also down from around \$280k. When we blend these incomes, the ADA reports the average dentist annual income of just under \$208k. There are a few other interesting things to note about earnings. The gap in gender is closing; however, female dentists continue to earn less than their male colleagues and they work about two percent fewer hours. The gap between what associates and owners are earning is also narrowing. Your general practice dentists are working slightly more hours each week, which contributes to the pressure from declining revenue. Practice owners work five hours more a week, contributed to non-clinical duties.

Don't forget our doctors who are carrying their student loan debt.

EXPENSES OUTPACING REVENUE – According to the ADA, for 12 months ending Feb. 2026, prices for dental equipment and supplies increased by six percent and hourly earnings of dental office staff increased by two percent.



In Q1 of this year, revenue has decreased by 1.2 percent, but the expenses per dentist are up three percent and the dentist earnings are down 13.2 percent.

Rural areas are different. Revenue per dentist in rural areas is significantly higher and is continuing to increase. Their expenses per doctor, however, also increased and are also traditionally higher. Of course, they too are experiencing a decrease in income by 16 percent.

SHORTAGE OF STAFF – Your dental clients are struggling to hire team members and this has been the case since the pandemic. The biggest shortage is in hygienists, followed by dental assistants and then administrative staff. Ninety percent of dentists in an ADA survey done in Q1 of this year cited that it was very difficult to recruit staff due to, “a shortage of available candidates, candidates not being experienced (a large but shallow pool), candidates not wanting to work the advertised hours, demand for high wages and benefits, the wages surpassing reimbursement amounts and the inability to compete with local DSO practices.”

The cost of recruiters to fill positions, both hygiene and assisting, was cited at 17 percent of the first year's pay. With a national average of nearly \$50/hour for hygienists that is a whopping investment. The staffing shortage, especially for hygienists, has caused the average pay to skyrocket. To put it into perspective, before COVID the average rate was \$37/hour and now it is nearly \$50/hour.

DENTAL INSURANCE REIMBURSEMENT – Only about 24 percent of Americans, of all ages, are uninsured. Dental reimbursements are notoriously low and have been kept that way. Add to that the smaller number of fee-for-service and private practices and you see the challenge clearly. The ADA reports that this past February reimbursements increased slightly, but they note that the rates are not keeping pace with overall inflation or the rising practice costs. To add to that, 15 percent of patients say they declined needed dental care because of the cost – that includes those who have dental insurance.

One big challenge your clients face when speaking with their patients is around mindset – that if a procedure (or prosthesis) isn't fully covered by insurance it is either not needed or unaffordable.

THE GROWTH OF DSOS – In 2024 (the most recent data), 16 percent of all dentists are affiliated with a Dental Support Organization. For comparison, just nine years earlier the number was just over seven percent. The number also varies a lot by the stage of career the dentist is in. The older the doctor, the less likely she/he is affiliated.

You must know your own business so that you don't chase things which won't work for you.

With the growth of DSOs comes some new challenges for your doctors. In many areas, they are either competing against a DSO-owned practice, or they are in one. Like dental insurance, many DSO practices use a high-volume revenue model and low negotiated expense contracted rates.

By now, you can see the drivers behind the squeeze and the behaviors you are experiencing. These factors are why approximately 2,000-2,500 chairside milling machines are purchased annually. This is part of what drives roughly 15-17 percent of practices to acquire an in-office printer. It's estimated that 75 percent of dentists use intra-oral scanners. The need to find ways to save money and drive revenue are ever present, which may be one of the reasons that there is so much talk about All-on-X, a treatment which has been around for more than 25 years, but which is being offered in almost every market. If you don't know a lot about All-on-X, you aren't alone. It is very attractive to a lot of doctors because of the high price point, but it is also quite complex and requires a high degree of planning, skill and communication.

CONSUMER DENTAL SPENDING IS GROWING – up 24 percent over 10 years. In a recent ADA survey from Q1 2026, nearly 45 percent of dentists reported feeling confident about the dental sector citing that people always need care.

With the changes your clients are feeling, you can create some opportunities, but you may have to develop your mindset. If not, these changes can bring fear, uncertainty and even a stubbornness.

My business is partnering with leaders to create strategies and develop leadership skills so that they can compete in today's ever-changing market. Here are some takeaways for how you can set up your lab:

MYOB

Yes, Mind Your Own Business, emphasis on your own business.

There are two big challenges when it comes to growth for most lab owners and it isn't money and labor (although those are important). The first is knowing your business; I mean really knowing your business. Not the lab business, YOUR lab's business. What do you excel at? Who are your best customers? What can you handle and what stretches you too thin?



Doctor DSO affiliation by stage of practice:



Which of your products are the most profitable? Which are the least profitable? Do not guess. Know which products make you the most and which make you the least.

