

No Variable Control

In 1991, Leon Hermanides graduated with the equivalent of a bachelor's degree in dental technology from Natal Technikon in Durban, South Africa. Even though his father was a dental technician, Hermanides went into the profession against his father's wishes. His father had hoped Hermanides would be a dentist, but it was the demands and rewards of dental technology that captured the son's passion.

That dedication has taken Hermanides from South Africa to England to the United States. He owns and is president of Protea Dental Studio in Redmond, Wash. The laboratory employees 14 people, 10 of whom are technicians, and specializes in major dental reconstructions.

What top three lessons that you learned at school still apply today?

First of all, that it's a biologic system and you can't control all of the variables. I think the second thing would be that there are no easy answers - I've spent the years since I graduated actually

studying more than I did at college. The third lesson is that when all else fails, read the instructions.

What did you most enjoy during school?

The parties (laugh). What really surprised me was that I really enjoyed the material sciences particularly with the ceramics and firing ceramic.

After graduating, how qualified were you to work in a dental laboratory?

The pace of the work in the beginning was very hard for me to adapt to. I had trouble adjusting to strict deadlines and schedules. At school you could talk your way into extending a deadline by another week, but in a lab there's none of that. Also, I think there's no substitute for your first 1,000 crowns. You have to make your mistakes and learn from them.

Do you still attend continuing education seminars?

I do a lot. I don't do a lot of technical continuing education anymore because I'm not happy with the format it's in — the company-sponsored format. It's sparse on information and more of a commercial. Most of my training, my continuing education, is in clinical areas. I'm a mentor at the Kois Center (Seattle, Wash.) so I've taken all nine courses there. ... There's a lot of study clubs in the area. I



subscribe to about six scientific journals as well. Then, I lecture around the country, in Canada and, recently, in Denmark.

What advice would you give a recent graduate?

You come out of school thinking you know everything and you don't. There really is no substitute for what goes on in a commercial dental lab and there really is no substitute for the time at the bench. I'd also urge them to never stop learning.

What advice would you offer a laboratory owner hiring recently graduated technicians?

The thing I've learned is to be patient with recent graduates because they do come in thinking they know a lot and it's hard for them to take those first few knocks. There is a steep learning curve. I expect mistakes. What I recommend is that (owners are) very specific about what they want changed and why they want it changed. The people I've worked with and trained respond well to that. Their learning curve is shorter because they respond to why. **JDT**

