

Dr. Michael Fuesting – A Dentist Story

A Man of Courage and Character

Life is filled with obstacles that can't be avoided. What defines our character is whether we have the courage to surmount those obstacles and continue onward. Dr. Michael Fuesting is a man of great courage and character. He has encountered no shortage of unexpected challenges in his life, but every time, he has managed to overcome them and ended up the better for it.

Dr. Fuesting hails from the small town of Teutopolis in a very agricultural region of Illinois, where he grew up as the 9th out of 12 children. He was a very bright young man and excelled in school from an early age. But while the majority of his classmates went to work on the farms after high school, Michael knew that he was meant for something else. "I decided I wanted to pursue a respectable career that would allow me to use my talents," Dr. Fuesting said. "That was when I began to seriously consider a career in medicine."

He immediately began preparing himself for a future as a physician. He took the appropriate classes and eventually started volunteering at a hospital in nearby Effingham, Ill. He wasted no time in making himself indispensable at the hospital. It wasn't long before he was offered a paid position, which he gladly accepted. But then something unexpected happened that had him very concerned. "I began to notice that the doctors at the hospital were working all the time, some as much as 120 hours a week," Dr. Fuesting said. He was never one to shy away from hard work, but he was also a very family-oriented man, and he began to worry that a career as a doctor could prevent him from having a good family life.

As he was considering his options for the future, a doctor at the hospital pulled him aside one day and told him he should go to dental school. When Michael asked why, the doctor simply replied, "They're the best golfers on the golf course." A bit cryptic perhaps, but Dr. Fuesting got the message loud and clear.

Dr. Fuesting attended Eastern Illinois University in Charleston, where he started on the pre-dental track. As always, he excelled in his classes and graduated in just three years with a degree in Chemistry. When it came time to apply to dental school, he considered a number of options. Initially he thought about attending school in the Chicago area, but he ultimately decided on Southern Illinois University School of Dental Medicine in Alton. Being from a small town, he figured he'd be happier here than in the hustle and bustle of the big city. More importantly however, he understood that at that time, the Chicago-based schools tended to stick to the very basics of general dentistry, since

the area was already saturated with specialists. But a small town dental school like Southern Illinois provided him a huge amount of experience in a broader range of specialty skills, such as oral surgery, endodontics, orthodontics and pediatric dentistry. Their mission was to train dentists for practice in rural areas where there was no or only very limited access to specialists.

After graduating from SIU in 1982, Dr. Fuesting moved north to the town of Danville near the Indiana border. He joined a dental practice there as an associate to an older dentist who planned to retire in a couple years. But just a few months into his new career, the owner dentist had a sudden heart attack. Thankfully it was not fatal, but it did prevent him from returning to work. Having just gotten comfortable in his new home, Dr. Fuesting did not want to start over somewhere else, and he unexpectedly found himself the owner and sole dentist of the practice. "It was like jumping out of the frying pan and into the fire," Dr. Fuesting said. "I had the perfect opportunity to ease into owning a private practice and learn the ropes from a seasoned veteran. But suddenly I found myself alone way before I had intended."

Luckily for him, Dr. Fuesting's schooling had prepared him for this situation. The well-rounded education he had received in dental school gave him the skills to serve patients of all needs. While he was definitely busy every day, he faced the challenge head on, with passion and gusto. Once he really got his feet under him in this new role, things started to take off in a big way. He began placing implants, which grew into a major facet of his practice. Soon enough, he outgrew his initial office space and built a brand new office in 1990. The new location had much more space, which allowed for more patients, more employees and as a result, more business.

During all this growth and prosperity, Dr. Fuesting also managed to stay involved in dentistry outside the practice. He earned a Fellowship with the Academy of General Dentistry, served on various committees in the Illinois State Dental Society, and was a member of the Chicago Dental Society. Closer to home, he joined the Danville District Dental Society, where he rose through the ranks from treasurer, to secretary, to vice president before finally reaching the apex as president. Truly it was a golden age for Dr. Fuesting.

Years later, Dr Fuesting was faced with arguably the biggest challenge of his life. He began to suffer from a physical ailment that affected his hands. Ever the realist, Dr. Fuesting knew this could signal the beginning of the end of his dentistry career. But he was not about to just drop everything at once. He was going to make sure his practice was secure before he stepped down. It would turn out to be a grueling task.

Dr. Fuesting first tried to find an associate who could buy the practice and take over. "My first hope was to hire a driven, young dentist, one who reminded me of myself when I first started out," he said. But this ended up being more difficult than Dr. Fuesting anticipated, and after a number of interested potential candidates came and went, it seemed this approach was not the answer. "So many young dentists are in too much debt to buy a practice outright," he said. "And the large workload was intimidating to many of them so early in their careers."

After giving it much thought, Dr. Fuesting decided to explore the idea of selling his practice to a dental support organization. He had a plan for his exit though, and was determined to only consider an agreement if the group could build a plan to meet his goals.

This proved to be yet another challenge that Dr. Fuesting would have to overcome. "Most of the groups I spoke too were too rigid and couldn't provide the solution I needed. It got to the point where I started to become concerned for the fate of my practice."

Out of all the group organizations Dr. Fuesting contacted, there was one that showed promise from the start. "One of the biggest issues I had been running into was my timeline," Dr. Fuesting said. "It's common that a seller like myself be expected to stick around for a few years before retiring. But with my hand issues, I knew I couldn't make such a commitment. But when everyone else fell short, Midwest Dental stepped up. They agreed to a faster exit timeline and did not try to shortchange me on account of it. They even successfully found me an associate, who I helped train for five months before handing over the reins and stepping down. Throughout it all, Midwest Dental was understanding of my circumstances and very fair in our agreements. I cannot say enough to express my gratitude."

Dr. Fuesting finally retired from dentistry in March of 2018. Since then, he's had some medical procedures to help with his hands, and his quality of life has dramatically improved. He has remained in the Danville area, where he enjoys a happy, peaceful life. He often stops by his old practice to say hello, and is warmly welcomed every time.



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