



The choice of a dream

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Life is a balance between choices and opportunities. All the time we are put in situations where we need to choose one way or another, not always certain that we are getting to a place we really belong. It was with that uncertainty about the future that I, by my own choice, became a specialist and then got a Master's Degree on Operative Dentistry. But after all, what does it mean to be a "Master of Science" nowadays? What is interesting about pursuing an academic career on a country so full of dentists and yet so bad at investing resources on teaching and researching such as Brazil?

The pressure to dedicate myself to and stand

out on my dentistry career is not really something new. Since my graduation, I'd always hear from some professors about how hard our market was and how important it was to practice an evidence-based dentistry in order to do it in a dignified and ethical manner, especially because we're always dealing with other people's health. Somehow, that certainly sparked my desire to always be in search of knowledge in the field, whether about dental materials, all the techniques, or why things function the way they do.

It was because of this constant curiosity, during my Specialization course, that I was oriented to think about pursuing a Master's Degree,

<https://doi.org/10.14436/2447-911x.17.3.186-189.cmc>

Submitted: August 20, 2020 • Revised and accepted: September 10, 2020

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by the professor **Fernanda Calazans**. Even though I couldn't see myself as a teacher at the time, the academic career seemed very attractive, since it would make it possible to deepen my knowledge on Operative Dentistry, which is the reason I chose to give it a try. Since then, I've seen myself grow both as a person and a professional. I discovered so many other talents, immersed myself in the world of laboratorial and clinical research, started to read more articles and books, met professors who were only reference names before and, when I finally realized, I was much more confident about everything I do and aim for my career.

Today I work with much more pleasure and confidence, both in the office and the teaching profession. While in the office I am able to continue my direct work on dental practice, working as a professor on an university classroom or clinic let me improve even more, learning how to better deal with scientific knowledge on dentistry, and also with the educational practice itself, which includes the interaction with more experienced teachers. The challenges happen daily, which makes our personal improvement and renovation necessary, but there is also a need of recognizing our own limitations and the reality that there's much more yet to learn.

Not everything is wonderful, though. It is fact that it is getting harder to get a job as a professor on universities, both private and public. Reports about highly qualified teacher's layoffs all over the country, as well as the hiring of cheaper and less qualified people (some even without a Master's Degree), are getting more common by the day. The upward cut in research funding at universities also does not make the academic scene exciting. I see many colleagues in doubt about what the next step to take is. Many stop after their Master's Degrees and come back to try the clinical work. Others, like me, still dream about the Doctorate Degree as a continuation of the journey in search of knowledge, without any certainty about the financial feedback. Meanwhile, there ARE also opportunities on the dental industry, where the professional starts to act as a professor to some company, which can be attractive, since it is a world of constant renovation and improvement of the dental materials.

There is no way to guarantee opportunities to all of us who walk this path. Not even guarantees that, with all your effort, opportunities will exist. It seems to me that the academic life is now much more of a way to try to live a dream than a way to achieve a certain degree of success. It is

undeniable that all the experience can be highly satisfying, especially in terms of personal and professional growth. Interacting with students can be as challenging as it is invigorating, because the feeling of making a difference is great. Despite that, the financial return still seems to be hard to be achieved on a short term. It is necessary that you enjoy what you do on the field to get a rewarding feeling, otherwise, there will be much frustration. I saw it happen live with some of my colleagues during my Master's.

There is no right path to follow. In the end, our choices will lead us to different scenarios, with different opportunities, which can be successful or not, and that is applicable not only to the academic field or to the dental clinic. I am still new to all this, with 5 years since graduation, 3 since becoming a specialist and 1 of being a Master of Science. I don't know what the future holds for me, but I am sure that nowadays I follow the way which makes me feel happier, learning each day to value my work more and more, as well as value those I meet along the way. Each new event is a new experience, no

matter whether I do things right or wrong. There is no recipe to success, so do not worry about being always right. I understand now that what is important is to be coherent, ethical and dedicated with what you set out to do. It may not bring you the expected success, but it will certainly bring you joy for each small or big result you achieve.

That said, I propose that you keep following your dreams. What others want or say is best for you might not be necessarily what will bring you to the point you really crave for. Your happiness is more important than any pot of gold promised to you at the end of a rainbow. Follow through where you feel free to vibrate and smile, by the side of those who make you well. Opportunities will come, and when they come, sometimes you will have to take a chance. We practice a beautiful profession, acting on other people's lives every day, such as patients, students, colleagues, or employees. We all have the potential to make a difference in our world, on a greater or lesser degree. That is why I am in favor of dreams. Pick one dream and go towards it. It all begins with a choice.