Ask yourself the same questions about your clients. Which of your doctors should you be spending more or less time with? Who takes up a lot of time but doesn't do a lot of (profitable) work with you? Again, don't play a guessing game. Pull data and look at it. Most labs have at least one "quiet" client who is helping you make money but who you may not be paying much attention to.

You must know your own business so that you don't chase things which won't work for you. You cannot run a successful business in reaction mode.

Stop Chasing and Start Strategizing

The second challenge for most labs is that hope is not a strategy, and growth – sustainable growth – requires a strategy. That is a fact. So, what is a strategy? It is knowledge combined with a plan to reach a pre-determined outcome, which we call a goal or target.

Do not chase other lab's strategies. It's tempting, but it rarely works. I'll give you two examples which are common: free scanner and very low-cost single-unit zirconia. These are two tactics to attract new or keep existing clients. Yet they are not growth strategies. You must understand how these initiatives fit into your overall goal, what investment they require and what the projected ROI is. Again, you cannot guess, you must know.

So why won't these two tactics which seem to work well for some labs not provide the same results for your lab? Well,

both require your ability to scale to large numbers and have the capital to outlay on technology and/or materials before you reach expected volume of revenue. Both have narrow profit margins, and both have a measure of risk. Additionally, both rely on the intended client to grow in other ways to achieve ROI, which means you must have that thought out in advance and understand those drivers as well. In short, both are part of an overall strategy, so unless you have that strategy built out, you may experience more loss than gain.

Developing a growth strategy specific to your lab takes a bit of work and begins with:

- Identifying your market differentiators (what makes your lab unique)
- Defining your growth goals (ex: how much additional revenue you are seeking and in what areas)
- Determining your investment allocation (how much time, money, and energy do you have).

Think Like an Outside Investor

You need to explore your business like an outside investor would. What are you holding on to that isn't helping to grow your business?

A potential business investor would speak to your clients and ask questions: What do your best clients like about working with your lab? Why do they stay with you? What do they rely on your lab for? What do they wish you offered that you currently don't? Why did they come to you and what would make them leave?

An investor would look at how you are investing in your business to ensure growth. How much of your revenue is reinvested into the business annually? How are you tracking the ROI? Are you investing in technology? Are you establishing new protocols around technology so that you achieve more efficiency or are you investing in new tech just to try to squeeze it into old protocols?

An investor thinks like, well, an investor. Challenge your thinking and think like an investor. Two of my favorite quotes are from Albert Einstein and John Lubbock. Einstein said, "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them" and Lubbock said, "What we see depends mainly on what we look for." Both are powerful reminders that our mindset controls a lot of how we think. See what an outside investor would see. Apply that perspective to your thinking.

*Learn to adapt to the changes,
be proactive, and create a
strategy for growth.*

Final Thought

Charles Darwin is probably one of the most misattributed theorists in history. Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection is often cited as being survival of the fittest.

Darwin suggested that organisms change over time as a result of changes in heritable physical or behavioral traits. Changes which allow an organism to better adapt to its environment will help it survive and have more offspring. So, Darwin's Theory is not 'survival of the fittest.' If it were, then dinosaurs would still roam the earth and we tiny, slow, fat humans would not exist.

Darwin's theory is about survival of the most adaptable. The organism best able to adapt to its environment will survive.

Following old ways of thinking narrows the options for how to compete. Learn to adapt to the changes, be proactive, create a strategy for growth and be one of the labs that looks back on this time 10 years from now and recalls it as the catalyst you used for change.

*Sources: ADA's Health Policy Institute, data available as of March 2026. American Dental Education Association survey of graduating dental students, 2024 graduating class. *Decline in dental earnings was from the same data, but the last earnings report cited earnings from 2024. ⓘ*

About the Author

Ricki Braswell is the owner of Beyond Coaching. As a certified professional coach, she works with clients to develop their strategy and leadership skills – both are at the heart of building teams, creating momentum and clarity, keys to achieving business growth. Ricki is a frequent speaker at dental and dental laboratory conferences and provides workshops to leaders and teams. She can be reached by email at Ricki@TransitionBeyond.com and welcomes questions and opposing viewpoints.



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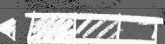


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THE ART OF THE SINGLE-TOOTH MATCH

Using OptiShade by Matisse and Creation Magic Colour to transform data into a natural-looking restoration

There are few cases in restorative dentistry that are more demanding than replacing a single anterior tooth.

When several teeth are being restored, the eye tends to read the smile as a composition. Small differences in individual teeth can become part of the overall harmony. A single central incisor, however, has nowhere to hide. It is surrounded by natural teeth that immediately establish the reference for color, translucency, texture, morphology and light reflection.

The challenge is not simply to create a restoration that is the “right shade.” The real challenge is to reproduce the optical behavior of one particular tooth closely enough that the restoration becomes visually integrated with its neighbors.

This is where modern digital shade analysis can become a powerful partner to the dental technician's experience. OptiShade provides objective color information, while the Matisse software can translate that information into a structured ceramic strategy. Creation Magic Colour then gives the technician another level of control—the ability to introduce the subtle individual characteristics that make a restoration look less like a manufactured object and more like a natural tooth.

