

# Mentoring—Everyone pays it forward!

One of the strongest attributes of the orthodontic profession is its sense of community. Go to any meeting and you'll see doctors and staff socializing, sharing stories, and networking. You're likely doing it now with other residents and your instructors.

Most orthodontists believe in giving back and sharing their professional experience with those just starting their career. There's a really good chance that someone along the way has mentioned the idea of finding a mentor.

We wanted to take a more in-depth look at mentoring so we reached out to a couple of our tops Docs to gain their wisdom. We spoke first to Dr. Tom Merrill of Merrill Orthodontics in East Wenatchee, Washington.

**team tops: Dr. Merrill, thank you for your time. Who was your mentor?**

*Dr. Merrill:* I actually had two. Both my Dad and my brother were orthodontists. I really learned the business side from them.

**team tops: Best advice you were ever given?**

*Dr. Merrill:* Live like a college student when you get out. I'm not joking. (laughs) You want to get out of debt so be frugal when you can.

**team tops: What was your experience like?**

*Dr. Merrill:* I think working with a mentor gives you practice and experience based wisdom. But since you're young, you can also bounce your new ideas off your mentor. Looking back now as an experienced orthodontist, I appreciate the drive and the energy of the younger doc. Another aspect of mentoring that I appreciate is the networking. You form relationships that can last for the rest of your professional life.

**team tops: Any last thoughts?**

*Dr. Merrill:* I would suggest contacting the AAO or your state organization. They often have successful docs who are willing to be a mentor. Go to meetings and make those face-to-face connections. It's one of the things that I really appreciate about being an orthodontist. That sense of community and giving back.

**team tops: Thank you, Dr. Merrill!**

We then spoke with Dr. Michal Kleinlerer of MK Orthodontics in Augusta and Waterville, Maine. She's a native New Yorker, but now calls Freeport home.

**team tops: Dr. Kleinlerer, thank you for your time. We're sharing tops Docs' thoughts on the benefits of mentoring, and we're thrilled to speak with you. For starters, did you have a mentor?**

*Dr. Kleinlerer:* Of course. When I was in my residency, the idea of leaving that environment was a bit intimidating since you had the comfort of being around your peers and instructors to answer any questions you might have. Then you graduate and you're on your own. One of the best things I did after graduation was maintain relationships with my instructors. It allowed me to continue to learn from them, about practicing orthodontics and about the business side of running a practice.

**team tops: Now that you mention it, instructors really are the first mentors you'll have.**

*Dr. Kleinlerer:* That's true. But even after I graduated, I would visit other orthodontic offices as I was trying to start and grow my own practice. It's a stressful time while you're trying to figure your next move. So experiencing those other practices was both very helpful and educational. When I was early in my career, I made sure to take advantage of not having a fully-booked schedule and focused on spending time with my mentors and investing in learning practice management skills.

**team tops: Any secrets for finding a good one?**

*Dr. Kleinlerer:* Networking is very important. Taking advantage of continued education opportunities and attending orthodontic meetings can be very helpful. They can be very helpful, but you have to take the initiative and make the time.

**team tops: Any last thoughts on mentoring?**

*Dr. Kleinlerer:* I would mention the AAO Mentor/Mentee program (<https://aao.chronus.com/pages/programs>). Through this program, you can find someone who's NOT in your geographic region so you are connected with a mentor without concern for conflict. It's a win/win for both mentor and mentee, as each gets so much from the experience. So just do it. Mentoring is a great way to learn and gain real insight into the profession.

**team tops: Thank you, Dr. Kleinlerer!**

So there you have it! Great wisdom from two amazing tops Docs. We hope this gives you a little push to seek and find a good mentor today. We're excited about having you in the profession and look forward to seeing you go from Mentee to Mentor!



*Dr. Tom Merrill has been in private practice in Wenatchee, Washington since 2001. He graduated from Brigham Young University, the University of Washington Dental School and the University of Minnesota Department of Orthodontics. He's been a topsOrtho™ user since 2011. He is past president of the Washington State Society of Orthodontists and continues to volunteer his time in organized orthodontics.*



*Dr. Michal Kleinlerer has been in private practice in both Waterville and Augusta, Maine since 2004. She graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, and obtained her Doctorate of Dental Medicine and her Master of Science and certificate in orthodontics from Harvard University. Professional Affiliations include the American Board of Orthodontics, Northeastern Society of Orthodontists, American Dental Association and she served as President (2011—2013) of the Maine Dental Association. She has been a topsOrtho user since 2008. It is important to her to give back to her community and she has served on the board of the Kennebec Valley Chamber of Commerce and is a proud Smiles Change Lives provider.*