

# Building People First: Creating a High-Performance Dental Practice and Business

## Dr. Matt VanderMolen: Ep #540



### Dr. Jerry Gray:

There's more important things than the profession. Who we are as people is way more important than what we do. I look at my profession as a way to provide the income now, before it was who I was, I mean I was root canal guy. Now I've realized that I am a valuable human being in and of myself beyond that, and if we could have people realize that and not focus on all the technology and all those other things that cloud the way because deep down that's who we have to look at in the mirror.

### Dr. David Phelps:

Decades ago I hustled to grow my dental practice and real estate Empire Society patted me on the back and every new deal and patient reinforced the success they said I had. Then my daughter, Jenna was diagnosed with leukemia. Nine years, several intense chemo treatments and years of epileptic seizures. My daughter was given one more miracle, a life-saving liver transplant. In that hospital. I realized I wasn't successful. I had money. I had real estate assets and a business, but the only thing that mattered was time with my daughter. In that hospital room, I decided to sell my business, leave active income, and sustain my lifestyle with my real estate assets. Now, Jenna is healthy and all grown up and me. I am teaching others to do what I did and I continue to uncover the principles, strategies, and lessons we can apply in business and investing to create ultimate freedom for what matters most to each of us. Welcome to the Freedom Founders podcast.

We all dream of the perfect business, life and legacy, but that takes bravery, reinvention and leadership skills we know we need to work on, but always leave for another day. Our guest today will show us how to start taking charge of our future. Now today I speak with Dr. Jerry Gray, a seasoned ended, honest practice owner and newly certified professional coach. With more than three decades of clinical experience and a personal journey of profound transformation, Dr. Gray shares his defining moment that changed how he leads, serves and lives from burnout and isolation to leadership and legacy. Jerry walks us through the process of reinvention, not just for himself but for his family, his team, and the next generation, including his son who has set to join him in his practice. If you're a leader who knows, there's more to success than income statements, this conversation is for you.

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In this episode, we explore the blueprint weekend. That sparked a turning point in Jerry's career, how investing in coaching led to leadership breakthroughs, redefining the practice as a platform for team development, preparing for succession with his son and mentoring others. Why legacy is about values, not just about wealth. The advice every young professional needs to hear. This is a masterclass in humility, transformation and long-term thinking. For anyone ready to grow beyond wealth in their current profession, please welcome Dr. Jerry Gray. Well, Jerry, it's great to get a chance to get back in front of you. It's virtual, not live. I always enjoy the live part, but what I really enjoyed in getting to know you and Carrie a little over a year ago was the pathway that the two of you have taken, marriage and family and practice, and I think I find myself in the same realm.

We're just maybe a little different stage in life, but I really found your willingness to be open and transparent about the discoveries. So I think that's what life's about. It's discovering different paths or new opportunities or ways to build what we thought we wanted but didn't get there. That's usually what happens when we go through school. We have this idea of what we want in life and our practices and what that's going to look like, and no doubt we are blessed to, we have to work hard to get there, but we're blessed to have the opportunity to provide the services we do in this case, in our specific industry in dentistry, your specific case in specialization of endodontics, yet there's a lot more to the practice thereof than just our technical skills, I guess is what I'm getting down to, right? That's a big piece of it, and that's what we go through school and academia and licensure to get that, but then we learn. Yeah, but there's more to all of this and that's really why I want to go today with a little bit of that path. So let's just go back in time. How did you start to transport you and Carrie's vision about who you wanted to be, and again, this encompasses your family and the practice and how you started to model it out. What transpired that induced you to take next steps and what were those steps look like?

### Dr. Jerry Gray:

Yeah, there's many different ways to go. We got married, young, 20 years old, had three kids by the time we were done with dental school and got on that path, did endo training right after dental school and did the practice. I thought that was the answer. You hop on that hamster wheel and you do the thing. When the last kid was graduating from high school, oh gosh, about 11 years ago now, 2014, I knew that I needed to delve into something else. The practice was rolling as great practice, but I needed something else. So I started looking at more education. I didn't really understand the dental business even though I had one, so I looked into an MBA program. I started the MBA program and it was an online deal and started that MBA program. Got into it about a week or a month. I mean it wasn't very long, and I realized that this was not really what I needed.