The technology does not replace the art. It gives the artist better information.

The Single Tooth: A Different Kind of Challenge

A natural tooth is not one color. When we look at an anterior tooth, we see the combined optical effects of dentin, enamel, internal structures, incisal translucency, surface texture and the surrounding oral environment. Light enters, is absorbed, reflected and transmitted through different areas of the tooth. Even teeth that appear to belong to the same shade family can behave very differently. One central incisor may have a relatively opaque, warm dentin with a translucent enamel shell. Another may have more sclerotic dentin, a higher value and less visible internal structure. Cervical areas can be warmer and more saturated, while the incisal third may contain blue, gray, amber or opalescent effects. This is why simply selecting a shade tab and attempting to reproduce it with ceramic powders can be frustrating. The technician is not really matching a number. The technician is matching light. That distinction is fundamental.

From Guesswork to Measurable Information

Traditional shade taking remains an important part of dentistry, but human perception is subjective. Lighting, surrounding colors, tooth dehydration and individual visual interpretation can all influence what we see.





OptiShade approaches the problem differently. The device captures the color of the natural tooth and provides objective L*, a* and b* color information through its iOS application. The system uses a capture guide and calibration process designed to make measurements repeatable, and the resulting data can be transferred into Matisse for further analysis.

For the laboratory, the important point is not that a digital measurement magically produces a finished crown. It doesn't. What it provides is a much more precise starting point. Instead of communicating, "The tooth looks like an A1," the dentist/assistant and technician can communicate actual color information about the target tooth. That information can then become part of a larger restorative strategy. This is particularly valuable when the technician does not have the opportunity to see the patient personally.

The Importance of Measuring the Right Tooth

A single-tooth case should begin with careful observation. Before looking at ceramic powders, look at the natural tooth.

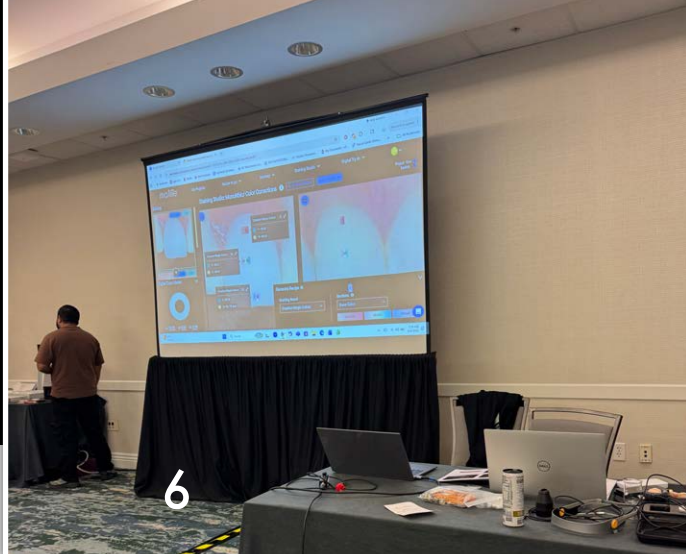
Which tooth is being copied? Which neighboring tooth provides the best reference? Where is the greatest chroma? Where does the tooth become more translucent? Is the cervical third warmer? Does the incisal edge appear blue, gray, amber or almost neutral? Most importantly, where is the dominant dentin color? OptiShade can provide objective color measurements of the target tooth, while Matisse uses the information to help establish a ceramic recipe. The Matisse workflow considers factors such as the preparation color, target-tooth color and available restorative space when generating its recommendations. That last point is critical; a ceramic recipe cannot be separated from the thickness of the restoration. A material that works beautifully at one millimeter may behave very differently at 0.5 mm. Likewise, the preparation beneath a restoration can dramatically influence



the final optical result. Color is not independent of space. This is one of the reasons a systematic approach to single-tooth matching is so valuable.

Turning Digital Information into Ceramic

Once the target has been measured, the next question is: What do we do with the information? This is where Matisse can become a bridge between color measurement and ceramic fabrication. The software can generate recommendations for framework selection, dentin and enamel recipes, in-



ternal effects and other aspects of the restoration. Its approach is designed to account for the individual circumstances of the case rather than treating every restoration as if it were being built from the same recipe. For the technician, this changes the workflow. Instead of starting with a collection of ceramic powders and asking, “Which combination might get me there?” the technician can begin with a calculated direction and then concentrate on execution. That does not eliminate judgment; it makes judgment more productive. The technician can spend less time chasing the basic shade and more time studying the anatomy, morphology, translucency and surface characteristics that ultimately make the restoration convincing.

