

## A story of *Dentors!*

by Courtney Westlake, ISDS contractual writer

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When Dr. Nick Riccio was deciding between dental school and medical school, he reached out to fellow alumna from his school, Haverford College, for guidance. That's when he first connected with Dr. Manuel Cordero, who welcomed Nick into his home office to demonstrate how dentists can have a well-balanced career and personal life – which has always been a big motivator for Nick.

“I spent time with him and his patients during the work day, occasionally popping over to the home side of his office to meet with his wife and pet his dog. At the end of the day, his four kids all came home from high school and college and their work, respectively, to have family dinner together and speak candidly with me; it was very special!” Nick recalls.

“Dentors,” as Nick calls dentist mentors, played a pivotal role in his decision to become a dentist and has continued to shape his career. Manuel mentored Nick throughout the application process and into dental school.

Now as an orthodontist, Nick values mentorship thanks to his own mentors like Manuel and loves to “pay it forward” to this day.

“In orthodontics, I am afforded the amazing opportunity to be a coach for not only my patients, but also my amazing team, and even my dental colleagues,” Nick says. “Mentorship of all these folks is undoubtedly the reason I love what I do and think I have the best job in the world.”

Today, Nick regularly provides continuing education for his own team and encourages their training and development. This filters down to potential dentists in his community, whom he welcomes into his office for job shadowing opportunities.

“That's when I really get to emulate what Dr. Cordero did for me all those years ago, and it's a very special experience for me,” Nick says. “One student had

recently expressed interest in treating kids and families, so not only did I spend most of the summer showing her all about my field of ortho, I connected her with an excellent family dentist and a magician of a pediatric dentist, so she could learn from some of the best practitioners and people I know. I'm sure she will make an amazing dentist one day, and I take great pride in being a part of her journey, the way my 'dentors' were for me back in my day.”

But it's not only the younger generation that Nick looks out for. He created and currently runs a study club called Masterminds that brings together dental colleagues for networking, learning, and most importantly, teaching. Each member is expected to contribute to the club by occasionally lecturing on topics they have become experts in.

“I lead by example and lecture at many of the meetings, where in addition to the normal topics of practice management and clinical excellence, we cover more progressive topics than your average 'study club in a box,' such as mindset, leadership, wellness, personal financial planning, and more,” Nick shares.

Fellow dentist Dr. Trent Jones jumped at the chance to join Masterminds when he first connected with Nick. He saw the potential to develop relationships with local dentists who could help navigate various challenges in the dental industry, encourage progress, and celebrate each other's successes.

“Being from Nebraska, I didn't know many people in the area and have now met many dentists that I consider friends and hang out with regularly,” Trent says. “The challenges we face in dentistry can feel isolating at times, but developing relationships with like-minded individuals has proven invaluable in supporting one another. It has served as a great resource for career growth while taking a moment to have some fun along the way.”

To Nick, mentorship doesn't even stop within dentistry. Occasionally, he takes on the opportunity to connect with and mentor non-dental colleagues.

When an allergist moved her practice into Nick's building, he realized she was new to business ownership. As they've gotten to know each other, he enjoys when she reaches out to "pick his brain," despite the fact that their businesses are unrelated.

"I've taken every opportunity I can find to not only share my specific experiences with her, but really try to help her be successful in her own business," Nick says. "Despite having 'nothing to gain' from helping her, I find that it is one of the best feelings whenever I do, because it's as close as I can come to true altruistic mentorship, and it has been very fun, too!"



**PHOTOS:** Top left: Dr. Susan Blair and Dr. Nick Riccio practice together in their office. Top Right: Dr. Riccio has done patient appreciation events where he hops on a humanpowered Blender Bike to blend up smoothies on a corner next to their office in downtown Hinsdale. Bottom: Dr. Riccio and Dr. Susan Blair with their team.

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