



Dr Alex Rubinov: 5 Things You Need To Create A Successful Career As A Dentist



... My family immigrated from Russia when I was 5 years old and had to start over in a country where they didn't speak the language. We came from very humble beginnings, which makes me particularly sensitive to the fact that dental health, and especially smile makeovers, are a luxury for most people in this country and abroad. I'm privileged to have a skill that can not only help people stay healthy, but also feel more confident and better about themselves. I went on a mission trip to Cambodia to perform dentistry on children living in orphanages with no access to care. I also have helped patients regain a sense of confidence and dignity after life events that impacted their smiles, such as addiction, eating disorders, homelessness. I think getting more people to smile inherently brings goodness to the world.

As *part of our series about healthcare leaders, I had the pleasure of interviewing Dr. Alex Rubinov, DDS.*

Dr. Alex Rubinov, DDS is a leading Cosmetic Dentist located in NYC. He graduated from Columbia University College of Dental Medicine with distinction, and follows in a storied tradition of dental excellence, building on the legacy of his grandfather, grandmother, and his father, all dentists. Dr. Rubinov is a pioneer of cosmetic and minimally invasive dentistry. He received world-class training during his residency at Mount Sinai and perfected his craft while working alongside renowned cosmetic dentists Dr. Michael Apa and Dr. Larry Rosenthal, prior to founding his practice.

Thank you so much for joining us in this interview series! What is your “backstory”?

I *m a 3rd generation dentist — my father and grandparents were all dentists — so I suppose this career path was my destiny. In college, I majored in Biology and minored in Fine Arts, with a primary focus on ceramics. I received my master’s degree in biomedical science, with a concentration in Oral Biology, and while applying to dental school I worked for Johnson & Johnson running clinical studies on Listerine mouthwash. I went on to Graduate from Columbia University College of Dental Medicine with honors, where I started the aesthetics club for dental students. As the founder of the club, I’d invite top dentists in NYC to lecture, which gave me exposure to industry leaders and helped me build my network. Upon completing my residency, I had the privilege of starting my career working alongside the prestigious Michael Apa and Larry Rosenthal prior to starting my own practice.*

Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you started your career?

I always preach about how a smile can change someone's life, but there's one smile I did that changed mine. A woman chipped her tooth and her daughter, a girl I went to high school with, suggested she come to me to fix it. When she came in, we really connected, and she ended up getting a full smile makeover instead of just repairing the one tooth. After the procedure, she proceeded to tell me that her daughter was single and insisted I call her to ask her out on a date. That patient is now my mother-in-law, and her daughter is my wife.

Can you share a story about the funniest mistake you made when you were first starting? Can you tell us what lesson you learned from that?

Being a cosmetic dentist is an intersection of my passion for medicine and fine arts. When I was in college, I spent a lot of time in the ceramics studio throwing on a wheel. When my pieces came out of the kiln, I was so disappointed when I didn't feel they were perfect. My instructor, Paul Chaleff, asked if I was trying to achieve beauty or perfection and that awakened a new perspective for me. My mistake was thinking that art needed to be perfect to be beautiful. This translated into my career as a cosmetic dentist where perfection of a white chicklet smile does not translate into natural beauty.

Are you working on any new or exciting projects now?

Yes! I've benefited throughout my career from various forms of continuous education and mentors. Through paying it forward with a few of my mentees I've realized I have a lot to offer dentists who are looking to start and build their own practices. Dental school teaches you how to be a clinician, but not a business owner or entrepreneur. That's why my Office Manager Nicole and I had the idea to build an educational platform called "Cosmetic MBA," which will educate dentists on luxury practice management.

None of us are able to achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story about that?

I was in the middle of a procedure at my residency program and noticed I got a missed call from Michael Apa. I asked my patient to close her mouth and told her I would be right back. I stepped out of the room and when I called him back, he said he wanted me to start spending more time in his office while I was a resident. Having the opportunity to shadow and then work alongside Dr. Apa and Dr. Rosenthal for three years changed my trajectory as a dentist forever. I've never been more grateful for a phone call — that's an opportunity only a handful of people in this world get, and I feel tremendously fortunate to have been trained by true pioneers in the field.

Is there a particular book that made an impact on you? Can you share a story?

HBR's 10 Must Reads on Emotional Intelligence

Everyone can go to dental school and learn how to cut teeth. We all essentially passed the same national boards. But the way I connect with patients and my team members requires emotional intelligence, and I think that is just as important as my academic credentials. I believe regardless of who or where you are in your life, being able to find and make authentic connections is paramount.