The Role of Creation Magic Colour

Even an extremely accurate ceramic build-up may need individual characterization. This is where Creation Magic Colour becomes particularly interesting for the single-tooth case. Magic Colour is designed for individual characterization of dental restorations. The system includes dentine shades, highlights, Make-In colors, gingiva shades and glazes, along with liquids for stain application and microlayering. The powders are finely processed and incorporate color pigments and fluorescent particles intended to create natural-looking optical effects. The key word is individualization. The objective is not to paint a tooth with stains. The objective is to reproduce what makes that tooth different. A small amount of warm color in the cervical area may make the difference between a restoration that feels slightly lifeless and one that belongs in the smile. A subtle white accent can reproduce a localized enamel characteristic. A carefully controlled blue or gray effect may help recreate the optical behavior of the incisal third. The technician's hand remains essential.

Characterization Begins with Observation

One of the easiest mistakes in anterior characterization is adding effects because they look attractive on a laboratory model. Natural teeth are rarely uniformly characterized. A patient may

have a tiny area of increased opacity, a faint developmental groove, a localized white spot or a subtle warm transition toward the cervical region. These details can be almost invisible at conversational distance but become important when the restoration is viewed beside the natural contralateral tooth. This is why characterization should be approached with restraint. If a natural tooth has a faint feature, reproduce a faint feature. If it has almost no visible characterization, don't invent one. The best characterization is often the characterization that nobody consciously notices. Magic Colour allows stains to be mixed and adjusted in consistency and intensity, providing the technician with control over how much or how little color is introduced. The system can be used for surface staining as well as in conjunction with microlayering techniques. That flexibility is particularly useful when working with monolithic anterior restorations, where a few carefully placed effects can significantly change the perception of depth and vitality.

Internal Effects Versus Surface Effects

Another important consideration is where the color belongs. Not every visual characteristic should be painted onto the surface. The natural tooth derives much of its character from its internal anatomy. Mamelons, variations in dentin density, areas of translucency and changes in light transmission all contribute to the final appearance. Matisse's workflow can provide recommendations for internal effects as part of its broader ceramic strategy. Magic Colour, meanwhile, can be used for controlled characterization and staining. Together, these approaches encourage a useful distinction: Build the three-dimensional optical structure where possible; use staining to refine and individualize it. This prevents the restoration from becoming overly dependent on surface color. A beautifully stained crown can look convincing under one light source and artificial under another. A restoration with a sound internal structure and carefully controlled surface characterization has a much greater chance of maintaining its natural appearance across different lighting conditions.

The Beauty of a Small Correction

Sometimes the restoration is close, but not quite right. Perhaps the value is excellent, but the cervical third is slightly too neutral. Perhaps the body of the crown is correct, but the incisal area lacks a subtle cool transition. Perhaps the restoration has the right color but looks too uniform compared with the natural tooth. This is where the technician's ability to make small corrections becomes extremely important. The Matisse/OptiShade workflow can also be used to compare the restoration against the target and evaluate color during the process. OptiShade's application includes comparison functionality, allowing the technician to assess the restoration against the natural tooth rather than relying exclusively on memory. That creates a valuable feedback loop: measure → plan → build → evaluate → refine.

The goal is not to make endless corrections. The goal is to make informed corrections.

Knowing When to Stop

Perhaps the most underrated skill in single-tooth matching is knowing when the restoration is finished. Technicians are trained to see imperfections that most people will never notice. This can be both an advantage and a disadvantage. A restoration can be technically beautiful and still become less natural if it is overworked. Every additional stain changes the optical balance. Every additional glaze layer changes surface reflection. Every attempt to “add life” can eventually create an artificial appearance. The natural tooth should remain the authority. When the restoration disappears into the dentition at normal conversational distance, when the value remains harmonious, when the incisal effects are subtle and when the surface reflects light in a similar way to the neighboring teeth, it may be time to put the brush down.

The New Definition of a Shade Match

A successful single-tooth restoration should not simply match a shade guide. It should match the individual optical identity of the tooth. That means considering color, value, chroma, translucency, internal structure, surface texture and light reflection as one integrated system. The combination of OptiShade/Matisse offers a way to make the color component more objective and systematic. Creation Magic Colour then gives the technician a means of adding the subtle, indi-



visualized characteristics that distinguish one natural tooth from another.

Ultimately, this is not a competition between technology and artistry. It is a collaboration. Digital measurement gives us information. Software gives us direction. Ceramic gives us structure. Stains give us nuance and the technician gives the restoration its identity. That is the art of the single-tooth match: not simply reproducing a color but reproducing the way a particular tooth interacts with light—and doing it so successfully that the restoration becomes part of the smile rather than an object within it.

The goal is not to make a crown that looks natural; the goal is to make a crown that looks like it was always there! 📌

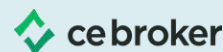
About the Author

Richard Wodzinski, CDT, RG, DTG, is the owner and operator of Clearwater Dental Prosthetics. With more than 20 years of experience in the dental industry, Richard brings a lifelong understanding of dental technology, craftsmanship, and patient care to his work. Working closely with dentists and their teams, Richard is dedicated to creating high-quality dental restorations that combine precision, function, and aesthetics. His goal is to help patients restore not only their smiles, but also their confidence and quality of life. Having grown up in the dental industry, Richard developed a passion for the profession early in life. Today, he continues to bring that experience and dedication to every restoration created at Clearwater Dental Prosthetics.



