

A Fable for Dentists

# Valuocity



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**VALUOCITY**  
A FABLE FOR DENTISTS

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## PREFACE

*Running on Empty* left you with one message: You have the opportunity to reinvent your dental practice as a more efficient, high performing, and satisfying business expression has never been better. And doing so now will position you for greater success when the economy ultimately does rebound.

But how does one accomplish this exactly? In *Valuocity*, dentist Carl Oldquist, whose practice is swirling down the 'loo' is despondent and lacking answers for a business that is failing. He crosses paths with Sidney Kaprov, a coach and consultant who believes he has those answers. Making use of the 'fable' format, Sidney invites Carl to his ranch in Northern New Mexico and takes him through a series of lessons that will help him reformulate his practice in a way better suited to operate in the new economy.

If you are in the same economic situation as Carl, or have ever wondered how a consultant might lead you or an actual dentist might actually make changes in his or her practice to operate more effectively, then this is the fable for you.

*Dr. Marc B. Cooper*  
*Dr. Mark Silberg*  
*The Mastery Company*

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## CHAPTER ONE

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### ***A Rock and a Hard Place***

The bright lights startled him. Carl Oldquist blinked out of his trance, suddenly aware that he was sitting among 350 dentists in a large room at the San Antonio Convention Center. He was attending a three hour presentation on restoring implants being given by a highly regarded clinician from Seattle. But he hadn't heard a single word. Even the images on the PowerPoint slides hadn't registered; they were nothing but a fleeting montage of teeth, porcelain, bone, blood and metal. Carl had been in another world. A world that increasingly made him uneasy.

Carl is a 49-year old general dentist in his 14th year of practice that graduated from Case Western Reserve, spent two years in the Air Force and then completed a General Practice residency. He had worked as an associate in Milwaukee for two years with the intention of purchasing the practice after a short partnership, but that deal had fallen through.

So, in 1995, Carl purchased a practice in Madison, on Mound Street close to Meriter Hospital. He upgraded the office—new chairs, new delivery systems, new floors, new lighting—the whole nine-yards. It was a very functional space, 2100 square feet, five operatories. Carl signed a 10-year lease and received some needed lease-hold dollars from the owner.

Over the ensuing 13 years, the practice grew in active and recall patients, in revenues, in technologies and materials, and in the kind of dentistry he could provide. Carl considered himself a CE junkie. He loved to learn and get technically better. He studied with the masters; Pankey, Spears and Kois. Simply put, he was a strong clinician and he loved his dentistry.

Carl was no slacker in practice management either. He attended programs regularly, participated in a study club, read bestselling business books and hired highly regarded consultants to help improve practice performance, practice systems and structures. He also invested in developing his staff. By 2007, Carl had a solid million dollar practice with one full time and one part time hygienist, two assistants, two front desks and several part-timers to help around the office.

Personally, he was happily married, had two teenagers and a very nice home. His interest in cars kept his four car garage full with some very sweet rides – a Silver 1999 Porsche 911, a navy blue 2005 Mercedes S500, a bright red, fully restored, 1964 Dodge pickup, and of course his family car, a 2006 Acura SUV. He didn't want his kids driving any of these cars so there was a used 2003 Honda Civic sitting in the driveway for his older son Jonathan to drive. His youngest, Amy wouldn't be driving for two more years. With his family and practice Carl felt he should consider himself a very lucky man, but recently he felt anything but lucky.

In spite of the outward appearances of financial stability, over the last year Carl's practice had been experiencing a severe slow down as the global financial meltdown crept into his practice. New patient numbers shrunk from about 22 a month to less than 10. Cancellation and no shows in hygiene were up over 40%. His columns had plenty of holes. Worse, the new patients he had and even those coming out of recall were delaying or declining more lucrative treatments.

