



Talking Burnout With Dr. Kyle Stanley

Conversations about growth light me up. When I met Kyle, I knew instantly that he was on a path of growth, one that emphasizes happiness. When we chatted, it was obvious that we're aligned, and I was excited to share him with this community.

Many doctors today are having trouble navigating the unforeseen challenges in dentistry, and experiencing burnout at some point in their career. I was one of them. I couldn't recognize, at the time, that I was unhealthy or unhappy. I lost sight of what my needs were, how to advocate for myself, and what brings me joy. That is a dark place to be.

A [systematic review](#) and meta-analysis on burnout among dentists revealed that, "13% of dentists experience burnout syndrome." That's over 26,000 dentists in the U.S. alone.

Some of those people may realize that dentistry just isn't for them, while others will quit simply because they're exhausted, emotionally drained, and lacking the tools to create a healthy work-life balance.

In 2018, international speaker and Cosmetic Dentist, Dr. Kyle Stanley, found himself in that same dark place; burnt out and exhausted from the demands of patient care and running a practice.

"I came home and told my wife that I was going to quit dentistry," Stanley explains. "On the outside, I really had everything. I had plenty of money. I was publishing in all the top journals. I was speaking at AO and ACD, and every top podium around the world. I had a good celebrity practice in Beverly Hills. I was doing fee for service dentistry, and I was miserable. I was just ready to quit."

Let's face it, It's hard to let go of a career you've poured your life into. I've been there, wanting to quit, and feeling like all those years of school were wasted time.

He decided to lean into his passion for research, sharing, "I started focusing on positive psychology, and learning about the psychology of overachievers, going into PubMed and reading articles on difficult things with dentistry and depression, and anxiety, and suicide."

Stanley realized that burnout wasn't just a personal battle, it was a problem within dentistry itself.

He decided to turn science supported practices into actionable steps, by founding *Light Side Academy*, a dentistry-specific course designed to reduce burnout and increase mental wellness. The course is virtual and self-paced, and even provides CE credits.

"In my course, we talk about something called D.R.E.A.M.S; diet, relationships, exercise, appreciation, meditation, and sleep. I found all this research on those five things and just



started making them a priority," Stanley shares. "Once I started making those daily habits outside of my practice, I started feeling better to where I could show up better in my practice."

Stanley's program addresses the one thing we didn't learn in school: how to take care of ourselves.

"Boundaries, expectations, and communication are the pillars of what my course is built on," shares Stanley. "I was a great clinical dentist. I think I'm still a pretty good clinical dentist, that wasn't my problem. My problem was setting boundaries, good communication, and setting expectations with everybody in my life."

In what Stanley terms the "Ripple Effect," he examines how to realize we have a problem, identify the triggers that are causing those problems, find purpose and perspective surrounding work, learn beneficial daily habits, and institute that change to elevate our practice.

Dr. Stanley describes how not prioritizing his needs created a change in his behavior. "[It] made me more reactive, which then impacted my relationships. And that was everywhere. That was at home, with patients, team members." We can not compartmentalize our state of being.

The opposite will also be true. When we do the work to shift our mindset and behaviors, that peace of mind and joy will be felt in all aspects of our lives.

He takes his experience with burnout as an opportunity to discover his purpose and passions outside of clinical dentistry. "I am a father, and a husband, that's a big part of my identity. I am a jiu jitsu practitioner; I am a dentist. That's [all] part of my identity," Stanley says.

Stanley believes there are dangers to attaching our self-worth to one aspect of our life. "When you align your purpose with your profession, and you have a failure, your entire self-worth drops with that."

I totally agree. When I was unable to detach from work, my mood was dictated by what happened in the office that day. Almost like I deserved this day of depression as some sort of punishment when things went wrong, and happiness was allowed only when I experienced success.

"I think as dentists, many of us lose that, and our job takes over who we are. That's a difficult thing to have in a profession like ours," Stanley confesses. "Where you're bound to fail, meaning that a crown's going to come off, the shade's not going to match, the bite's going to be off, an implants going to fail, you know, you're bound to have difficulties."

The truth is, dental work, even at its best, is imperfect.



There are different triggers we experience in dentistry that are specific to our field. *Light Side Academy* outlines 18 to be exact. We all know from our own practice how hard it is to simply work with other people all day, every day, particularly in such an intimate way. However, we can change our perspective, shift our lives, and can even pursue different careers to prioritize our peace. Dr. Stanley is proof of that.

"I'm so much more relaxed now," he says, "I'm so much happier."

Stanley reduced his time in clinical practice when he needed to, developed multiple companies, and now spends more time with his family. Counterintuitive to what we may think, stepping away from patient care didn't reduce the amount of people he helped, it amplified it.

He did the work, and now leads by example. This has truly had a ripple effect on every aspect of his life. It's clear that when we show up as our best selves, it is felt by everyone that we interact with.

When asked about his goals, Dr. Stanley shares the way he hopes to help young dentists, proclaiming, "Find them early, change their mindset early, [and] have them set expectations and boundaries early, so that they can learn from my mistakes instead of learning from their own."

We may never live perfectly balanced lives. Our priorities will fluctuate, and our career paths may change. What we can do is create different avenues that bring us fulfillment, we can choose a path of growth, free ourselves from the pressures of our career, and prioritize happiness. That is true success.

To learn more about Dr. Stanley's programs, check him out at [Light Side Dentistry](#).