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MANAGING ESTHETIC CASE WORKFLOWS FOR PREDICTABLE OUTCOMES



Figure 1:

Final E.Max (Ivoclar) veneers for delivery

INTRODUCTION

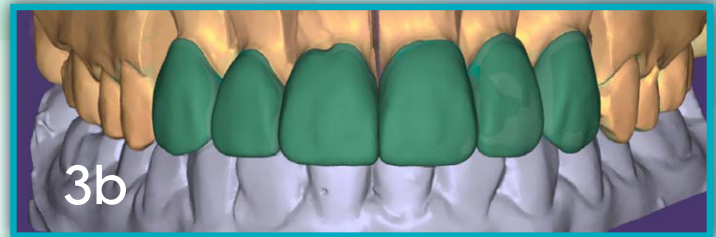
Achieving esthetic outcomes that routinely meet or exceed expectations is a challenge for the dental team. Building predictable workflows is critical to achieving great end results, and also manages the anxiety closely associated with high-expectation cosmetic dental work. Often, esthetic case acceptance revolves around a life milestone for the patient (retirement, wedding, anniversary, etc.) which adds significant pressure to get great results within tight deadlines.

At Sakr Dental Arts, we suggest clients follow defined processes to manage restorative cases from start to finish. These workflows have gone a long way to help grow cosmetic case acceptance and make highly demanding esthetic cases enjoyable and rewarding (**Fig. 1**).

In **Figures 2 a-b**, the patient's smile reveals obvious signs of dental fluorosis. Fluorosis symptoms include white spots, discoloration, surface irregularities and pits in enamel, and if left untreated, could lead to tooth sensitivity, damaged enamel and a higher propensity for tooth decay.

This patient of Dr. Mariana Fernandez (Guiding Light Dental, Winter Park, Fla.) is coming of age and heading off to her first year in college. The patient was highly self-conscious of the color, alignment, and overall unesthetic smile. A treatment plan was put together for porcelain veneers to be completed prior to the patient leaving for school. A diagnostic design was developed with various models and indexes to simulate the end result.





Figs. 3 a-b:

2D and 3D CAD software visualization showing the digital design

ESTHETIC WORKFLOW

Records are crucial to setting up cases for success. Standard photographs and properly mounted models start the process. The various diagnostic models and indexes we recommend at Sakr are listed next (1-5). If the patient has not yet committed to treatment, a 2D smile simulation is often the first step. For little to no cost, the patient and doctor can start to visualize the outcome. Then, when the patient has committed, the diagnostic models and indexes are prepared (**Figs. 3 a-b**).

1. **Prep Operative Mounted Models** – All models are mounted on an Adjustable Articulator (Stratos, Ivoclar).
2. **Gingival Reduction Guides** (when needed) – Many esthetic cases involve orthodontics, gingival contouring and esthetic reshaping of remaining teeth. Gingival reduction guides are done prior to fabricating the diagnostic wax up.

3. **Diagnostic Models** with the proposed result
 - a. The diagnostic model comes with two indexes
 - i. Final Chairside Temporization Index
 - ii. Preparation Index: To check preparation against the diagnostic design and allow for proper restorative room.
4. **Blended Model** – The blended model is designed with the diagnostic design and the preoperative situation; "Blended" all within one model. This works well when teeth are rotated, misaligned, and the final diagnostic design is subtractive to the preoperative tooth position. This index is great for motivational mockups and getting the patient and doctor's approval before any preparation has started.



Fig. 4:

Printed preoperative model (above) next to a printout of the final diagnostic design (center). The far-right model is a scan of the approved temporaries made from the index of the diagnostic design. Often a scan and pictures of the approved temporary are overlooked. Even though the temporary is fabricated from the diagnostic wax up, it is important to take records of the temporary once placed as a final esthetic reference.



Fig. 5:

Diagnostic model with silicone putty matrices for chairside temporization and to manage appropriate preparation to accommodate restorative space



5. Staged Model – combines unprepared teeth with some of the proposed diagnostic designed restorations. The staged models will be prepared in a pre-determined temporary delivery sequence (i.e., the anterior diagnostic design is combined in one model with the posterior unprepared teeth). This staging or delivery sequencing is established in advance by the clinician and technician. Models are prepared with indexes over multiple staged models to help the doctor work through this sequence. Staged models are used for fabricating chairside temporaries on larger cases at the desired VDO and/or for the delivery of shell temporaries. Indexes from staged models could also be utilized for mockups showing only the anterior segment as well.