As he became aware of the slowdown in his practice, Carl had applied all the things he'd learned in practice management. Regular staff meetings, more broadcast marketing with brochures and a newsletter, upgrading his Website, asking patients to refer other patients, combing the recall patients' charts for undone restorative work, confirming patients two times. You name it, he was doing it. Unfortunately, nothing was working. His bottom line was in freefall.

It began with just a few cancellations, even though the production and collection were still matching last year's numbers. More recently, however, things were going downhill rapidly and Carl was panicked, wondering when the practice would hit bottom. Last month was so bad, he couldn't make payroll. Carl went to his bank to execute a line of credit to cover expenses. He even started taking home a reduced salary. Worse, when he looked at the book for next month, it was a total disaster.

And that's where Carl had disappeared to when the lights went out, the slides lit up and the speaker began his presentation. Carl's mind was consumed with worry, fear and trepidation about the future of his practice—and his family. *What am I going to do? What if I can't make it? What if the economic situation gets worse? What if I fail?*

Now, that the lights had come back on and the crowd around him began to stir and stand, Carl was jolted back to the present. He was at this ADA conference to learn, to figure out what to do so those questions of failure didn't nag at him. But as he sat there, an uncomfortable truth, that his practice was now sandwiched between a rock and a hard place, made his decision to come to this conference seem desperate.

As his fellow dentists began to exit, Carl stayed pressed to his seat, a great weight, a terrible mountain of doubt, preventing him from rising.

## CHAPTER TWO

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### *Fresh Air*

Carl had signed up for another three hour presentation that afternoon. The seminar was on anterior esthetics and scheduled to start after lunch. But his enthusiasm for attending had disappeared under the heavy weight of uncertainty. He just couldn't think about anything else. Even the thought of lunch left Carl a bit numb. He grabbed a cup of coffee and decided he could use a walk to clear his head. He needed some fresh air.

Making his way out of the convention center, he was hailed by some of his colleagues to come have lunch with them, but he waved absently back and called out that he had an appointment. *An appointment?* he thought. *I'm going nowhere—and fast.* With a muted sigh, he slung his black bag with the ADA logo over his shoulder and headed out into the bright sunshine and emerging heat of the day.

Carl had been to San Antonio a few times before and knew his way around town. He headed west on Market Street and soon found himself on a stairway descending to the River Walk. It was warm, certainly a change from Madison this time of the year. But rather than enjoying the warmth and the sunshine, Carl was deep in thought. *What do I need to do to pull my practice out of this mess? I've tried everything I know and nothing has worked. What's going to happen to my family if I fail?*

As Carl walked along the river he was too preoccupied with his thoughts to notice other strollers or the sprawling cypress trees. He failed to smell the tangy aroma of the Mexican cafes along the river. He was deaf to the tour guides on barges floating by, weaving their stories of the Alamo and old San Antonio. All he could register was the unending refrain playing in his muddled head, *What am I going to do?* His situation was poised on hopeless. His practice was circling the drain and he had no answers. And to make matters worse, here he was at the ADA meeting, surrounded by people with solutions, but he couldn't bring himself to ask for help. He wasn't even sure what he'd ask for.

At a bend in the river, he looked at his watch. Almost two hours had passed and his thoughts were no clearer. The fresh air had brought him no respite, or inspiration. He considered going back to the convention center, but the thought of sitting in a dark room with hundreds of other dentists, watching presentations about advanced dentistry he wasn't able to provide since patients weren't buying, chatting with his peers and pretending everything was fine, seemed ludicrous.

A wave of fatigue overtook Carl. He found a nearby bench under a towering oak and sat down. He stared vacantly at the river. His mind fixated on his floundering practice. He just couldn't figure out how to reignite his business, how to get new patients through the door, how to get his patients to accept treatment, how to motivate his staff to really pull together and make it work. Then his thoughts turned to his wife,

Veronica, and their two children. Their whole life style was being threatened. Not only because of the downturn in his practice, but also due to massive recent losses in the stock market seriously evaporating his retirement fund. All the years he had put into building his practice and creating a secure future for his family were on the brink. *What am I going to do?* pounded like a pulse on his overloaded brain.

