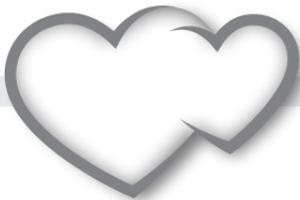


Let Love Work

the story

The Story



‘Superb lecture!’ I complimented John.

‘Thanks, Kev!’ Friends often drop the letters from our names just as they please.

‘When are you visiting India again?’

‘Winter, marriage season.’

We crossed Jamnagar bypass. Suddenly, John said, ‘Before I forget, I need to make a suggestion to you.’

I really lap it up when friends like John come up with suggestions.

‘Please shoot!’ I replied eagerly.

‘Appoint an associate. I can see you have teaching potential. When one is good at anything, they need to spread the light around.’

‘You serious, John?’

‘Yes. Raise your bar. Focus on the tricky ones. Your associate can look after the simpler ones.’

‘Won’t it be interference?’

‘On the contrary, it will be constructive. As you know, we are more careful when we know someone looks up to us, like, as a role model. That way your own standards will go up too. It will be a win-win situation for both of you.’

‘The way you did to me, inspire, I mean.’

‘Exactly. I could only do it long distance, sitting in my office, a few thousand miles away. And yet, as you say, I inspired you. Imagine how much you can achieve when someone is observing you from up close.’

We reached the airport. Over coffee we had some small talk, picking up old threads, remembering this one and that one- our old acquaintances. We said our ‘byes when John’s boarding was finally announced.

Now, I always take John’s suggestions seriously. So the very next morning I posted a note in all my social media groups saying ‘Associate Dentist Required’. I received three

applications in response. I saw the candidates one by one. More than anything else I rely on my gut feelings, my sixth sense so to speak, to pick up the vibes from the other person. I found one candidate that had those vibes. Preeti looked innocent and sincere. I had a hunch that she would be an asset to my set up. I generally mull the things over before taking such decisions- like allowing someone into my personal or professional life- so it was almost a week before I informed Preeti about her selection.

She joined my clinic the very next day. She was there at the exact scheduled time, wearing a neatly pressed dress. I was a little late myself. I promised myself to add punctuality to my nature. Here I was, supposedly the mentor and I was already learning good habits from my associate! John was so right, I thought.

I started by talking about the patients scheduled for that session: their complaints, the diagnoses and the treatment plans. Over

the next few days, that became our routine. Though Preeti was a qualified dentist, clearing examinations and actually handling patients clinically are two totally different things. So I designed a curriculum for her. I encouraged her to develop her hand skills and mind in such a way that even the unpredictable problems cropping up during clinical dentistry can be handled like routine, predictable issues. I kept reminding myself to be the mentor and not the boss.

She worked with our set up for about two years before she left.

Then, a few weeks short of three years, she was at our clinic once again. She told us that she was pregnant. We were happy to hear this piece of good news. We chatted for a while and then she asked me, 'Sir, can I join the centre again? In my last trimester, that is.'

I was not expecting this, so I was silent for some time. Then I said, 'See, Dr. Purv

here is already a part of our team and, as you know, we can't accommodate both of you. Moreover, you are pregnant. I wouldn't be comfortable exposing you to radiation. Another issue is possible infections...'

I didn't want to turn her away just like that, without any valid reasons, but she was sure of what she wanted.

'Sir, for me you are not just a dentist. I see a mentor in you. Of course, my health is important for my baby, but I feel that my thoughts too are equally important for the complete development of the life growing inside me. You can influence my thoughts in a positive way. We used to have some wonderful discussions about psychology and philosophy and I want to re-live those days, if you are comfortable with it.'

I could see that she had already made up her mind and "if you are comfortable" was just a formality. How could I refuse such a motivated person! Still I said, by way of

final confirmation: 'I hope nobody in your family has any problems with your decision.'

'Neither my parents nor my in-laws have any issues with it.'

We decided to have a lighter schedule for her, assigning her the lighter hours with fewer patients. Dr. Purv was well on course to learning the ropes and I had more staff members than necessary, but Preeti had been a part of the set up for about two years and she had sort of a right to re-join us. Yet, I was not fully aware of what she had in her mind, resuming clinical work in the middle of her pregnancy like this.

I went home after the evening session was finally over.

Our mind works in a strange way. It just needs a trigger and, as if by magic, the scenes from so long ago start playing back like a movie. I recalled Dr. Preeti from three years back. The days went by like a flash.

She had reported on time on her first day.

Her punctuality had impressed me. She was a little guarded when talking about anything and everything. I could sense that she was not confident. She had hidden fears like all beginners would have. Lack of field exposure is a big thing and one cannot hide it!

During the initial few days I explained to her how we function as a unit. What our policies were, how the staff members are dealt with, the works. I assigned her the task of dealing with the staff members, to instill an element of confidence in her. I introduced her to a book on advances in clinical dentistry. We started discussing the theoretical dentistry first. There was something about her that prevented her from getting fully involved in our routine and I had to keep motivating her.

One day, I was counselling a patient. She was a middle aged lady. Earlier, her husband used to be with her. That day was the first time that she had come alone. As soon as she entered our chamber, I could sense from

her lackluster face that she was having some issues. I did not want to upset her further by asking direct questions. Also, it wouldn't have been good chair side manners, so to speak. I stuck to the dental problem she had approached us for in the first place.

'You have decay in two of your teeth. Both will need root canal treatment. Your pain will go away once that is taken care of.'

