

Chapter 4 **Gerbil Wheel Dynamics—He Can't Run Forever**

I mistakenly thought that my success, both business and personal, was tied to an unfounded belief--that my worth was solely based on how successful my dental practice was. After all, I had to impress my peers, I had to impress my spouse, and I had to impress my then-new friends with the idea that I was some successful young dentist. Little did I know the negative energy I was accumulating that would have an effect on my health and all my life relationships.

I was either too arrogant and thought I knew it all, or I was just too damn stupid to step back and think about this gerbil lifestyle and what it was costing me. The success of my practice defined who I was, my personal self-worth, as well as my external view of myself. Although I denied it at the time, there were times when it became clear to my wife that my practice was the most important thing in my life . . . and not her. That was one of my major life mistakes.

Now, as a more mature man, it's easy to understand the brashness of youth. I continued to push and push and push. I worked harder. I expanded my hours thinking that I needed to appeal to the marketplace and patients that needed to be seen after work in the evenings, on weekends. You name it, I'd be there. Foolish thinking, as it was unknowingly taking a toll on me. I expanded my staff thinking that more, and more, and more production was the key to my success. I never gave a thought to life balance. I continued to add more expense to an ever-increasing overhead without knowing it because in my never-ending drive to succeed I had failed to track my practice numbers with any regularity. I had not given much thought to disability overhead coverage or the value of developing a financial savings strategy to protect my family and my practice investment.

After my heart attack, I knew I had to make some major readjustments in my life. Otherwise, I'd be back in the same situation, and maybe even worse.

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Because what I did learn is, the most common first sign of heart disease is sudden death.

While I was recuperating in the hospital, I had an epiphany. All of a sudden, I knew *why* I'd had a heart attack. It wasn't my bad habits. It wasn't my family history. It was my "stinking thinking." Unbeknownst to those around me, in my mind, my glass was always half empty, and I carried that feeling around with me everywhere I went. It resided in my self-talk, the quiet, unobvious, and negative communications I was having with myself. For my entire life I had masterfully disguised my feelings of "less than" with an outer façade of strength and "I can do it." It was finally exposed to me. I finally came face-to-face with my internal truth.!

At the end of my first day at the hospital, I fervently asked the cardiologist to bring me a psychiatrist. He looked down at me through his reading glasses perched on the end of his nose, and said: "I'm the doctor here, and I make the treatment decisions."

The next day I asked him again, "I need to see a psychiatrist. I know why I had a heart attack. It's my 'stinking thinking,' and I need to talk to someone who can help me. I need the help desperately." He looked at his chart, offered another snide "I'm the doctor" comment, made a notation in my patient chart, and quickly exited the room.

Later that day, a woman quietly and majestically walked into my room. She was wearing sandals and a long skirt under her white coat—a real hippie-type doctor—and she introduced herself. She talked with me for nearly thirty minutes, a short time really, but it was life changing. I don't remember what she said, I don't remember what I said, but something *huge* shifted for me. In retrospect, I understand that the more words you use, the greater the chance of being misunderstood. This doctor's words were few, laser-like, and healing.

I had a new attitude. Never before had I opened up to someone so completely and in such a short period about whatever history had prevented "me" from being "me." She masterfully guided me with her questions and insights to help me discover that I was now beginning the first day of a "new life."

Before then, I always, *always* compared myself to other people, struggling to be better than the other person. I had to be successful. I had to be the best. I could be impatient and demanding, because I was single-minded in my quest to get ahead as quickly as possible.

Back then, I was striving to be successful according to how other people defined success. I wasn't striving to be happy on my own terms. I suppose I was

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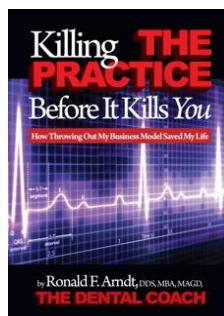
trying to prove something, perhaps the result of pent-up emotions from my childhood.

What I want for you, the reader, is to *not* wait for a major health trauma, or a failed relationship, or any other kind of trauma, to encourage you to make some shifts in your thinking that could potentially save your life. You don't have to be like me, you don't have to ignore all the signs and symptoms, and wait for a near tragedy to strike. If anything that I have shared thus far resonates with you, you know that it is important to get off that gerbil wheel. However, to do that, you must be willing and resolved to take action. You must have a desire for something different. You must want to vote for your life.

Everything in life is about give and take. You never take anything without giving something in return. Success in life becomes more of a reality when you're clear about your expectations. Unclear expectations lead to unclear outcomes. And nothing we do in our life, nothing, is immune from consequences. While oftentimes we may feel that those consequences are unfair, unintended, or inappropriate, be prepared for them. When we are young we somehow feel that we are immune or have a superhuman resilience to the laws of life. Not so--"life" offered up its consequences for me.

While I didn't say it was easy, the solution is rather simple: jump off the wheel. Over the following pages, I'll share with you some ideas that have worked for me and may work for you. What's beautiful about this process is that you get to decide the degree of change that you want for yourself. In my case, I chose massive and fast change. For you, it may be grabbing the low-hanging fruit and moving forward in a slow and methodical pace. It's your choice.

Now that you've read chapter 4. Wouldn't you like to learn more? Order the book now [here](#).



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