

# Change and Thrive!

## An Interview with Dr. Kimberly Santiago

**A**s you step into Issaquah Family Dentistry, the practice run by Dr. Kimberly Santiago, you'd hardly know that she purchased the practice just over three years ago. Change and growth have been watchwords in this practice, and Dr. Santiago is a firm believer in the adage, "progress requires change," as evidenced by the decisions she has made in her practice. She recognized that it was important to differentiate her practice and establish effective systems, and that strategy has served her well in our current economy. Dr. Santiago approached branding her practice with the same energy, enthusiasm, and passion she invests into dentistry.

*I immediately set out to create my own practice identity. In the process of purchasing the practice, I hired a graphic designer to design my logo and stationery, hired a design team and contractor to help*

*with my plans for the expansion and remodel[ing] of my office space, and worked with Burkhart to select optimal equipment for function, quality, and durability. I hired PLBC during my first year in the practice, as I was overwhelmed with every aspect of the business side of the practice, as well as being a leader. I was taught very little [about] practice management. Rather than continue to suffer and struggle, I sought the guidance of a consulting firm that would teach us business systems and bring out my potential as a leader. Lastly, I sought the guidance of a clinical mentor and was so fortunate to have the opportunity to begin my coursework with the Kois Center. Just as PLBC has given my practice our business systems, the Kois Center has given me clinical systems, a scientifically driven higher education, and an amazing set of skills to approach dentistry as a wellness model.*

It can feel overwhelming at times to purchase an existing practice and grow it into what you envision. In that respect, Dr. Santiago encountered many of the same challenges others have faced.

*Working with an existing staff and patient population that had grown accustomed to the previous doctor's practice philosophies and policies was a struggle. I was dealing with less-than-effective financial policies, few business systems, no scheduling structure, and a hygiene department unaccustomed to a consultative*

*approach. Being a young female doctor, I was uncomfortable not knowing how the patients would receive me and believe in me.*

Dr. Santiago has approached change in her practice as a positive method to bring her closer to her goals.

*I embrace change wholeheartedly. I am intent on finding the best systems, both clinically and administratively. My staff has been very patient and willing to try PLBC and Kois Center's recommendations, and we tailor them to best fit into our practice. I am thankful and fortunate to have a staff that is willing to be on my ever evolving journey.*

Embracing change has moved Dr. Santiago closer to the ultimate vision she has for her practice both clinically, operationally and aesthetically.

*My clinical vision is to bring a comprehensive wellness model to oral health care. I have high expectations for both myself and my staff. I never want to compromise on quality, patient care, comfort, or service. We assess each patient's level of participation in care, their needs, their wants, and find a balance. I follow up with our restorative and surgical patients daily; we strive to be the Nordstrom's of the dental community.*

Dr. Santiago is passionate about the aesthetics of her practice as well, and understands the value this provides to her patients and her team.



Dr. Santiago credits PLBC and the Kois Center for teaching her the systems for practice management and clinical management to help her infuse her vision into her practice. Photo by Scott George © 2009.

*Patients take note of every detail when they step into the practice and hopefully interpret them to be a reflection of the care and quality they are to encounter here at Issaquah Family Dentistry. This helps ... the patients and the team realize a sense of organization, standardization, and consistency.*

Dr. Santiago's desire for stability and growth initially caused some instability in the practice. Change can be difficult, however, and Dr. Santiago learned that the quicker you can let go of inefficient systems and embrace new, more effective ones, the closer you move toward your goal.

*The practice has evolved into a patient-centered experience. Each team member is attentive, caring, motivated, and truly enjoys patient care. We went from business chaos to virtually ordered systems. If there is not a system in place, we create a new one. Systems are the foundation for practice stability and future growth.*

While you are in the midst of change and are striving to make the practice your own, it can often feel as though the transformation isn't happening fast enough—while for your team, it can feel like it is happening all too quickly! Fear can begin to play a role, and it's at these times that it is best to heed Churchill's wisdom, "There is nothing wrong with change if it is in the right direction." Change can help practices thrive, even in this economy, and Dr. Santiago's practice is a case in point. When situations change, these practices change with them. Envision what you want in your practice, and take the steps—make the changes—to do just that.

*Our efficiencies have improved, which has led to better production. As a result, I've been able to invest in amazing CE courses as well as dabbling in additional technology.*



Issaquah Family Dentistry (left to right) Irina Brunets, Kara Prew, Jenn Peschel, Dr. Kimberly Santiago, Linda Carlton, Cori Frandsen and Kim Swofford. Photo by Scott George © 2009.

*With greater implementation of systems, we have been able to bring in more clinical systems, treatments, and technologies.*

Dr. Santiago has also learned along the way that one of the greatest inhibitors to change can reside within you.

*It can be quite difficult to lead a group of contemporaries. I do my best to be the leader and minimize my role as friend/equal. I attempt to give everyone real-time feedback as objectively as possible, sticking to fact-fact rather than emotion-driven conversation. Again, it is a challenge I work at constantly.*

Dr. Santiago is not alone in this area. All of the preparation and training you received in school has been centered on creating healthy mouths and not healthy practices. Dr. Santiago welcomed change, and brought PLBC in to help her reach the dreams and goals she had for her practice.

*PLBC is one of the best investments I've made. It will rock your business foundations and transform your*

*leadership skill set. Be prepared to make changes—some you may struggle with—[but] the benefits will come, in time. Be committed to the advice they offer, implement [it], and follow up with employees. Holding everyone, including you, accountable for the changes is the key to success. ■*

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