

The People Make It Worthwhile

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One question that seems to always come up in private conversations is, “Why do you continue to teach in places where travel is so difficult?” To me, the answer has always been easy to come up with: I enjoy teaching, and the people make it all worthwhile. I really think that there are the main reasons why most well-known clinicians come up with. Then there are the other most popular answers: seeking status, getting paid to see the world, the quest to “reach the top” and financial rewards.

But let’s go back to the beginning. Travel used to be exciting when I first began to lecture. Now, it has become a bad dream with sometimes a nightmare thrown in -- such was my travel experience for lectures in Moscow for the Russian Academy of Esthetic Dentistry this winter. To begin with I happen to be one of those people who can’t sleep on planes. I have tried sleeping pills, sleeper seats, and various sleeping aids. They’ve never worked. My latest experience on Air France first-class was a “sleeper seat” with such a bulge in the center that only a snake could relax over it.

Going through French security, after being directed to the wrong gate, the newly found all-powerful security man demanded I remove my sunglasses and reading glasses to put them through security. When they finished searching everything but my toenails, I was permitted to walk to the plane, because the last bus had left. I discovered I had gotten everything back but my glasses. So no reading glasses in Moscow! Fortunately for me the sun never came out in 6 days in Moscow, but the city and the snow were beautiful, and I really enjoyed being there.

I was most impressed with the closeness of the Russian Academy members, and their excellent relationship to the dental industry, especially TBI and Ultradent, two Russian companies that underwrite much of the expense of continuing education and have helped to raise the standards of dental practice and teaching to world-class status.

I met Sergei of the Ukraine whose vision and clinical standards rivals any leader in our profession today. He will build an Academy of Esthetic Dentistry in Ukraine.

The president of the Russian Academy, Ilya Rabinovich is doing such an excellent job in organizing and leading the organization .

And one other important person has been Marina Tabakova. She has acted as translator for the past years and is such a beautiful person to help represent the Academy.

So how is this Academy different than other countries willing to create an academy of esthetic dentistry? This goal has been helped by International Federation of Esthetic Dentistry President and Co-founder Philippe Gallon, who encourages each country to create an academy of esthetic dentistry. The merger of academicians, leading clinicians and dental industry seems to be the best way to establish such a national academy.

My Air France plane was delayed leaving Moscow and I feared I would miss my connecting flight, so I pleaded with the personnel to alert the gate for my Hanover, Germany flight to know I was coming and to hopefully arrange a car (which Air France does many times for delayed planes with

close connections). We arrived and I had to go to another terminal with 25 minutes to spare. No car met me. Instead I had to wait on the bus to take us to the terminal until the very last slow walking person boarded the bus. Still no help from the 3 agents who led me in different directions and after actually running through the airport lugging my computer, I made it to the gate and the agent informed me the flight was cancelled. The plane was still on the ground, but again no car to take me to the plane.

The good news of the day occurred when Air France kindly sent me to a hotel for the evening including dinner with all the other stranded travelers in one room. Fortunately I had just purchased a coat that would keep me warm in Russia's -30° weather. It acted as the missing blanket on my bed and actually did keep me warm!

Now on the "regional carrier" morning flight to Hanover I learned that "regional" means the seats are ½ the size of the normal economy seats. No place to put your coat and after stuffing your briefcase under the "seat"? in front of you, your legs wish you were a spider. So one of my toes was sticking out into the aisle as the stone-faced flight attendant ran her cart into it. I know she meant to say "excuse me" but I guess I am just fortunate I was able to somehow retract my toe into the preassigned shoe box space.

She served a little box of 2 sweet rolls (no complaint) and an explosive container of yogurt that made my conservative business attire look more like Elton John's polka dot outfit.

So I ask myself . . . is it all worth it? On a day like this the answer seems a bit strained, but it is a resounding YES. Seeing the look on the 250 Russian professors, deans, associate deans ,

instructors, and leading dentists who came from all over Russia and surrounding countries, is what will remain with me. Helping the Russian Academy of Esthetic Dentistry become even more successful (they publish a world-class magazine) and establishing such good new friendships, there is so much more important than the inconveniences and perils of modern day security and travel.

However, I can better understand why my wife chooses NOT to accompany me to dental lectures any more.

But I do wonder . . . just who is now seeing through my glasses. Whomever it is, I hope they too will view life as an opportunity to contribute and help make the world a better place for their existence.

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