How have you used your success to bring goodness to the world?

My family immigrated from Russia when I was 5 years old and had to start over in a country where they didn't speak the language. We came from very humble beginnings, which makes me particularly sensitive to the fact that dental health, and especially smile makeovers, are a luxury for most people in this country and abroad. I'm privileged to have a skill that can not only help people stay healthy, but also feel more confident and better about themselves. I went on a mission trip to Cambodia to perform dentistry on children living in orphanages with no access to care. I also have helped patients regain a sense of confidence and dignity after life events that impacted their smiles, such as addiction, eating disorders, homelessness. I think getting more people to smile inherently brings goodness to the world.

Can you please give us your favorite "Life Lesson Quote"? Can you share a story about how that was relevant to you in your own life?

"Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome." — Booker T. Washington

As I mentioned, my family immigrated from Russia when I was 5 years old. My father was a prestigious and well-regarded dentist there, but the political environment was unpredictable, even dangerous, for a young Jewish family. They believed a better future for themselves and their children could be achieved in America. My family came to America not speaking the language, with two young children, and only \$500 US dollars to their name. My dad went from being a respected clinician to an immigrant / refugee who, at the age of 36, had to start from the beginning and go to dental school again so he could be licensed to practice here in the States. In my mind, his success is unparalleled because of all the obstacles he overcame, and the literal and metaphorical relative distance he traveled to achieve what he did for his family.

Can you share your top three “oral hygiene tweaks” that will help people look and feel great?

1. Drink water! Especially after eating or drinking anything that could stain your teeth.
2. Tongue scrape! It improves the micro biome in your mouth and helps keep bad breath away.
3. Electric toothbrush! It works much better than your manual one, don't forget to change the head every three months. And when you're brushing, focus on brushing your gums. You'll ultimately brush your teeth, but if you focus on your teeth, you'll likely miss your gums, which is where most of the bacteria hides out.

Ok thank you for all of that. Here is the main question of our interview.

Based on your experience, what are your “5 Things You Need To Create A Successful Career As A Dentist” and why? (Please share a story or example for each.)

1. Clinical skills — we are doctors, and we take a clinical oath to do good by the patients we serve. Dental school is responsible for providing doctors with a strong foundation. Who you become as a clinician depends on your commitment to mastering your expertise.
2. Discipline — When I was in dental school, I was committed to building good habits from the start. I remember when we learned to use our mirrored instrument, and everything looked backwards. When the professors turned their backs, I noticed some of my classmates would try to use direct vision instead of struggling to use the mirror to complete the task and leave on time. I was never chasing speed but wanted to master the skill. This experience translated to my first veneer case which took many more hours than the same case would for me today. Dentists need to know there are no shortcuts to mastering their craft.
3. Artistic Vision — When someone comes into my office, I need to be able to envision what is possible for their smile within moments. The artistry immediately comes into play because we need to customize a smile that compliments someone's facial features, age, and personality, as well as address clinical health.

4. Strong Communication skills — there is a tremendous amount of coordination required to deliver a porcelain veneer smile makeover. You must communicate what the process looks like to a patient; this builds their confidence and comfort in proceeding with this transformation. I also serve as the liaison between my patient and the ceramist to execute.
5. Being a good listener — The first thing I do at every consultation is ask my patients what they like and dislike about their smile. Understanding their concerns and addressing them through my treatment plan is what's most important.

If you could start a movement that would bring the most amount of wellness to the most amount of people, what would that be?

I would help people build preventative and proactive behaviors and habits. What I have seen throughout my career rebuilding people's smiles, is that if we intervene earlier in life we might not have to repair. The health of your oral cavity is often indicative of your overall health so it's important not to neglect it.

We are very blessed that some of the biggest names in Business, VC funding, Sports, and Entertainment read this column. Is there a person in the world, or in the US whom you would love to have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why? He or she might just see this if we tag them :-)

I've always been very inspired by Elon Musk — he is confident, resilient, a visionary, and tremendously hard working. He never lets setbacks, even at one point potential bankruptcy, keep him from pursuing his ideas and it's obviously paid off.

What is the best way for our readers to follow you online?

My Instagram is @DrAlexNYC. That's the best way to connect with me and my work.

Thank you so much for these wonderful insights!