

Dr. Thomas Grabeman – A Dentist Story

Great Dentistry, Great Responsibility

Dayton, Ohio – “The Gem City” – central hub of aeronautical and aviation innovation in the country, a job-making, economic powerhouse, and home to such esteemed individuals as Orville and Wilbur Wright, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Dr. Thomas Grabeman.

If the name Thomas Grabeman doesn't sound familiar to you, not to worry, it doesn't mean you didn't pay close enough attention in history class. While you may not find his name in textbooks or your encyclopedia, Dr. Thomas Grabeman is most definitely an important figure in his own right, and the impact he has made during his life can't be understated.

As you may have guessed, Dr. Grabeman is a dentist, and his path to becoming one is a good tale all by itself. But his story reaches well beyond the dental practice. Since he was young, Dr. Grabeman had been taught that being a great dentist must include a commitment to giving back to the community one serves. This philosophy was repeated to him by several important people in his life, and Dr. Grabeman took it to heart.

PART 1

Thomas was born in Dayton, Ohio, and when he came along, his family name was already highly respected in the community. His father was a man of the people, a kind and very well-liked individual who spent a lot of his time volunteering and giving back to others. He also happened to be a dentist, and would regularly visit local nursing homes to provide free dental care for those who were otherwise unable to get it. This was not part of his business or an education requirement. Dr. Grabeman, Sr. offered his help purely out of the goodness of his heart and an innate sense of social responsibility. And the impact of his kindness was not lost on his son.

“My father was more than just an influence to me when I was growing up,” said Dr. Thomas Grabeman. “He was like a superhero. My brother and I would follow him around as he did his volunteer work, and people's faces just lit up when they saw him. It had such a huge impression on me and I always knew I wanted to follow in his footsteps.”

And follow he did. While Dr. Grabeman, Sr. preached charity and giving back, he never pushed his profession on his children. But it turns out he didn't need to, because Thomas went off to college with a plan to pursue a career as a dentist anyway.

The future Dr. Grabeman, Jr. earned his undergraduate degree from Vanderbilt University in 1977, then graduated with his DDS degree from the Ohio State University College of Dentistry in 1980. Before venturing out into the world and starting his career, Dr. Grabeman joined his brother, also a dentist, to complete a one-year residency at the Ohio Medical College at Toledo. It was here that he met another mentor who would be an important influence on his career and life.

The director of the Toledo dental residency program shared a professional vision very similar to that of Dr. Grabeman's father. Aside from helping dentists hone their clinical skills, the director consistently expounded on the importance of giving back, and Dr. Grabeman latched onto every word. "The program director at Toledo was adamant about going above and beyond in dentistry," said Dr. Grabeman. "To him, that not only meant excellence in the dental practice, but in service to the community. I remember being a bit surprised at how much he sounded like my father, but I also think that's why it has always stuck with me."

Needless to say, as he entered the professional world of dental practice, Dr. Thomas Grabeman now had a very firm idea of the kind of dentist he wanted to be.

PART 2

During his time at Toledo, Dr. Grabeman met a hygienist named Lisa who would become his wife before the residency was over. It ended up being the perfect fit. They were very much in love and ended up working side by side for over 30 years. But there was another facet of their marriage that was equally impactful and perhaps even more serendipitous.

His new father-in-law also turned out to be a dentist. Not only that, but he happened to be the President of the Ohio Dental Association. Naturally, they always had plenty to talk about at family gatherings, but one thing in particular stood out to Dr. Grabeman. "Amidst all our conversations about clinical procedures, recent case studies, and the latest dental technology, my father-in-law never missed an opportunity to convey the importance of being active and charitable in your community," said Dr. Grabeman. "He used to say that as dentists, we are fortunate to be in our position and it is our duty and responsibility to give back to those we serve."

If there was any doubt left in Dr. Grabeman's mind, it was quickly erased. He was now thoroughly convinced that being a truly great dentist meant much more than being skilled in clinical procedure. It meant being compassionate, charitable and socially responsible. Dr. Grabeman had learned many things from his mentors over the years, but this one lesson continued to present itself, and it was now deeply ingrained in his own personal philosophy.