Carl was so consumed with worry he didn't noticed that an elder gentleman had sat down next to him on the bench. Oblivious to everyone and everything, Carl stared at the river until the old man addressed him.

"Carl, you don't look so well?"

Carl snapped out of his fog and turned to the man seated next to him. *How did he know my name?*

"Excuse me?" Carl said, buying time. Then he realized he was still wearing his ADA name tag on a lanyard around his neck that read: Carl Oldquist, DDS, Madison WI, General Practice.

"Sorry to intrude, but you look like someone who is upset about something," the old man said gently.

Carl took a good look at the older gentleman. He was slim with thin white hair, goatee and mustache. At first glance, he struck Carl as a slender version of Colonel Sanders, but with a certain air of gravitas. He looked grandfatherly and kind, but not comical. He wore an off white suite, a white shirt and a bolo. He also sported an ADA nametag around his neck. Before Carl could read his name tag, the old man introduced himself.

"My name is Sidney, Sidney Kaprov. I didn't mean to disturb you, but you appear somewhat troubled. You look like you could use someone to talk to."

Carl thought a moment about this whole scene: here he was hundreds of miles from home sitting by a river in Texas and out of nowhere a white-suited man appears like some character right out of a B-movie asking if he can be of any service. An angelic Colonel Sanders trying to earn his wings—and not chicken wings. Just what Carl needed. He'd left the conference for some air and space, and now some amateur do-gooder was trying to choke off his last breath of privacy.

"I'm fine." Carl smiled, but his tone said *Mind your own business*.

"Well," replied Sidney, "you should tell your face. Your frown is sending a very different message. You look plenty troubled to me. I thought maybe I could help. I'm not in the habit of butting into a person's private affairs, but I noticed your ADA nametag, and I have a great deal of experience with dental practices. I do consulting work."

Carl didn't know what to say to this. He wasn't in the habit of talking about his practice with others, except with consultants he'd hired when his practice had been growing rapidly. His business was a private matter, especially now that the practice was rapidly declining. Carl thought, *Dentists don't talk to other dentists about their business. It's just not done, especially with a stranger.*

"No, I'm fine, really. Thanks for asking," Carl said, hoping to put an end to the matter.

"Carl, here's my card just in case you need to talk to someone. I know dentists don't like to talk to other dentists about their problems, but I have helped a few dentists through tough times, and the dental industry is definitely in tough times."

Carl took the business card with a faint grin.



The card read, VALUOCITY: You Can't Fail When You Base Your Practice on Your Values. The slogan made no immediate impression, and Carl automatically slipped the card into his jacket pocket. He said a curt thank you to Sidney and then rose quickly, heading back in the direction of the Marriott where he was staying.

As he walked, Carl couldn't get the elderly man out of his mind. There was something about him—something about his demeanor, his smile, the sense of understanding he conveyed. *Definitely a well-meaning individual*, Carl thought. *But, what's the difference, I've got to figure this out myself and make it work.* He took a deep breath and sighed heavily. The air felt somewhat crisper now, like the wind had changed directions. Carl, with his head down, had barely noticed it.

## CHAPTER THREE

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### *Veronica*

When Carl arrived at his hotel room, he was greeted by a rush of cold air. It felt good. He was perspiring slightly from the walk back, and his mind was still racing. The meeting with Sidney continued to replay in his head. He took the business card out of his pocket and read it again: *You Can't Fail When You Base Your Practice on Values*. Carl still couldn't grasp the meaning. He tossed the card down by the phone.

Seeing the telephone, he remembered he'd been running late that morning and he hadn't called home. Carl got out his cell phone which was dark. He'd turned it off before the morning's presentation, and had been so preoccupied he hadn't turned it back on. As he speed dialed the home number, his thoughts turned to Veronica.

