



Thinking Outside the Box: The Path to a New Career

FAQs

Q: I want to explore my career options outside of traditional clinical practice. Where do I start?

A: Equip yourself with information! These frequently asked questions are designed to provide insight to the process of determining what career paths are available and to identify the first steps necessary for you to begin the next phase of your career journey. Investigation and a thorough understanding of the dental hygiene landscape are the first keys to advancing your career.

Q: What career options are available to a dental hygienist?

A: In addition to clinical practice in private dental offices and clinics, dental hygienists have careers in the fields of education, research, administration, public health and advanced practice. For some great examples of the opportunities available within these fields, visit [Working](#), an Access magazine column profiling dental hygienists working in unique settings.

Q: Are there new career options on the horizon?

A: Yes! This is an exciting time to be a dental hygienist. The profession of dental hygiene is at the crossroads of change, and the variety of career opportunities are expanding as never before. In order to stay relevant in a changing profession and to understand emerging roles, take a fascinating look into the future with the 2011-2021 [ADHA Environmental Scan](#), a must read.

Q: Do I search for a position outside of traditional clinical hygiene the same way I approached my clinical positions?

A: Most entry-level dental hygiene programs focus almost exclusively on preparation for a clinical career, therefore your path to traditional clinical practice was clearly defined. The next stage of your career development requires a new, broader approach. You will need to use the critical thinking skills you have developed as a professional to investigate and pursue additional career options. Rather than a familiar or cookie-cutter approach, YOU design your unique career path through innovation, education and understanding.

Q: What new skill sets will I need?

A: A new career path requires new skill sets. For example, some non-traditional dental hygiene career paths involve clinical practice (collaborative practice, advanced practice, clinical educator, public health clinician, to name a few). Yet in order to be successful in these settings, additional business skills, educational methodology, knowledge of state practice acts and rules, or healthcare

administration knowledge and skills may be necessary. The same is true for career paths with little or no clinical component, such as corporate sales, product development, and didactic education, regulatory or legislative administration. New positions involve different work environments and processes, and therefore different knowledge and skill sets. You already possess valuable knowledge and skills that will transfer to a new setting; the next step is to identify the gaps and develop a plan to address them.

Q: Will I need additional education to advance my career path?

A: It is likely you will need to pursue additional education to advance your career. This may involve continuing education, college courses and/or an additional degree. Often the coursework required for a degree will lead to a career path you had not even envisioned. In order to advance your career, it's important to be open to possibilities and commit to grow through education.

Q: How can I get in touch with others who can help me?

A: We are all better together! Many hygienists have made the transition you are pursuing; seek out people who are willing to mentor you through your journey. Take advantage of networking opportunities whenever possible: attend meetings and CE sessions in your area of interest. Introduce yourself and ask questions. If you have not been active in your association previously, now is the time to connect through ADHA, on a local, state and national level. Communicating with people outside your current career track is critical in advancing your career.

Q: What resources does ADHA have to help?

A: ADHA is here to here to empower, support and develop YOU. For information regarding career advancement and professional development, including:

- the long range outlook for the profession,
- examples of career opportunities within public health,
- employment trend data,
- job listings,
- resume writing,
- career development CE courses and more

Visit the ADHA website at <http://www.adha.org/careerinfo/dhcareers.htm>.