Within a three-week period, Dr. Fernandez and the Sakr Dental Lab team took this patient through the workflow appropriate for this case. The esthetic gingival contouring guide, as well as the blended and staged models were not necessary. A definitive workflow for the records and diagnostics work up, through the motivational mock up, preparation, temporization, new record of the approved temporaries, and shade confirmation was followed. The final E.Max (Ivoclar) veneers were delivered by Dr. Fernandez within the patient's needed timetable exceeding the expectations of the patient and more importantly, her parents. (**Figs. 6a-b**).

SUMMARY

Following well-established workflows is essential to predictable restorative outcomes. Thank you to Dr. Mariana Fernandez and her team for allowing us to collaborate on this case and many, many more!!



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Nick Azzara is the Director of Clinical Communication at Sakr Dental Arts in Winter Park, Fla. He is a graduate of Alfred University, Class of 1988, where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree. Throughout his career, Nick has worked with highly regarded companies in the dental industry, including Ivoclar, Leach and Dillion, and Bego. He began his career in the dental laboratory industry in the 1990s with da Vinci Dental Studios, one of the premier esthetic dental laboratories of its time. Nick later became a partner in the Captek-Precious Chemicals Company and held senior leadership roles with two large Dental Support Organizations (DSOs).

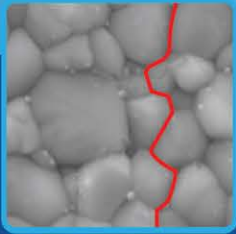


Enja Dorj is the Business Operations Manager at Sakr Dental Arts. Like many, she started her career on the bench doing model work. She has grown and learned all aspects of the laboratory business for 20+ years. For the last eight years, she has delved deeper into implant dentistry, hybrid restorations, and improving communication and workflow with doctors and staff. Enja earned her Master of Business Administration from University of Central Florida in 2012 majoring in business and accounting. She likes to develop systems and workflow processes that improve the lab and aspires to take Sakr Dental Arts to a national level.



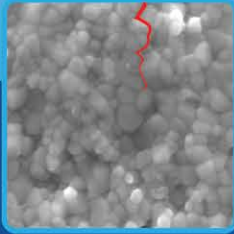
Dr. Mariana Fernandez is a prosthodontist at Guiding Light Dental, Winter Park, Fla. She earned her dental degree from Santa María University in Caracas Venezuela and worked in private practice as a general dentist, while also volunteering with nonprofit organizations to care for underserved populations. After she relocated to the United States, she pursued advanced education in general dentistry at the University of Connecticut's John Dempsey Hospital. She completed a three-year residency in prosthodontics at the University of Illinois at Chicago, earning a master's degree in dental sciences with a focus on complex restorative and implant dentistry. She worked in an implant center corporation, gaining extensive experience in full-mouth rehabilitation, implant dentistry, and esthetic restorations which reinforced her desire to create a practice where comprehensive, high-quality care could be delivered thoughtfully and collaboratively; leading to the creation of Guiding Light Dental. Her mission is to serve every patient with integrity, kindness, and excellence, restoring not only smiles, but confidence and peace of mind.

Others

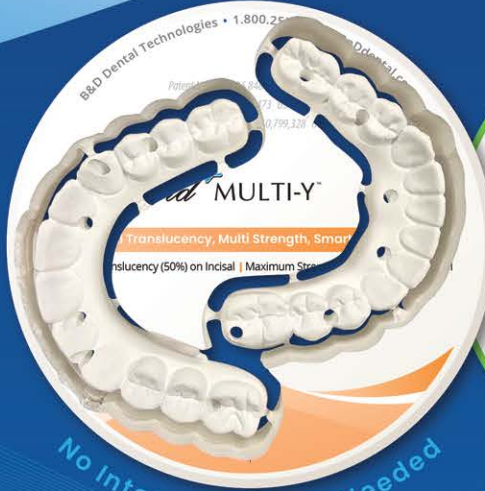


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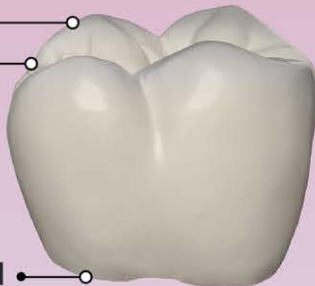
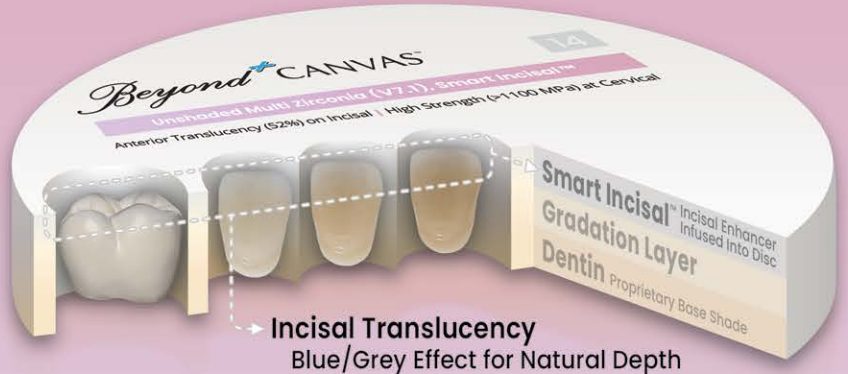
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By Rene A. Silva, MBA



I GOT SCAMMED

and You Could Be Next, *Continued*

I still have nightmares from time to time about the call.

