There are ways to predict the future, even a rapidly changing one such as dental laboratory technology. Ten years ago there were clues that predicted the changes that have already been seen, and there are clues today that indicate what is yet to come. A successful business owner is one that can accurately scan the environment, assess the developing forces and utilize the data to better position the business for optimal future scenarios. The 2019 Vision 21 Meeting has been designed to help attendees not just envision tomorrow, but live it today. This year’s line-up of engaging speakers will dive into influencing factors such as disruption, technology, execution and leadership development and promises to revitalize attendees with knowledge gained and the necessary resources for implementation. Read on to hear about the incredible insight that will be offered at the Vision 21 Meeting and why you should be there. The future is now; are you ready?
What WIll attendees Walk
Away WIth?

I want attendees to walk away inspired and with a different perspective of what technology and blue sky type of thinking can bring to their business. Hopefully everyone will have their own ‘aha’ moment and will percolate some different ideas about their future. Up until around ten years ago I used to attend various music conferences and talk about the future; not from the perspective of fear but from the perspective of pointing out potential opportunities. The music industry was the first business to be obliterated and then built back up through technology. Within the dental laboratory industry, there’s disruption going on. If you haven’t felt it yet, you certainly will. So it’s a matter of how you want to view it, fear or opportunity, which is where I want people to go.

What Was one of your
more memorable speaking
engagements?

One of the most interesting meetings was a wine conference twelve years ago. A lot of the ideas I talked about seem so obvious now but weren’t obvious back then. One item was the effect the changing climate would have on wine and where the growing regions were based. Another idea was QR codes. I pointed out that someone could be enjoying a great glass of wine at a restaurant and rather than try to remember it, at some point in the future they would be able to take a photo with their phone and buy it direct. Now, most wineries at the time were ‘mom and pop’ and this concept of 100 percent of sales being direct to consumer made for great margins and a very sustainable business. This wasn’t a small conference, but it was meaningful.

You have analyzed the results of digital in the music industry — astounding in the past decade. What principles did you learn that dental laboratory owners can take back?

Ten years ago piracy inside the music industry was basically wiping it out. If music was free, why would anyone pay for it? The millennial generation might be willing to pay $3 for a bottle of water, but not music. What the music business had to do to overcome this was realize that it’s not so much the content but the experience. They mistakenly believed that the song was 100 percent of why people consumed the product, and therefore lost connection and understanding of their customers. Back then, there was a retail store between the artist and consumer. Similarly, there’s a dentist between you and the consumer. You need to understand the consumer perspective of what they are going to get and align it with the end product.

Ultimately technology is going to benefit margins. It’s not only going to do it for the labs but it’ll also do it for the dentist practice, which is where most of the margin is — similar again to the music margin. The retail store could sell a CD at twice the value and make much more than the producer. Over the past few years with the advancement of Spotify and Apple technology, the retailer now takes only 30 percent and the producer takes more. As far as this industry, I think the future is in fashion. Teeth are an expression of who you are and cosmetic repair and whitening is a direct reflection of that. Fifty years ago the only people that had tattoos were sailors and those who went to war; now so many people under 30 have tattoos. Look at rappers with diamonds in their teeth — it’s an expression of themselves that could be coming up in a major way in the next few years. It’s not about putting a 3D printer in your lab. It’s about how technology will allow the expression of the consumer and the dentists and labs that see this will benefit.

What drives you in your career?

I used to be an artist manager and managed a lot of big international stars. I loved doing this but after a while I realized that I loved music but not the drama. At a certain point you should want to have fun in what you do. I decided twelve years ago to only focus on music and not be a manager. At the time, the music industry was crumbling but even then I saw opportunity. Blue sky thinking needs to fuel your passion.
You spend time, energy, effort and money providing your team with techniques and ideas, but do you have a system to execute it? The marketplace only rewards those ideas that get implemented. Do you want to achieve more in the next 12 weeks than most do in 12 months?

**WHY SHOULD PEOPLE ATTEND?**

What’s ultimately going to happen is we are going to help the organizations execute more effectively. It’s not enough to have great ideas or resources; we have to execute. We will help execute marketing, process improvement, and any revenue and customer service goals. It all comes down to the fact that it’s not enough to know; you have to implement. I’m going to provide a system to actually do it. Many times there are a lot of great ideas generated at a conference, but I’m going to show the process of how to take great ideas and implement in any business model, large or small. It’s a system focused solely on execution.

**WHAT IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES YOU’VE SEEN?**

For most people, including myself, the biggest challenge is to overcome doubt and fear and then take risks and stay with it long enough to really see the fruit.

