

President's Column

HEADING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION



Dr. Alfred Dean

When I was a teenager, my father and I would often go fishing for the weekend. The journey to our favourite lake entailed a 3-hour trek through the bush following a blazed trail. On one of these expeditions, the rain had been incessant and we decided to head home quite late in the day. It soon became clear that we had lost the trail. Being only 15 years old and not possessing my father's keen sense of direction, I was worried that we would become permanent woodsmen. With darkness setting in and with my father's reassurance that he had a plan, we spent the night circling a fire trying to stay warm and dry.

Why do I recount this tale? In 2005, representatives of Canadian dentistry in its many forms will convene in Ottawa to create a strategic plan for the profession nationally. The Canadian Dental Association's

(CDA) current strategic plan has been in place for 5 years and now needs to be reviewed. Many goals from our previous strategic plan have been accomplished. Others are in progress and will continue to occupy our future efforts. And frankly, there are some areas where results have not met expectations.

Reading from our current strategic plan, I note many significant achievements. In government relations, our ongoing lobbying efforts are opening many doors on Parliament Hill. A recent edition of *Communiqué* showed a productive Days on the Hill session, displaying photographs of some of the candid conversations that took place during our meetings in November. In other areas, we have resolved our governance issues and have initiated the process to adapt our membership model to meet members' needs.

CDA has created a strong working alliance with educators and regulators as part of our commitment to address complex education and registration issues. In our efforts to embrace change, we are preparing conferences on 2 timely topics, seniors' care and models of care delivery.

Internationally, Canadian dentists are routinely consulted on issues of importance to the global profession. This past year, CDA announced a thorough review of all of our policies and position statements. This includes reviewing our infection control guidelines to ensure that they meet current international standards and adhere to up-to-date scientific literature.

All organizations, whether large or small, should realize that an overarching strategic plan is a key determinant of success. The plan should be designed so that an organization can effectively use its resources while keeping focused on important macro-level issues.

As a Nova Scotian, I envision CDA's strategic plan as the iconic schooner *Bluenose II*. It would not be wise to turn such a vessel on a dime, to head into uncharted waters. Rather, it must stay on course while remaining sensitive to the changing conditions that occur along the voyage. Plotting a definable navigational route, while remaining willing to gradually alter the course when necessary, is crucial to arriving safely at your destination.

Which brings me back to the story of the lost fishermen. When morning broke bright and dry, my father put his plan into action. Within 20 minutes we were back on the right path, and the trout tasted that much better upon our return home. I am sure that my father saw the time spent by the fire as a chance for father-son bonding, allowing us to regroup and discuss his plan. Similarly, I look forward to gathering with colleagues from across Canada at the strategic planning session, to discuss ways to keep the Association moving along a positive path.

Like other organizations, CDA can only be successful with the help of our members. We need your help — please help us.

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In response to the tragic events in South Asia and East Africa, I wrote to the National Dental Associations of the countries directly affected by the tsunami, expressing the sympathies of Canadian dentists. Through our involvement with the FDI World Dental Federation, CDA offered these Associations our assistance in whatever form is deemed necessary. On a personal note, I would encourage members to make a donation to a charitable organization of their choice.