Quit that because I was in the class. One of my first classes was international business and I was in with people that were actually in the international business, like vice president of Southeast Asia for Nintendo or

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something like that. I couldn't see that fulfilling what I needed to have in my dental practice in my life. So then I started searching around and found an ended on a coaching system I inquired about, then signed up with Funny thing was 20 years earlier, I got pamphlets from this same guy when I was first out of school, what is an old guy going to teach me about root cans? I just got out of my training, I know this stuff well. So almost 20 years later I contact him and he has kind of a full scope coaching business, front office, back office, clinical as well as personal coaching.

And so I got into all different parts of that coaching with his program and that really opened my eyes that I didn't have all the answers and there's so much more out there and I really realized that I was spinning my wheels. I was on that hamster wheel and I was getting tired of the same thing over and over and over again. One of the main things in his program is, okay, increase production. How are you going to do that to make the money to then do other things with it? That allowed me to afford the time and the cash expenditures to do his other coaching programs, including personal coaching, which I needed. My daughter let me know of 4th of July that summer that dad, you could use some help. And that kind of broke me out of my shell that I was very isolated.

#### **Dr. David Phelps:**

I was going to say, what was she noticing?

#### **Dr. Jerry Gray:**

I would've a temper 4th of July and then I'm yelling and screaming at her or something over nothing huge blowups are usually over these little tiny things. Can't even remember what it is. But she told me in the summer of 2017, she said, dad, if you keep backing like this, I'm not showing up anymore. That time I slap in the face that says, Hey, I was kind of on this trajectory. But that really brought it about that, hey, I have some work to do for the people that I love. I don't want to alienate them. I don't want to alienate myself have this what looks like from the outside storybook type life for some people and I'm in the middle of it and not seeing the fruit and the happiness and the contentment that I really wanted to have. So started the coaching thing, started realizing that there's a different me that could come out and so I just started working on myself, working on my practice, working on the leadership that I had in the practice or have in the practice, and then it's really transformed into my looking at my practice as, I mean it's an income source for myself and others, but the other people in the office are no longer just worker bees.

They're not pawns in the process, and if they don't do it, then we get rid of, we get another person to do the menial tasks and I've learned to just trust other people and make them important, and I see them really as human beings now, which I really didn't in the past.

#### **Dr. David Phelps:**

You're right. Many business owners just feel like, well, these are cogs in the system and I just need to plug

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one in and pay them for what they're supposed to do. How quickly with the inspiration and the provocations that you were getting from your coaching, did things start to make sense where you started to see the light and where you started to look at not only your family but also your staff in a different realm? Was it hard at first or did things just crack open? You go, I've got to make some changes and I'm just going to do it, whatever it is, and I'm going to have faith in the process.

### Dr. Jerry Gray:

I'm usually not a very quick learner, but in this realm it really did. Once I decided to jump in, I just let people have influence over me. The thing is my team really went with the office concept. They created the stream and I just jumped in. So they had that going. They bought into the whole coaching process.

### Dr. David Phelps:

Were they part of the coaching process? Were they were involved? Okay, that's what I thought.

### Dr. Jerry Gray:

So we had a coach show up after we got going a little bit. We actually went to the mentor's office, all of us, so they were into this thing. It wasn't until I moved from that individual coaching to leadership coaching that I really got that input that says, let's not just have this transactional relationship with the team members, but more of this transformational type of relationship with them. So it's not just the money time for dollars that they can feel like they're part of it. You still have to pay them for the time and their expertise, but give up some of that that we don't want to give up. We want to have our hands on and grip the wheel, and I was just listening to one of your videos over the weekend. It was from a while ago, but let 'em do stuff. Let 'em do those tasks that you think only you can do, and if they can do 'em 80% as well as you can, then that's fine and start to take the hands off the wheel wheel, and that's when I really started to notice that It freed me up, freed me up to think.