Shortly after Dr. Grabeman and his wife were married, they started a small practice together in Kettering, Ohio, which is a nearby suburb of his hometown of Dayton. From day one, Dr. Grabeman went about distinguishing himself as a skilled and compassionate dentist. "Patient relationships have always been important to me and my practice," said Dr. Grabeman.

“Sure I want to provide excellent care, but I also want to be more to my patients than just their dentist. I want them to see that I’m their friend and neighbor too.”

This approach clearly had merit, because eventually Dr. Grabeman’s practice wasn’t so little anymore. Word got around, family told family, friends told friends, and suddenly Dr. Grabeman had more patients than he could handle on his own. It wasn’t in his nature to turn away a patient, so Dr. Grabeman brought on an associate to help care for this rapidly growing dental family. But he didn’t hire just anybody.

Once again, Dr. Grabeman thought locally, and hired a young, new dentist who just so happened to be a former patient of his. “I couldn’t have asked for a more perfect candidate for my new associate,” Dr. Grabeman recalls. “I had known this young man since he was just a kid and watched him grow up. Now here he was, a skilled dentist who was from the area. His local ties made him popular with our patients, and I knew right away that he was going to do great things.” And under the friendly care of Dr. Grabeman and his staff, the practice continued to thrive.

PART 3

In 2011, after more than 30 years in practice, Dr. Grabeman started thinking about life after dentistry. He wasn’t anywhere near ready to retire, but he’s a planner, and wanted to start formulating an exit strategy. He figured he would practice another 5-7 years and then decide where to go next.

In recent years Dr. Grabeman had also wanted to take more time to focus on clinical development and pursuing improvements in diagnosing and treating dental cases. But between serving patients and running the business side of the practice, he and his associates were always too busy to commit their attention to much else.

Then one day Dr. Grabeman was introduced to Midwest Dental via a mutual connection. He had gone through the motions with a few other dental organizations and had not been able to find the right fit. But Dr. Grabeman was a thorough man and he decided to learn more about Midwest Dental, just to make sure he left no stone unturned.

Turns out it was a smart move on his part, because the more he learned, the more he loved the idea of working with Midwest Dental. “I had built my practice around a few main principles – always putting patients first, staying on top of the latest advancements in dentistry, and giving back to my community,” said Dr. Grabeman. “The first thing that really stood out to me about Midwest Dental is that they share those same principles.”

Along with aligned care philosophies, Dr. Grabeman appreciates how Midwest Dental let him continue to lead his practice. “Midwest Dental offered something no other group had – real autonomy,” Dr. Grabeman said. “They didn’t burden me with any quotas or limits, and they let me continue to do things my own way. Early on, Midwest Dental impressed that they are a partner, providing support to allow my practice to continue its success. Not once have they failed to deliver on that promise.”

A couple of years after joining with Midwest Dental, Dr. Grabeman was contacted with some unexpected but very welcome news. Midwest Dental was seeking a new dental director to help mentor and support their growing family of dentists, and Dr. Grabeman was asked if he would consider the opportunity. He considered it, for about a minute, and gladly agreed to take the offer. It turned out to be the proverbial icing on the cake. "From the beginning, Midwest Dental has made it clear that they always act in the best interest of their patients and dentists. Filling their director position by promoting a dentist from within was just further proof of the trust they have in their staff, and it was a great honor for me."

Dr. Grabeman has since taken up his post as Dental Director and is thoroughly satisfied with his situation. "I love practicing dentistry, but after 35 years in the clinic, I was ready for something new. Becoming a Dental Director offers a nice change of scenery, and providing support and mentorship to other doctors allows me to continue making a difference in people's lives."

Now, Dr. Grabeman regularly receives calls from his peers throughout Ohio, asking him how everything is going with Midwest Dental. And while he could spend hours extolling his great experience, he can confidently and simply say - "Things could not be better."



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