As shared in the last issue of focus magazine, I recently had an unfortunate experience of being scammed. After accepting an urgent call from Bank of America's fraud department, it didn't take long before my suspicions were raised. They quickly posted two transactions, one for \$12,000 and then another \$7,000, assuring me they would be reversed on the back end. I immediately began the drive to my local branch while keeping the fraudulent caller on hold.

It took me 10 minutes to get to the local bank branch (at the same time I was calling the bank's fraud line and the scammer was still on hold). Unfortunately, the bank manager told me he could do nothing and prompted me to keep holding on the line.

Scams have grown to be so sophisticated that it is almost impossible to tell "friend from foe." Let's consider my experience, for instance; assume, I did not take the scammer's call, but rather, hung up and called the bank directly. In my case, I waited almost 30 minutes to speak with a person and every so often I was offered a call back instead of continuing to wait; I am sure some people reading this have chosen to be called back instead of waiting on hold. Scammers know this and they will place the first call knowing that you will hang up. They will call you again in 10 minutes and tell you they are "calling you back as per your request" and at that moment, you will most likely be "on the hook."

The aftermath of all this had both a business and a personal dimension. On the business side,

it was a huge shock to the system. All accounts had to be frozen and subsequently closed, while new accounts had to be opened and validated. The lab's entire cash flow cycle was upended; even check deposits were rejected by the bank as a security measure because the checks, in some instances, did not have the lab's exact legal name. Processing payroll was not possible until the new accounts were validated by the payroll company and the deadline to process was not missed by one minute; it was a very stressful experience. This leads me to the personal dimension of all this. I could not sleep for several days and found myself replaying that damn call over and over again in my head. I was second guessing my every decision and felt like the weight of the world was on my chest pressing down. I still have nightmares from time to time about the call. I am more fortunate than most, however, as I did not lose it all. The scammer was attempting to take full control of the accounts to clean them all up, including the business, my house, life savings, and family assets, which is why many scam victims suffer from depression and have higher rates of suicide than the general population.

Here are my key takeaways.

1. Trust your gut!
2. Do not underestimate them: Scamming is a multinational multibillion dollar enterprise, with power and influence at all levels of government around the world. Scammers are highly adaptable and sophisticated, and even if you are trained and aware, you can fall.
3. Personal information is not private; your social security number, date of birth, etc. are available to the highest bidder.
4. Add friction to your online banking.
 - a. Choose to get email notifications.
 - b. Reduce the number of options to validate the account if the password is not present.
 - c. Use a USB Key instead of your cell phone to authenticate your access.
 - d. I started using a Yubikey.
5. Never take calls from the bank, instead, you make the call and wait instead of asking for a call back.

6. Become familiarized with your bank's security protocols.
 - a. Bank of America told me they never ask for codes over the phone and the "fraud department" does not call. On the other hand, I use other banks which do call about fraud and send you a code to authenticate you.
7. Always have a good relationship with your bank's branch manager and have his/her direct line to contact in case of emergency. If you carry large balances in your account, your bank may have personal bankers that you can call on directly.
8. Nurture and foster good relationships with all your vendors; the lab got extensions of payments due.
9. NEVER transfer money without double and triple checking. The lab was able to receive credit for the \$19,000 that was scammed because, in great part, the transfer got done by the scammer instead of the lab.
10. Even if you are constantly trained, do not underestimate scammers. Remember, they are relentless and most scams are successful because of circumstance and context. It is all about the odd chance of picking up the phone or getting that email at the right time and with the right pretext, and you could be the next victim. I was at lunch, my guard was down and a trusted person gave me the call with urgency, which is all it takes to engage.



About the Author

Rene Silva is managing partner for OrthoDenco Labs, a dental laboratory specialized in orthodontics and functional orthopedic appliances. OrthoDenco is the second iteration of a venture that started almost 50 years ago, steeped in the tradition of a family of dental laboratory owners and operators. He oversees a team of almost 30 technicians and staff with service across the continental U.S., Caribbean, and Latin America. Rene holds an MBA as well as a dual bachelor's degree in business administration and marketing from Florida Atlantic University, go owls! Additionally, he has multiple certifications in human resource management and marketing.



Sources and additional information:

<https://fdla.memberclicks.net/3rd-q-26-tech-tip-sources>



Another Successful Adventure at Race for the Future 12

Twenty-three racers. One Sprint Triathlon. Two 10Ks. Twenty 5Ks. A whole lot of sweat. And nearly \$87,000 raised for the future of dental laboratory technology!