**WHAT IS THE PRIMARY SOURCE OF EMPOWERMENT?**

Whether you are trying to empower yourself or others, empowerment is primarily driven by ownership. You have to establish the goal and connect it to a longer term vision so there’s passion and motivation to take action and stick to it. Look at New Year’s Resolutions. Everyone says they want to but they don’t follow through; there’s no ownership. Commitment comes when we are clear on outcomes and understand how hitting the short-term goal connects to the long-term vision. This is what encourages people to take consistent action.

**WHEN DID IT “CLICK” WITH YOU THAT THIS PROGRAM WORKS?**

Years ago — that’s why we (co-author Michael Lennington) wrote the book. Everything we do now we first did in our own business. We didn’t just come up with a theory; we came up with a process, put it into practice and saw it worked.

**WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE EXPECT IN THE VALUE ADDED WORKSHOP?**

The keynote presentation will be exposing the concepts and giving takeaways. In the breakout session, we will roll up our sleeves and walk through creating a 12-week plan and see how it all comes together. Attendees will learn a lot about leadership and how to motivate individuals to perform at the highest level.
It’s not easy to find that perfect leader to take your business to the next level. Leaders need to be carefully identified, developed and integrated within the business culture. Who are the leaders in your lab?

WHAT SHOULD ATTENDEES EXPECT?

My intent is not to talk to people, but to have an interactive approach. I want to first discuss how to identify leaders and define the characteristics of a successful leader. Next we will talk about developing future leaders, the different leadership styles and identifying personal leadership styles, and finally dive into what emotional intelligence really means and how it leads to outstanding leadership. I’ll be providing a starter toolkit of resources to develop their own leadership program in their organization.

WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST INSPIRATION?

My children are my biggest inspiration for getting up every day, but secondarily, helping others find the opportunity to grow and find their own strength provides me such a sense of achievement. It’s amazing to have a role in someone’s development and watch them succeed.

WAS THERE EVER A MOMENT WHEN YOU THOUGHT YOU COULDN’T DO IT?

It’s called life! I have a very strong friend and family network and once I am able to talk things out it helps me to overcome challenges. I also regularly practice meditation and mindfulness and it calms the brain and anxiety that’s telling me that I can’t accomplish something.

WHAT ONE QUALITY DOES IT TAKE TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN HUMAN RESOURCES?

I think in order to be successful you first have to understand the business. People are a part of the business and if you don’t understand the function the person is coming from, you won’t find the best solution. Emotional intelligence is also the key to success for anyone that has to be in a facilitative role. You have to be cognizant of yourself and your behaviors and words, while at the same time also being very aware of the other person and how they might be reacting to the situation.

WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE BE LOOKING FOR WHEN HIRING EMPLOYEES?

Try to hire people that are smarter than you. It’s hard not to get threatened by someone that’s smarter than you but it’s critical to surround yourself with really smart people who can teach you something and help the organization grow. You also need humility and understanding of the organizational culture — and not hire the antithesis.

WHAT’S ONE MISTAKE MANY OWNERS MAKE WHEN DEVELOPING A LEADERS?

A lot of times one of the biggest mistakes is to take the strongest technician or sales representative and make them the manager, thinking they are the best and need to be developed and promoted. Just because someone is great technically, however, that doesn’t mean they are great interpersonally. Dual tracks for both specialty and management are needed in order to promote appropriately and make people feel valued.
I’ve been in dental for 31 years, 21 here at Heartland Dental, and I’ve seen the same thing: the prevalence of the need to help dentists with the things they don’t like to do or aren’t good at is increasing. Dentists need an exit strategy to help with administrative burdens so they can take care of patients the way they want to. It’s hard to run a business as a solo practitioner and deal with insurance and rising costs, never mind the skyrocketing student debt and the younger dentists’ expectations. There is a lot of pressure on practitioners to run a business and be dentists and they can’t be the best at all those things.

I wish there would be less animosity between solo practitioners and people like Heartland Dental. We aren’t trying to eliminate solo practitioners. We are trying to solve a problem that exists in the marketplace. We are helping those that are choosing to practice in a different way, but not a bad way. We just have a different model that works for some dentists and there’s nothing wrong with that.

DO YOU THINK THE SMALL LAB MODEL WILL BECOME OBSOLETE? ANY OTHER PREDICTIONS?

There will always be a place and a need for the small lab. They have to be nimble and creative and take care of the customer; if they can do this they will continue to win. Consolidation in the medical field has been happening for a long time and solo practitioners are still around. Lab owners have to decide who they are and what they want and how their model fits them.