

**“Promoting our Profession”**  
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08/29/16

What is the role of a dental hygienist? Various individuals like friends, professionals, and even my patients frequently ask this question. It may bring some frustration when we are only perceived as "teeth cleaners". Our profession and skills are often misunderstood and underutilized. It is of great importance to break through the barriers and spread knowledge, as hygienists we are educators after all. We have such a wide range of skills that we can use in many ways to benefit our patients and community. I have created a 3-step challenge that will allow us to flourish and achieve our goals successfully in order to promote the great field of dental hygiene.

Step one is to "Be the change" where we increase in self-knowledge and confidence. Before we reach out to individuals and the community we must first believe that we can create change. I often find hygienist underestimating their potential and power to make a difference. We must not let our minds settle to the thought of how our capabilities do not go beyond us performing a prophylaxis. We have spent endless hours in school learning precise details of the anatomy of the head and neck, oral diseases, and have spent countless hours in the school clinic. Let's not leave this knowledge boxed up and put away with our old hygiene books from school. We must also take the knowledge we learn from our continuing education courses and RDH magazines and put it to use. Keeping up to date with new information is key.

The second step is to "Spread the change" where we share the abundant knowledge we have. Let's share this knowledge with friends, professionals, patients, and the general public. Awareness plays a large role in promoting our profession.

Some may not view the importance of dental hygiene simply because they are unaware of the crucial duties we perform on a day-to-day basis with our patients. It is rewarding when we come across thankful patients when we explain or educate them about their oral health in detail.

The third step is to "Get involved" where we need to be creative with our talents. We need to take our unique capabilities and find ways to benefit and bring awareness to our patients and communities. Recently at a local soup kitchen a fellow volunteer and I discovered that both of us are in the healthcare profession, therefore, we dedicated time to creating a health fair for the soup kitchen attendees. We brought many different healthcare and medical professionals to join us once a month to perform basic screenings and to educate the population on proper health and oral care preventive methods. There are countless ways we can show the community that our profession is imperative when it comes to taking care of their oral health.

There are many creative ways we can promote our profession and its importance. It is only possible to create change if we believe that we can be the change. Sometimes when we think of making a difference, we think it has to be on a large scale. We must never underestimate the power of how our small actions can make a great difference. Let us take this challenge and create a better future for our patients, dental hygienists, and community.