Jeffrey Anzalone, DDS, a regular reader of this blog recently sent me a copy of a book he wrote that I think every dentist, dental student, non-hospital based physician and small business owner should read. *What They Don’t Teach You In Dental School* is a short, high-yield, practical primer to opening your own practice. Jeff is a periodontist who thought he was going to be joining another practice right out of his residency, but then was surprised when the position was no longer available. He ended up taking a position as an associate and eventually building and opening his own practice. Along the way, he made hundreds of mistakes, most of which could have been prevented with just a little bit of knowledge. In fact, he feels an entire year of dental school should be dedicated to learning the business aspects of running a practice. You know as well as I do that isn’t about to happen, so just like with anything else, you can either learn from the mistakes of others, or learn from your own.

This primer contains the information that would have helped you avoid the mistakes Dr. Anzalone and several of his colleagues made. It’s not the prettiest book I’ve ever seen, nor the best-written nor the best-edited. But it doesn’t claim to be. Like this blog, it’s written by a full-time practitioner trying to help you avoid errors similar to his own. It is a no-frills volume that takes you from knowing nothing about business to being able to equip, staff, and run
your own practice. The whole book is only 105 pages divided into 10 chapters; it only takes an hour or two to read.

The first three chapters are fairly personal, telling his story and that of other dentists and the challenges a new dental school graduate runs into. He also includes a brief tribute to Dave Ramsey. Then he launches into the meat of the book. Chapter four discusses how to form your LLC, get an employer identification number for the IRS, open a business bank account, and do payroll. Chapter 5 talks about renting, buying, or building your building and getting your insurance and licenses in order. Chapter 6 discusses practice management software, using consultants, developing an employee policy manual, and watching for embezzlement. (I loved the idea to throw a little extra money in the till to see what happens to it.) Chapter 7 is about equipping the office, preferably with used equipment for which you pay cash. It’s packed with pearls like remembers to ask for specials (or free shipping) when ordering office supplies and taking pictures of each drawer in any dental clinic you work in prior to opening your own practice. There are lots of things there you might not think of, like how to hire a medical waste disposal company. Chapter 8 is about marketing, including face to face, via websites, through social media and through patient newsletters. Chapter 9 wraps it all up with a discussion of the waiting room, acquiring testimonials, and keeping up on your CME. Chapter 10 is a bonus chapter written by a prior Navy periodontist Dr. Brian Evans about going the military route to pay for school. He mentions most of the downsides of having the military pay for your school, then bizarrely concludes that he fondly remembers the experience. I can completely relate. When I talk to people about my military experience, I always conclude by telling them “But obviously I didn’t think it was that great or I would have stayed in.”

Here are a few quotes to give you a taste of the book:
“Beginning specialty dentists have been known to bring in gift certificates, deliver lunch to a whole dental office, show up with baskets of flowers and cookies, and in general act like they have nothing better to do than press gifts on the established office. Which, really, you don’t.”

“The number one key to look for in hiring someone is his or her personality. Look for nice, happy people. You can teach anybody to do clerical work or dental assisting, but you can’t teach people to be kind. I’ve tried, and trust me, it doesn’t work.”

“[The marketing consultant recommended] restarting the newsletter, but this time, sharing information about my family and the practice as well as about me. I was hesitant at first, wondering why anyone would want to know things about my family and me? Boy was I wrong...we have already received more new patients this month than we had received the previous six months.”

Amazon is currently listing the book for as little as $12.99. This may be the best $13 you spend on books in dental school. Pick up your own copy of *What They Don’t Teach You In Dental School* today.