It freed me up to treat them in a different way, and I've always been a significant delegator, the micromanager too much, but man, once we let some of those team members go to Costco and do those things and make them responsible for birthdays, before I was going getting all the birthday cards and then whatever, and you just let somebody do that stuff. They love spending your money. It's the same money that's going to be spent. You might as well let somebody have some joy in it.

### Dr. David Phelps:

That's right.

### Dr. Jerry Gray:

Since then, we've just tried to expound on that. Have each person in the office just go to their highest

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potential and they're happier with it. They're happy bunch, and if they don't fit the culture, if they don't want to be that, then they probably just shouldn't be there.

### Dr. David Phelps:

Their financial advisor's word stung. You're on cruise control on the open highway. Just keep doing what you're doing for 20 more years. Rent an alley's, shoulders hung low. This was not cruise control. They were fighting tooth and nail in their dental practice with two little ones at home. They both knew they couldn't keep this up for much longer, let alone two more decades. That's when Brent and Ellie decided to make a change. Two years later, they are now free for life. Their practice is more profitable while they spend less time in practice, they have more time to raise their kids, see the world and live life without constraints. What was the change that started it all? The catalyst for this exponential freedom and success. Go to [freedomfounders.com/catalyst](https://freedomfounders.com/catalyst) to see what started it all. That's [freedomfounders.com/catalyst](https://freedomfounders.com/catalyst) and maybe you can take the same steps they did to stop grinding and start living. Well, let's give credit where Chris do. This is Ace Gary, right?

### Dr. Jerry Gray:

Yes.

### Dr. David Phelps:

Yeah. Ace, as you said, has been around a long time and has a great reputation. Your team's involved and they're seeing transformation in you, in your desire to change, and during this time, the team was getting on board. Did you have any team members that left because they didn't want to be on board or did most of them stick with this process and buy in? Also,

### Dr. Jerry Gray:

Most of stuck with, I mean, we had an expansion at the time, so we hired people. There's been one or two over the timeframe that have not worked out because they have to fit that culture. If you want to be that transactional person, just show up and do your thing and walk out the door and not really buy in, then you're not going to fit in so well, and I had an associate like that. I worked with her for years and just tried to get her to get that point to see those other people in the office as valuable and it didn't work out. I've just figured out that that's the key in my office now is not the production per day, but it's really what kind of environment can we have and what kind of culture we can create and then the money shows up.

### Dr. David Phelps:

Has this freed you to, as you said, the office becomes an income stream, but it's an income stream that you don't have to stress over? Maybe you did in earlier years. You've got a team that has ownership, they're participating, they're engaged in outcomes. You've taken your fingers off the controls in the appropriate way

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so that they can run things, so that takes stress off you, empowers them, excites them. What would keep you from keeping a run rate like you have right now for some period of time? Because a lot of people, when they get to that burnout, stressed out point's like, how quickly can I get out of here and be done with it all? Has this rejuvenated, you renewed your spirit. I'm kind of looking at what's next for you over the next number of years and also now that you've learned and gained so much introspection yourself, how are you taking that and not only providing inputs for your team with your leadership skills, but also where else is this impacting you and other people that you care about?

#### **Dr. Jerry Gray:**

Well, I've run into a little hiccup with my associate. We came to loggerheads and since the culture wasn't being appreciated that we had, we've parted way, so I'm actually working more these days. Days I do the least amount that I have to. I mean, I do what it takes to do and I do nothing else in the office besides leave the office. But yeah, I'm looking forward to my next associate, which will be my son. He'll be showing up in 13 months. Not that I have countdown going, but he'll be showing up. I'll take the foot off the gas a bit, let him ride that out. But we've already had significant conversations about what the culture is and what it is in our office. He has to match that. He doesn't get to have his own thing. That's in transition in the next year. Plus recently, actually just last Thursday, I completed a one year certified professional coaching program myself because I've just seen the benefits that I've gotten from coaching. I mean, I've had 6, 7, 8 coaches over the years, sometimes three or four at a time to deal with different parts of life, and I've just seen the benefits of that. I don't know what that looks like, but I know that a lot of our dental colleagues could benefit from just some help. You're not alone. You don't have to be alone, and there's help out there if you're willing to be somewhat vulnerable and then you got to do the work.