They'd been married for 17 years. He'd met Veronica while he was a junior in dental school and she was completing her Masters in sociology. Veronica's older brother was in Carl's dental class and he'd introduced them. It was an understatement to say they hit it off. They got married at the end of Carl's senior year and Veronica accompanied him to his first Air Force assignment in Minot, North Dakota where she promptly became pregnant with Jonathan. By the time Carl completed his GPR in Chicago, Jonathan was three and Amy was almost a year old.

While Carl was an associate, Veronica stayed home with the kids. But as soon as Carl purchased the Madison practice, she dug in and really helped out with the business. She did the payables, payroll, helped with office design, hosted a few practice open houses, joined the wife's club of the local dental society and was the perfect support Carl needed. Carl discussed with her all the issues and problems he was encountering in his first years of practice and Veronica provided him with sage advice. He and Veronica were a dynamic team. He trusted her judgment and she had excellent people skills.

After five years of practice, the money had become more dependable and the concern about Carl making it had disappeared. Although Carl and Veronica talked about the practice every day, the details, the personnel issues, the problems and the technologic advancements became less a part of those conversations. Long before his tenth year in practice, the conversations had evolved into light check-ins, sometimes gossip about staff or other dentists.

When Carl started feeling the downturn, he didn't know quite how to address it with Veronica. He thought it would pass quickly so he didn't say anything except that he was taking a smaller salary for a couple of months to pay a bigger bite on the digital x-ray he'd purchased. But

as time went on, and business didn't turn around, he was afraid to tell Veronica. And by keeping the bad news from her, she had no idea what was going on.

As Carl waited for the home phone to ring back in Madison, he felt again the shame and embarrassment that he hadn't confided in his wife. She had sacrificed and worked hard to build the practice as much as he had. He just didn't know what to say.

*Hey sweetie, I forgot to mention that we're two just months away from a financial meltdown, after that I'll have to take money out of our retirement to pay the bills. Oh, a few more things, you will need to stop spending so much money, we have to give up the country club and the gym, sell two cars, Amy will have to give up unlimited texting, and by the way, you'll need to go to work so we can afford food. But other than that, things are pretty good.*

And because he didn't know how to start the conversation with Veronica about the practice's finances, he didn't. And he pretended everything was fine. All the same, she'd begun to notice the stress. Whenever she'd ask how things were going, he'd tell her that he was busy but that overall things were fine. He rationalized his evasive responses by telling himself there was no need to worry her.

But as the situation deteriorated and the pressure grew, he began distancing himself from Veronica. The more she asked about what was bothering him, the more reserved and isolated he became. She began to think Carl's distance had something to do with their marriage. It was a vicious cycle. Not only was his practice going down the tube, their relationship was following close behind.

As the phone rang, Carl hoped he would get voicemail and not have to talk to her. But on the fourth ring, a breathless Veronica answered.

"Hi honey, how's the meeting? Glad you caught me. I just got back from playing tennis with Nikki. I've still got to pick up Amy at soccer and then get Jon to Aikido. After that, we're going out for pizza."

It sounded rushed like she was giving a report. What could he say to her now? So, like always, he didn't say much of anything.

"The meeting's fine so far. I went to the lecture on implants this morning, another on new materials. And I had a beer with Sam Sherman who sends his regards. How are the kids?"

"Fine. They're wondering when you'll be back and if you'll notice if they drive one of *your* cars." Veronica laughed. The sound of that made Carl feel both better and worse at the same time.

"Tell them I'm landing around seven on Thursday, so I should be home around by eight, and I'm going to check the odometers first thing," he said, trying to mimic her lightheartedness.

"Great, honey. I'll let them know how much you *car*—I mean, *care* about them. Alright, I gotta go. Talk to you later. Bye Bye."

“Bye, dear, I’ll check in tomorrow,” Carl said and flipped his phone shut.

