

From the desk of Dr. Melanie Fowler, Board-certified Orthodontist

Early in my orthodontic career, one of my goals was to become Board-certified. Board certification is not required to practice as an orthodontist, so most doctors don't do it. They say it is time-consuming and expensive, and basically they don't see the value in it, since most patients don't even know the difference. I guess I am the ultimate teacher's pet, because my program director and mentor, the late Dr. J.M. Chadha, not only encouraged me, but also expected it. He had already asked me to stay on as faculty at the LSU Dental School once I graduated, and he expected his faculty to become Board-certified.

Board certification is one of the hardest *self-assessments* I have ever done. At the time I completed the exam, you had to complete actual cases in your practice, and then write up case studies where you explain why you did what you did and what worked and what didn't. To top it all off, you had to sit in front of world-renowned orthodontists and defend your work! That means you ate a big slice of humble pie and realize that you may not be perfect! And, of course, that's exactly what I strive to be, perfect.

So, I would like to share some of the life lessons I learned from my Board certification journey and I hope they will give you some practical ideas to ponder!

1. **Take time to evaluate your current situation and see the big picture.** In orthodontics, we simply can't focus on one tooth. We might forget to look at the whole mouth, the bite, or even the actual face and smile. Sometimes, the saying "you can't see the forest for the trees" really does apply.
2. **Focus on your strengths rather than your weaknesses.** I happen to be very strong in the organization and logic department, and sometimes having a change in schedule may create some anxiety for me. But I have to remember to focus on what I do best and make it work. Letting my weaknesses get my full attention does not allow my strengths to prevail.
3. **Be a life-long learner.** As an orthodontist, I am required to complete continuing education classes each year. I think that

should be a personal requirement too, since life itself is a constantly evolving career! Read books, get advice from your grandparents, and even view your weekly friend get-togethers as your Personal Study Club!

4. **Compete with yourself, not your friends.** Board certification is about evaluating yourself and being evaluated by other orthodontists, but it's not a competition: no one wins a first place trophy. Don't compare yourself to your friend next door... her situation is completely different, and you probably don't know her whole story. The only trophy you need to compete for is the satisfaction of being healthy and happy!
5. **Celebrate achievements.** Becoming Board-certified is hard and it certainly deserves celebration. Life is hard too and we should celebrate our successes!

Take it from me, a periodic self-examination/assessment/evaluation is healthy and can help you reset your priorities. My American Board of Orthodontics re-certification is coming up soon, and I am looking forward to it!