



# Ray of Light

## Go the Back Way

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Many of the choices I've made in dental practice and in life have been some form of choosing 'the road less traveled'; often for no other reason than just to reject conventional wisdom or majority consensus. The label for this behavior is 'opposite sorter', a badge I accept. Since some of those choices have paid off nicely, I've never felt compelled to change my ways. In fact I recommend to anyone to challenge the conventional wisdom before committing to following it.

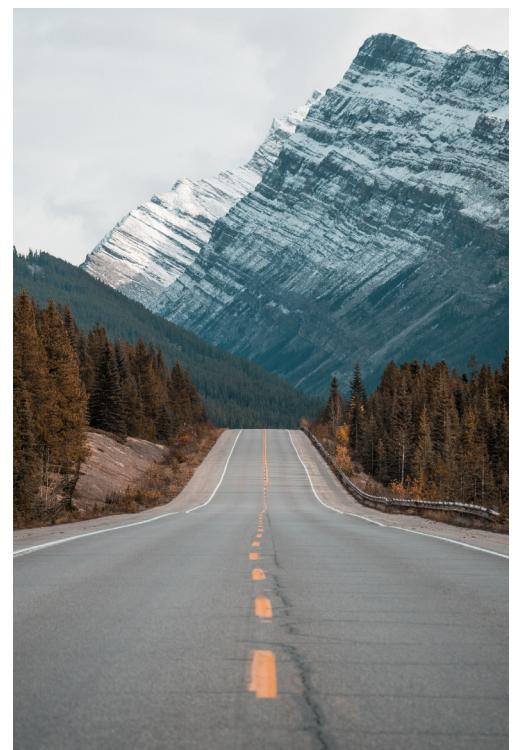
Now that I've reached a stage of life that allows weeks at a time for RV travel, I have the opportunity to very literally take the road less travelled. I gravitate toward routes to places unknown, least taken by others; the back way. I avoid the interstates, giving preference to the two-lane roads that go over mountains and through small towns and cities to places we never knew existed; places not featured in travel magazines.

Not having any schedule after 50 years of being scheduled to the minute every day, is almost intoxicating. It allows for spontaneity: for stops we'd never make if we were on a schedule, and to focus on what is here, where we are now. While we may have a destination in mind, we often don't know when (or if) we will get there.

By now, you're wondering when I'm going quit meandering and get there; to a point that relates to you. You're wondering how this can even be relevant in a world of goals, objectives and data tracking (all good things by the way).

Here it is:

**Go the back way, the way less travelled, as often as it looks inviting.** While others all stampede in the same direction, keep your eyes open for the inviting side road. True, some great accomplishments came from focused single-minded effort year after year for decades. But perhaps just as many came from recognizing and exploiting an unexpected opportunity when it arose, by making a sudden change of direction. While it is essential, in my opinion, to have vision, goals, objectives and to track progress; it is also just as important, again in my opinion, to watch for the opportunities that appeal to your sense of adventure or entrepreneurial spirit. Always hold to your core values, but be willing to alter your vision and bend your goals if it takes you down an exciting



path. Where are the true innovative leaders headed, or what trends in other areas of commerce offer opportunities for you in dentistry? Branch out in what you read and listen to. For example, while DSO's grow exponentially and dominate dental media and the profession's majority view of its future, could there be at the same time a stronger-than-ever demand created by that very trend, for smaller, non-corporate, dentist-owned, direct care (non-insurance) practices? Practices that take personal touch, customer service, comfort and convenience to a whole new level? If that is a niche that appeals to you or that you are already striving to fill, DenVantage is one of the tools that will help get you there.

**Be willing to take longer getting there**, even risk a deadend where you might have to turn around. If everyone is going the same direction, telling you to get on the bus before you miss out, maybe you shouldn't go, maybe it's too late, maybe it doesn't suit your values, maybe it will be too crowded when you get there (example: selling to corporate dentistry?). Got a great but untested idea to differentiate your practice? Go for it! Don't bet the whole farm, maybe, but give your idea some breathing room and see if it works even if others doubt. Isn't it obvious that the entire dental patient population doesn't all want McDonald's Dentistry; every dental practice to be like every other, vying for lowest fee and 'accepting all insurances'? Following the crowd can stifle reaching your vision for your practice; instead, make your practice as unique and individual as you are, and find a way to make that uniqueness visible to your community, not just another generic dental practice. Most patients, especially those who need major treatment, want to connect with a real person

who listens and has a reputation for excellence; far more than they want a lowball price at a corporate franchise. Your own individual reputation has far greater value to a prospective patient than a corporate franchise reputation does. Would you rather be known as 'expensive but worth it' or that you 'take any insurance'? Here again, as you move away from insurance dependence, DenVantage or another membership plan is an essential tool.

**Set a pace that allows you to enjoy the journey.** Forget about the 800-mile marathon days; take your time and enjoy the scenery. Does retiring at 50 sound great to you? If you can do it, great! But if you find you are grinding it out, holding your breath, counting the days until you can retire, maybe it's a sign you need to think about why you are in such a hurry to get done. Maybe you just need to find a pace that allows you to enjoy practice (and your life) more *now*. Will your practice vanish if you take a week off? No? What if you do it every month? Would you enjoy life more with a week's vacation every month? There are dentists doing that, so it must be possible, right? Are you revving up the treadmill to maximize the value of your practice to sell it? Have you considered the alternative of retaining ownership of your business in retirement? Have you heard of the concept of retiring *in practice*? The point is, you don't have to stay on the 'interstate' with the crowd; you have options. You can take an exit onto the less travelled road, the back way. Achieving this dream, or just about any dream regarding your practice, is most likely going to be helped by having the largest portion of your practice possible as DenVantage members, since it ensures loyalty to you, your practice, higher case acceptance per patient, and minimizes admin

work load; all of which allows you to slow the treadmill (if that is what you want) while increasing profits at the same time.

**Be willing to change your destination.** What you once thought was where you wanted to go, may not be the best choice from where you are now. Goals, objectives, and vision are great ways to guide your practice. But they are not chiseled in granite (are they?). Your core values remain unchanged but conditions you work and live in change in ways none of us could have imagined – sometimes for the good sometimes not. And sometimes what seems a catastrophe turns into a golden opportunity if you look for it. Example: it was once the overwhelming consensus that dental insurance was a boon to our profession and would allow us to treat more patients with complete dentistry without price resistance. Now that has changed to where dental insurance actually *deters* patients from receiving complete treatment, makes them more price resistant (complaining about co-pays and denials), while the patients who are getting complete treatment done are more often those

without the restrictions imposed by insurance. Data we've acquired from DenVantage practices shows that uninsured patients with DenVantage accept more treatment, in multiples of what insurance patients accept.

Changing my travel mode to the 'take the back way' mentality has completely transformed my perspective on hitting the road for a long trip. In short I now enjoy the journey as much as the destination. The same is true of my practice as DenVantage membership numbers have risen to several hundred: the practice atmosphere has been transformed by having more and more happy, loyal patients and fewer and fewer money transactions (not needed for hygiene visits), higher case acceptance, and better overall compliance.

I have written a book detailing that transformation and how you can do the same in your own practice simply and predictably. Like your own copy? It's \$49 for non-DenVantage practices, but free if you are a DenVantage provider. Just call Meg at (207) 266-8434 and ask.