*Talk about two ships passing in the night, Carl thought. But, I don’t want to get her crazy with what’s going on. If I tell her how deep the trouble is she’ll just worry. I’ll be able to handle this.*

Yet Carl knew it was foolish to hope for a financial turnaround in the next few months. Hope was no kind of business plan. His mind turned back to the nagging questions that had dogged him for months. *What am I going to do? What if my practice doesn’t turn around? What if I go belly-up? Would Veronica stick with me?*

## CHAPTER FOUR

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### ***The Floodgates Open***

After he hung up with Veronica, Carl opened his sleeping laptop to connect to his office computer and check the numbers. His heart sank. New patients were dismal, only four on the books. The receivable was growing like a weed. His schedule for the rest of the month looked like Swiss cheese. To make matters worse, what had been scheduled were single fillings and only two crowns.

He only had one implant case that could be ready to go this month. Six months ago, he would have had four, maybe five large implant cases in process and a crown or two every day. His daily target used to be \$7,000 and he made it nearly every day. Now he was lucky to bring in half that. A pang of despair engulfed him.

Then another pang crept into his consciousness. He was hungry. It was late afternoon and he hadn't eaten anything since breakfast. In his current state of mind, Carl didn't feel like going out, so he decided on room service. As he ordered, Carl found himself staring at the business card he'd tossed on the desk. He picked up it up, fingering the edges.

He used many consultants over the years, but they all told him basically the same thing. They all just said do more, and do it better. More of the same thing. The problem for Carl now was the same thing wasn't working anymore!

*Why do more of the same, when it isn't working,* he thought. Was Sidney just another consultant ready to take his money for more of the same? He'd never know unless he called, but Carl hesitated. *I can't just call him. I don't even know him. I don't know anything about him.* Still, Carl felt desperate. He needed some kind of plan, some kind of help to stop the bleeding. He glanced at his watch. It was almost 5 PM. Carl figured Sidney would most likely be heading out for dinner. That let him off the hook. He'd wait until around 9:00 to call him—if he'd call him at all.

Carl changed his clothes and turned on ESPN to get his mind off his situation. His food arrived twenty minutes later; tomato bisque, club sandwich and a Heineken. Carl was glad to see the food, but got upset when the wait person handed him a bill for \$36. Money was so tight and this was just another reminder of how broke he felt and how much he couldn't afford. A year ago, he wouldn't have given it a thought. Now, \$36 for soup and a sandwich seemed outrageous.

He hadn't had to worry about money for years. The practice had grown steadily at 12 to 15% a year. He'd been so busy that access used to be his major problem. A year ago, he didn't have an open restorative appointment for eight weeks, now it was less than a day or two. Hygiene

used to be booked tightly. Hygiene cancellations could be filled in minutes. Prosperity and abundance appeared unbounded. In fact, just a year ago he was considering investing in his own building and increasing the footprint to 5,200 square feet, taking on an associate and increasing hygiene. Now he didn't know if he could pay next month's rent.

And Carl hadn't been reckless with his money. He'd been putting away \$40K a year for his retirement the last nine years and had socked away a decent amount in the 529 College Savings Plans. He had his money with a well regarded financial group out of Southern California. Less than a year ago, his financial advisor had assured him, "You're right on the path to financial freedom. The way your fee-for-service market is growing, you'll be able to comfortably retire by your late 50s or early 60's. Just keep on writing those checks to Schwab."

As of today, he was down nearly 40% in his 401 K, about the same in his IRA, and 35% in the 529s. Forget about Ivy League universities for the kids; it was state schools now with student loans.

Carl finished his soup and sandwich, then drained the beer. It was good though the \$36 price still left a bitter aftertaste. He just couldn't see any positives at the moment. He slumped onto the bed and turned on the news. Not a good idea. Unemployment numbers were up, economic indicators down. Comparisons to the Great Depression. Just what Carl needed. He closed his eyes. Surprisingly he slipped into an easy sleep.