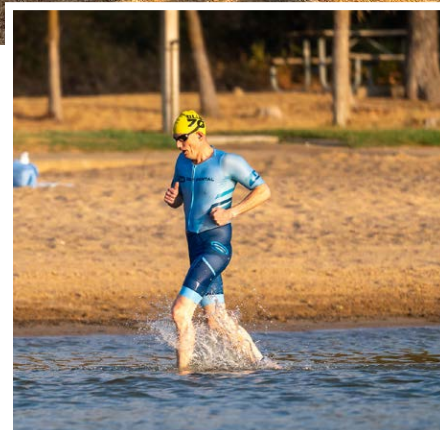
The Race for the Future simply would not be possible without the generosity of sponsors. This year, 44 sponsors stepped up to support the event and, in turn, the Foundation's mission. Their contributions provide stability for Foundation programs and help expand the Foundation's impact throughout the dental laboratory technology community.

Onsite sponsor representatives included: Nowak Dental Supplies, Argen Corporation, Garland Dental Services, Helm Dental Laboratory, National Association of Dental Laboratories, CNC Group, LifeLike Dental Studio, CDL, Zest Dental Solutions, B&D Dental Technologies, Digital Smile

Innovations, Divine Dental Prosthetics, CDL, exocad, Image Gallery, CDL, Ivoclar, Dental Laboratory Association of Texas, and Nakanishi Dental Laboratory, CDL.

One brave racer, Todd Hydock, took on the Sprint Triathlon, while Elvis Deverick and Ryan Fairbanks tackled the 10K. The remaining participants ran the 5K, making for a great mix of challenges and plenty of encouragement.

While raising nearly \$87,000 is an incredible accomplishment, the real value of the Race for the Future extends far beyond the racecourse. All funds raised help ensure the industry's viability and



advancement by creating access to dental laboratory technology education and providing grants and scholarships to assist with the cost of education and certification. Every donation represents an investment in people and our industry.

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Highlights

- 146 patients served and \$504,436 in treatment donated
- 49 new volunteer dentists recruited

Program History

- Established in 1997 in South Florida with the South Florida District Dental Association
- Expanded statewide in 2003 with the Florida Dental Association
- 2,322 total patients served since inception
- \$12,535,864 in total care donated by volunteers
- Statewide Volunteer Network: 514 dentists and 212 labs

Fiscal Year Goal

Help 120 people with disabilities or who are aged or medically fragile receive \$400,000 worth of comprehensive dental treatment, including \$28,500 in laboratory appliances. Results: During the fiscal year, we served 146 patients and generated \$504,436 in donated treatment (including \$40,916 in laboratory fabrications). Each patient who completed treatment received an average of \$8,319 worth of dental treatment; comprehensive care that illustrates the generosity of the volunteer dentists and labs. We are truly grateful to the 514 dentists and 212 dental laboratories that participate statewide.

Gathering of the Brightest Minds

Cory Hansen works at NuSmile Ceramics based in Seminole, Florida. While originally coming from a culinary background as sous chef at the Don CeSar Resort and St. Petersburg Yacht Club, he made the turn into the dental laboratory technology profession. Knowing that continuing education would be critical for his future success, he shares how FDLA played an important role.

Why did you decide to join the FDLA?

Six years ago, my mentor, Ralph Carlson, recommended that I join the FDLA when I attended my first Southern States Symposium & Expo with him. He explained that the FDLA provides resources to assist with my extended education and to help me learn more about digital techniques.

How has FDLA provided value to you?

FDLA keeps my continuing education credits in order and helps me become a better technician by keeping my education focused and me knowledgeable about the latest and greatest in materials and equipment for any current dental lab practice. The executive director of the FDLA, Christina Welty, is always willing to assist with any questions and accommodate my unique requests for the meeting, including having my teenage son Gavin attend the seminars so he can learn more about the industry.

Why is the Symposium important to you?

The Symposium is important as it is a gathering of the brightest minds of dental lab technicians in the Florida region. I can network and ask questions to other technicians in a safe space, and it provides such easy access to have these conversations. Most of us technicians are so busy with our day-to-day operations of our businesses. We rarely get a chance to socialize and it's very important for everyone to do that. The FDLA Southern States Symposium & Expo is a great way to keep a scheduled vacation on the calendar for us to unplug and recharge, while also maintaining our con-



tinued education credits in one easy location. I'm able to ask different vendors in the EXPO hall questions about new 3D printers, different types of resins or burs, and so much more.

Why should others get involved in the association and attend the Symposium?

In an industry that is seeing many allies setting off for retirement, it's important to continue to grow your mind, education and business. This is easily accomplished with an ally like FDLA. FDLA offers many different ways to help a dental lab and their owner stay focused and growing. ●

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