It doesn't just happen that coach or consultant just doesn't jump in and fix all your problems. You have to do that work daily, but you can have a better life. I have a better life now than I did seven or eight years ago, and I'm looking forward to having a better life in another few years and just change what I do. Clinical dentistry for me will curtail somewhat. I still want to keep my fingers wet at a certain level, but then move into more of that leadership role, maybe a coaching role with some impact.

#### **Dr. David Phelps:**

So no doubt you're looking forward to having that leadership and mentorship role with your son because you can full time for him and being that mentor that you've become over the last number of years and being coachable is a big part of it. You've said that, and if someone's not coachable, I'm not speaking about your son. I'm just saying in general, people aren't coachable then they're not ready for a transformation, and I agree with you. I've had multiple coaches and mentors in my life, and again, many times it's been multiple at any given time. It didn't start out that way in my life. It took a while before I understood. There's a few things I didn't know amazingly. How do you choose today a coach climbing a mountain where you are appreciating

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coaching and mentorship? How have you decided to choose? Is it just you're gaining more introspection into yourself and you're seeing different areas where you want to make improvements, and then is there a knowledge base or you ask a current coach? Who do you know or what happens there to choose who you think might be an appropriate coach? There has to be a fit. There has to be a fit, right?

### Dr. Jerry Gray:

Yeah, that's a great question. Well, most of my professional coaches have come through referrals. Like you said before, your network is your network, so I mean, it's just then you get to know people, which I never wanted to do. My first 20 years in practice, I was this island and I didn't want to talk to anybody. I never really got involved in the dental society thing. My kids are so small. When I got out of school that right when I got out of school and did the practice thing, I made myself an island. Although the first couple endo meetings I went to locally that they weren't very congenial to the new guy on the block, so then I just shut off. That's where Freedom Powder has been fantastic, even better than the other organizations that I've been in. There's more comradery in this group that you've fostered than anywhere I've seen and more vulnerability and people being real. It's really a testament to what you've created.

### Dr. David Phelps:

Well, I appreciate that, but again, I had to learn the same thing. I had to learn how to be open and vulnerable and not act like strength is only shown through thinking. You know it all. Yeah, it's a process we have to go through. I think most of us have to transition to that from being a John Wayne independent. I could do it all. I should be able to do it all to maybe, I don't know everything, and it's been a big part of my life, but it certainly has been for yours as well. How do you see, looking at your life and your life is for sure not over at all, but we talk about legacy and legacy can mean different things to different people. I feel like we're creating a legacy as we're going through life. What does that look like for you? What do you want to leave or input to others as you already have been doing? What's that mean for you?

### Dr. Jerry Gray:

Before joining this group, I had a different definition of legacy. I thought it was just what's in the family trust and the monies and the properties or whatever that are going to be handed down that it really is that the values and the persona that you want projected through time, through the people that you know that's the most important. The financial part is great, but if you don't have the other parts of that who you are and what values you hold most dear perpetuated and it doesn't mean much. So I would like to see these things that I've learned instilled in the people that I love and that they can perpetuate that down the line because I didn't have that growing up.

### Dr. David Phelps:

If you're ready to break free from the conventional financial treadmill, the Path to Freedom newsletter is your

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roadmap. Every quarter you'll receive my free digital newsletter packed with powerful alternative investment strategies, timely economic insights and uncommon wisdom to help you create more freedom, autonomy, and impact in your business and in life. As a subscriber, you'll also get weekly blog insights from decoding market shifts to building generational wealth, to crafting a business that doesn't run you. It's not just information, it's insight that leads to action. Join a community of like-minded entrepreneurs and practitioners who are choosing the road less traveled. Sign up today@freedomfounders.com slash digital newsletter one and start your path to true freedom. That's freedom founders.com/digital newsletter one. What advice would you give to a young professional? It doesn't have to be dentistry, but your son is definitely one who you're already giving advice to or hopefully he's asking you for advice, but let's just say young professionals in general today with our assessment of the current world we live in and all the changes that we're seeing rapidly happening, we have technology and we have AI, and we have student loan debt, and we could just tick off a lot of things.