Unfortunately for Carl, his dreams were uneasy. He stood at the base of a high dam, mammoth concrete structure like Hoover Dam. Veronica and Jonathon and Amy were at the top waving to him. But Carl could see the cracks in the dam. He tried shouting to his family, but he couldn't move or speak. The cracks grew larger. Carl looked around for something to stop the cracks from spreading. There was nothing around him. Then his eye caught a flash of white. He looked over to the side of the dam's giant spillway. There was a figure sitting on a bench waving. A figure all in white. Carl wanted to wave back, but he still couldn't move. Above him, he heard a mechanical grinding as the iron floodgates on the spillway began to open. The man in white got up and stood on the bench still waving as a frothing torrent of water headed down the spillway. Directly in the torrent's path, Carl strained to move his feet. Desperately he strained, and quite suddenly he lurched forward a step.

The lurch woke Carl. For a moment he was disoriented. The he saw that *Deal or No Deal* was on the television. He was back in his Marriott room, not about to be swept away by floodwaters of a cracking dam. He looked over at the clock on the night stand. 9:10. He clicked off the television, got up and washed his face to help him back into the waking world.

He sat down at the small desk and stared at Sidney's card. He picked up his cell and began to dial the number. He stopped. *What am I going to say to him? Calling a stranger to help rescue my practice? How is this going to make a difference? Am I really this desperate?*

He stared in the mirror above the desk. His hair was wildly askew, his face was pale and he had deep circles under his eyes. *Yeah, he had to admit, I look pretty desperate.*

He dialed.

After the first ring, Carl thought about hanging up. After the second ring, Carl got nervous about what he would say if Sidney answered. After the third ring, Carl began to hope that Sidney wouldn't answer and it would go to voice mail. And in the middle of the fourth ring Sidney answered the phone with a soft-spoken "Hello?"

"Sorry to call so late," Carl spoke apologetically. "It's Carl, the guy you met on the River Walk today."

"It's not that late, Carl. Glad you called. Actually, I half expected you to call."

Carl felt an odd sense of relief. He felt welcomed. Like he'd been expected. This put him at ease.

Sidney continued, "I know how difficult it may have been for you to make this call. We dentists don't like to ask for help. We'll pay for practice consultants, but we'll rarely ask our colleagues for help or advice."

"Yeah," Carl agreed, "I've called my previous consultants about my situation, but all I got was more of the same advice they always give. And even though I'm doing what they are telling me to do, it isn't working."

There was a long pause, and then Sidney asked, "Carl, are you open enough to tell me what's going on with you and your practice?"

Though he'd called Sidney for help, Carl didn't want to appear weak or unable. He hesitated to share the situation his practice was in and what it might mean for his marriage and family.

Sidney responded to Carl's hesitation like a mind reader. "You're probably uncertain whether to tell me about the nitty gritty of your situation. I imagine you're concerned about what I'll think about you. Nobody wants to look bad or incompetent. No one wants to look like a failure. And that's perfectly natural. Dentists like to keep their issues close to the vest. But, Carl, you called. That's a big step, to admit that you can't figure this out alone. That's why I spoke to you on the River Walk. I can help you, if you're willing to talk straight with me. Are you willing to do that?"

Carl knew he had a major decision to make. He could tell Sidney that he only had some minor problems with his practice. Then he could guide the conversation to a polite ending. Or, he could really share what was going on. But if he opened the floodgates and told the whole truth that would put him at risk. The risk of seeing himself as unable to solve his own problems, of not being in charge, of being a failure. He was weighing the risks when Sidney spoke again.

"Look, Carl, I'm here to help. If you don't want to tell me what's going on, you don't have to, but then I can't help. But if you are willing to open up, then you'll take the first real step in getting your situation handled. You can be right or you can be happy. You decide."