'Pain will go away?' She smiled, but the smile lacked warmth. 'Pain will go only with my life!' Her statement corroborated with my initial analysis of her demeanour. She went on, 'Anyway, you are just doing your job, doctor. Go ahead and do what you think is necessary. When will be my next appointment?'

'Tomorrow, if it's ok with you.'

We then finished work with the rest of the patients. Before winding up, we were going through that day's work and chalking out the following day's plans when Preeti asked

me, ‘Sir, I think that lady was willing to tell you something. Like, she was about to share something personal with you.’ For the first time she was talking about something not related to dentistry.

‘I know.’ I wanted to scratch under her curiosity, so I did not elaborate any further. May be I was curious myself, about what was going on in her mind!

‘Then why didn’t you encourage her to open up?’

‘You’ll get your answer; just wait until her treatment is over!’

The lady came back the following day. We got on with the treatment. She was satisfied with her pain relief and smiled a watery smile before confirming the next appointment. Later, I talked to Preeti about some of the new materials that I had used in that patient and asked her to read about them. She quipped, ‘Even today you didn’t ask her anything.’

I smiled. ‘You are learning two very important

qualities here, ethics and patience! She will tell us about her husband's death in due time. Just wait for her next appointment!

I could see surprise written all over her face.

'How can you be so sure, sir?'

'Observation. Experience.'

After the final appointment the lady was more comfortable physically as her toothache was gone. Being dental surgeons, we rarely take interest in our patients' personal affairs. However, I am not averse to human touch and am ready to extend a hand when someone needs it. The other day I was reading a book that discussed psychological origin of somatic diseases, including dental problems. So I make it a point to understand the patients' psyche and do some basic counselling.

During her final appointment she finally opened up and started crying. Preeti was surprised. She looked on with sympathy in her eyes.

I lost your uncle. He passed away. My whole life is shattered. I am feeling rather lonely!’

I remembered her husband well. I had done some dental implants for him. He was one of the nicest human beings I had ever met. The first thing he would say after sitting on the chair would be, ‘Thank you doctor, in advance!’

‘Oh, I am so sorry!’ I nodded in sympathy and waited for her to pour her heart out. ***I feel it’s better to lend an ear than to offer your tongue in such situations.***

‘Since then, Hiten my son has been asking me to go to Delhi with him. I haven’t, as I am more comfortable here.’ She was still sobbing but getting settled. She went on after taking a glass of water from Preeti, ‘It’s been a year now, but it seems like yesterday...’

I could sense that the lady had something more to share.

‘Though I was aware of his failing health, losing life partner is still painful.’

After a pause, she went on, 'I am having some skin issues and recently they have become worse. Can you suggest some good skin specialist?'

I felt that she had suddenly changed the topic.

'Of course I will, but first tell me what it is that bothers you the most. Open up a bit more if you are ok with it.'

'As such there is nothing...'

'As such there must be something?' She was our last patient scheduled for the session and I had all the time to help her in healing herself.

She seemed to feel better already when she realized that I was willing to listen to her. Just a little willingness to listen to people can take care of a lot of their anguish.

'Mine has always been a sheltered life. I saw life as he showed it to me. He was a gem of a person but he never had any hobbies.

He was not fond of fun things like outings, movies or any recreational activities. He took care of all outside chores and I had never gone to a bank or even done grocery. And now, suddenly I have to handle everything on my own. I am rather confused. I am intimidated by the challenge of handling everything on my own. At the same time I find it all really exciting.'

'I think you should feel happy that you are finally handling your own affairs. Being happy is no crime. Understanding some simple things will help you in healing yourself. Our body and mind keep changing constantly. We have come a long way compared to what we were, say ten years ago. We are being upgraded each moment that we live. Accepting this basic rule of nature goes a long way in disease prevention.' I could see that she was listening to me and trying to comprehend what I was saying, so I went on.

The negative emotions harm us, physically as well as mentally and we should consciously

rid our mind of them. We frequently come across people who are always fresh and full of energy. We wonder how they manage to defy ageing and stay fresh, always. One of the most important secret has to be their approach to their past. One needs to leave the past behind. Not just the bad memories, sometimes even the good ones. That improves the healing process and its outcome. The present moment is the reality. When we learn that, we can heal ourselves much better and much quicker.’ I didn’t understand where those words were coming from, but I spoke non-stop.

Considering the fact that she was older than I, so I added, ‘You have seen many more years than I have. Don’t you think you should focus on exploring new things; something which you haven’t done before? Uncle would be very happy wherever he is if he sees you happy, if he sees that you are living a satisfactory life.’ I had never tried to console someone who was at least

a couple of decades older to me but the occasion demanded it and the words came smoothly!

She smiled and this time I could see that her emotions had changed. She had grasped what I'd said. Her body language was better, her eyes had a sparkle in them and her 'bye' was animated as if a burden were lifted off her mind.

When you have been a part of mind healing, you yourself feel more complete, I felt.

As soon as she left, Preeti caught hold of me, 'Wonderful, sir! How come you were so sure of the matter?'

'I've already told you: observation, and may be some experience!'

I took off my apron and washed my hands. We then went through the staff meeting and some small talk. That has been our routine. That helps us finish the day on a rather even note. I like to see smiling faces. It's an open forum wherein even staff members

can point out my mistakes as well. They can even tease me. The tags are off for those fifteen minutes.

While we were leaving, Preeti told me, 'I want to share one of my issues with you, can I?'

'Well, of course yes, but you will have to pay the counseling fees!'

"Sure, sir!' She smiled.

'See you tomorrow then!'