I'm not being a doomsday or I'm just saying things change. They're always changing. What advice would you give to young professionals in general that are coming out of school, graduate school, whatever it might be, and they're seeking their pathway? Any general advice you would give to that group of young people?

### Dr. Jerry Gray:

You are trained to do what you're trained to do, but that's not who you have to be. Figure out who you want to be and do that work that it takes to create that in you

### Dr. David Phelps:

And how can you and I and others inspire young people to seek that greater depth beyond their technical training earlier in life? How can we, I guess the question I'd ask is what do you think we could do to influence their behavior? That's maybe another way to put it. I know this is real time questions and I don't have all the answers. That's why I'm asking you. I'm not sitting here off the top of the mountain going, I'm just waiting to see what Jerry says. I'm interested because I know this is on the forefront.

### Dr. Jerry Gray:

I mean, with three grown kids, I probably need to speak quietly. There's more important things than the profession. Who we are as people is way more important than what we do, so if you can have enough money, I look at my profession as a way to provide the income now before it was who I was. I mean, I was root canal guy, and now I've realized that I am a valuable human being in and of myself beyond that, and if we could have people realize that and not focus and all the technology and all those other things that cloud the way because deep down that's who we have to look at in the mirror. We have to look at ourselves, and that's what other people see in us, and if we could at least make that apparent that our value as human beings is much more important than our values as professionals in the end,

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### Dr. David Phelps:

That's well said, well said. I don't think I could make a better ending than that, Jerry, so I'm not going to try. I think you hit it just right, so I just want to thank you for your time. Thanks for who you are, who you become, and how you continue to inspire the people in your life wherever they may be. You're a true blessing. Really do appreciate your time today.

### Dr. Jerry Gray:

Thank you, David. You're a great mentor.

### Dr. David Phelps:

The difference between a transactional culture versus a transformational culture and a practice or a business really comes down to the short game of the long game. Transactions are necessary in every business. That's what drives the revenue, which drives hopefully a good profitable bottom line, which allows the business to continue to sustain and prosper. No question. We have to focus on the transactional elements of the business practice, the way we serve other patients or clients. Transformation, on the other hand, is playing the long game, so we've got to have the transformation along with the transactional transformation means you're building a real team of culture, of mission, of values. This is the glue that really creates the bonding and the core of any business, which takes a business from the beginning stages when there's euphoria about growth and transactions and making a market to being able to sustain the long game during market cycles, shifts in the market, shifts in the recession, consumer sentiments, others aspects of the business market that we can't control.

It's the core, the long-term transformation that makes the real difference in how you sustain and predict long-term success. I have a lot of great discussions with people in our Freedom Founders Group, as well as other mentors and coaches, people that I really ascribe to who they are as people, as people of influence, of people of real transformation, and often our discussions, particularly in our latter decades, comes down to legacy. Well, what is legacy? How do we leave a legacy, particularly a legacy where we're talking terms more than just wealth? Most of the time people think in terms of legacy about estate planning, asset protection, trusts and wills, and the ability to transfer wealth from one generation to another. I don't disregard that at all. I think that's important and how one goes about that is a topic for another conversation. The other aspects of legacy really comes down to who we're about as people, as families, as generations, the history, the story behind who we are, what we do, even if we're in different lines of business and we don't follow a business legacy, teaching our kids the next generation, what we're about and what's important in one's life, I think is the most important part of legacy beyond just the wealth aspect that so often discussed.

Thanks for watching or listening for those interested in learning how to create similar, exceptional and life-changing results like Dr. Cherry Gray, you can schedule a call with my team at freedom

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