“What?” asked Carl. “What do you mean I can be right or I can be happy?”

“It boils down to this, Carl. You can go on believing you can solve these problems on your own, doing things the same way that you’ve always done them. In that case you’d get to be right. Right that you didn’t need anyone’s help. Right that the way you’ve always done things will see you through this rough economic patch. You get to be right, but will that make you happy, will that really solve the problems you’re facing right now?”

“Why can’t I be right and happy?” Carl responded.

Sidney paused. “It’s a bit more complex than a phone conversation can deal with. That’s why I want to know if you’re willing to really tell me what’s going on. Revealing your true thoughts about your situation allows you to shift the power these thoughts have over you. When you speak your unspoken thoughts, you have them, they don’t have you.”

Carl considered Sidney’s words. His thoughts lately had overpowered him. He’d gripped by constant worry. He was having trouble sleeping. He was on edge, jumpy. His intuition told him Sidney was right. *Revealing my inner most thoughts might change things.* He was ready to confess it all, to open the floodgates.

The only question that remained for Carl was, *Would it make any difference?*

## CHAPTER FIVE

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### ***The Teacher Appears***

“Okay, Sidney, I’m ready.” Carl held the phone in his lap for a moment and took a deep breath. He really didn’t know why it was such a hard thing for him to confide his problems to someone else, but he had decided if Sidney wanted the truth, he’d give it to him starting with his state of mind.

*To be continued...*

## CHAPTER THIRTY

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### *The Eagle & the Prairie Chicken*

Richard pulled up to departures for United Airlines. Neither he nor Carl said much on the drive to the airport. A few comments about Sidney, about the history of the Pueblo, and a little about their kids and what they were up to. Most of the time, Carl kept going over in his mind the time he had spent with Sidney. He kept on seeing how he would implement all those things he had learned into his practice.

Richard pulled up to the curb. As Carl was about to get out, Richard turned to him. “Carl, before you leave I want to tell you a story that has been told on the reservation for generations.”

“Sure, I’ve got some time.”

“A young boy from the Pueblo found an eagle egg and he put it in the nest of a prairie chicken. The eagle hatched and thought he was a chicken. He grew up doing what prairie chickens do – scratching the dirt for food and flying short distances with a noisy flutter of wings. Gradually, the eagle grew old and bitter.”

“One day he and his prairie chicken friend saw a beautiful bird soaring on the currents of air, high above the mountains.”

“Oh, I wish I could fly like that!” said the eagle.

The chicken replied, “Don’t give it another thought. That’s the mighty eagle, the king of all birds – you could never be like him!”

And the eagle didn’t give it another thought. He went on cackling and complaining about life. And he died thinking he was a prairie chicken.”

“My friend, you too were born an eagle. The Creator intended you to be an eagle, so don’t listen to the prairie chickens!”

Carl nodded his head and smiled. He got out, slung his backpack over his right shoulder, walked to the back of the truck and grabbed his bag from the bed of the truck. He walked back to the passenger side of the truck.

“Richard, thank you. I won’t listen to the prairie chickens.”

Carl turned and headed for the sliding glass doors and entered the airport.

He realized he was an eagle.

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Dr. Cooper is President and CEO of The Mastery Company. He has been a consultant to the health care industry for more than 25 years—at the practice management level as well as at corporate and organizational levels. Prior to his consulting career, Dr. Cooper was an academician, basic science researcher and practicing periodontist.

His consulting clients include more than 2,000 dentists practicing in solo, partnered and group practices and their corresponding support staffs. Dr. Cooper has worked with senior executives, managers and supervisors in large health care systems, regional and community hospitals, third-party payers, clearinghouses, biotechnical firms, information technology companies, IPAs, PPOs, DPMs and DHMOs.

Dr. Cooper focuses the majority of his work on dentists in private practice, training and coaching them to achieve mastery as leaders, managers and owners who are able to consistently operate their dental practices as successful businesses.

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