

Words to Live By



Premier Dental CEO Julie Charlestein, right, in a meeting with an employee

*Premier Dental's top exec shares her advice that made her a **better businesswoman**— and the qualities that helped her get there*

by Julie Charlestein

Julie Charlestein is president, CEO and a fourth-generation leader at Premier Dental Products Co., which develops, manufactures and distributes innovative consumables to dental professionals worldwide. In her role at Premier, she has been named among the Top 25 Most Influential Women in Dentistry.

A Philadelphia native, Charlestein attended Emory University for her undergraduate studies and Temple University for graduate work. She is an honorary member of Alpha Omega Dental fraternity and sat on the board of directors of the Dental Trade Alliance, where she chaired the government relations committee.

“Be Silly. Be Honest. Be Kind.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Probably not the words that you would associate with CEOs and business leaders. But why not? Shouldn't we be who we truly are? That's what my greatest mentor—my grandfather—taught me. His exact words: “Remember who you are.”

When I was younger, I thought the phrase was meant literally—that as a prepared response to any potential “stranger danger,” I should know my name, address and phone number. Obviously, applicable to a 6-year-old! But as a CEO and as an adult, I realize now that his advice is so much more. For me, it's about authenticity—revealing and reflecting your genuine self.

At heart, I am silly, so I don't try to hide that. At meetings, I'll be the one who tells a ridiculous story. I also try to improvise; instead of a traditional meeting or lunch, I'll organize interactive activities. A favorite is getting a department together and playing “two truths and a lie.” Silly, yes—but it absolutely creates a bond and a connection among the team.

And, yes, I curse a lot. This is who I am, and it's real, and it's relatable, and it's honest.

Honesty

Honesty and *transparency* are buzz words you hear a lot in reference to relationships, but I think of them a bit differently in business. I equate them to detail and action. For me, detail is transparency.

It often comes down to the famed “bullet list”: What do we need to get done, and how are we going to do it? Even now as a CEO, I'm crazed about keeping action items and detailed meeting notes. I'm the one who, postmeeting, circulates actions and deadlines.

Honesty and transparency: “Here is what we discussed. Here is what I expect, and this is when I expect it.”

Kindness

Kindness is selfishness. It may seem counterintuitive, but in business this notion is imperative: Kindness to your employees and partners is always (or at least *should* always) be self-explanatory and heavily utilized.

Kindness to yourself is something that is often overlooked. As much as I'd like to quantify “kindness to self” in the form of a spa day or a piece of jewelry, I don't. I learned from a mentor that kindness in terms of selfishness is sharing—sharing the burden. In leadership positions, there's always a lot that you're dealing with, and most often dealing with it alone. It's critical to surround yourself with a core group of team members with whom you will share your burdens. It is a discipline to share that weight—but it is in fact a luxury. A luxury, a gift and ultimately a responsibility to the organization, in that you as a leader have a balanced and thoughtful view. ■

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