

The background of the cover features a light blue silhouette of a rock star in a dynamic pose, set against a white background with radiating blue lines. The title 'Rock Star' is written in a large, black, cursive script, while 'DENTAL ASSISTANT' is in a bold, blue, sans-serif font.

Rock Star

DENTAL ASSISTANT

*Follow me on my journey and
learn how to get more appreciation,
respect, and satisfaction*

TIJA HUNTER, CDA

RockStar

DENTAL ASSISTANT

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learn how to get more appreciation,
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CHAPTER 1



Why You Should Become a Rock Star Dental Assistant

Don't compare yourself to anyone.

You are uniquely you, and you are wonderful.

You are invited: *Take the journey to become
a rock star dental assistant who gets more
appreciation, respect, and satisfaction.*

Growing up, I remember my mom telling me, “I don’t want you hanging around that group; they will ruin your reputation.” In junior high school, I don’t think I even knew what that was. What was a reputation? How could I ruin something I knew nothing about?

She went on to say that hanging around with bad people gave me a bad reputation. You truly are a reflection of the company you keep.

One of my favorite memoirs was written by Yvonne Thornton: *The Ditch Diggers' Daughters*.¹ I stumbled on this little gem when the movie version was playing late one night. The film was so powerful I had to get the book. In it, Yvonne's father is bent on his daughters succeeding; he dedicates his life to seeing that cause to its fruition. Although sometimes his family didn't agree with his tactics, his heart was in the right place.

In one scene in the film version of the story, he drives his family to a very poor section of town and sits in the car with them. He tells his girls to look around them. See the people? The way they are dressed, the cluttered streets, the trash, their attitudes, the looks on the faces? Frowns, not smiles? "Do you want to live like this," he asks. "Do you want more out of life?"

¹ Thornton, Yvonne S., and Jo Coudert. *The Ditchdigger's Daughters: A Black Family's Astonishing Success Story*. New York: Kensington, 2002.

In the next scene, he drives them uptown to a nice part of town. Now he asks them if they want to live like these people. The streets are clean. The freshly dressed people have smiles on their faces. “Do you want to dress like them?” His point is, if you want the best, hang around the best. Be your best. You are a product of the company you keep, so surround yourself with people who support you, encourage you, and elevate you.

I know firsthand how being with the wrong person can hold you back, keep you from realizing your potential, and prevent you from seeing your worth. Take care of yourself first and foremost; it’s the best thing you can do.

So before we go any farther, let me offer the most *basic* advice.



As a mom, I always thought that I needed to take care of my kids first. There was no time for *me*. I had to take care of them, give them all I had. As they grew older and moved

on with their own lives, I realized that I had neglected myself. Then taking care of me became a priority. Please take a lesson from my experience; *you* are the greatest asset you have. If you have children, the best thing you can do is to take care of yourself *for them*. Don't put yourself second, because *they need you*. You need yourself to be your best for them and you.

When you are traveling on a commercial flight, you'll notice flight attendants tell you the safety features and what to do if the oxygen mask should fall from the overhead compartment. They always tell you, "If you are traveling with a small child, please place the mask on yourself first and then help the child with theirs." Put simply, if you aren't strong and healthy, you can't help anyone else.

It seems women have a tendency to do that: put ourselves last. If I had to go back and tell my younger self anything, it would be to take better care of my skin, use moisturizer on a daily basis, eat better, walk more, and

buy the best shoes I could afford. When you are younger, if you are like me, you just don't think about these things. I was invincible when I was younger. But as you age? *Ah*. That's when you realize all of the things you should have done differently.



Buy the good shoes. Your feet align your entire body; your spine, your hips, and your knees. If you don't have support in your feet, over time, your body takes a beating. Back in the day (the 1980s) it was customary for dental assistants to wear white pants and shoes, and I bought inexpensive white canvas shoes because I could throw them in the washer with some bleach and they would emerge looking new again. And when I couldn't wash them anymore, I threw them away because they were so inexpensive. Years later, I found out how bad that was for me. Your feet need support. Also, just because shoes are expensive, that doesn't mean they are supportive. Purchase a good pair of shoes and save them only for work. They will last

you longer, and your older body will thank you for it later. You can replace your knees, your hips, just about everything else; you can't replace your feet.



Keep moving. I remember one of my first bosses used to talk about his parents, who were very active in their seventies. They had camped from one end of the country to the other and loved to travel. We had patients about the same age as my boss's parents, yet I couldn't imagine this couple traveling and being as active as my boss's parents. My boss used to say, "You have to keep moving. Never stop." I didn't think much about that then; I was in my twenties and invincible. Now that I am older, I realize what he meant. Sitting for long periods of time is hard on an older body. You must keep moving. Exercise didn't seem necessary when I was younger. After all, I was chasing two boys. Now, it's essential that I keep moving and working these old muscles. Not moving will age you fast.



Never stop learning. School was not easy for me. I really just went so I could visit with my friends. I hated speaking in front of people, and yet many classes required me to get up and give presentations. I stressed over it; I would lie and say I was sick on any given day we had to present our work in front of the class, in hopes of getting out of the assignment. I hated homework and rarely did it, only completing assignments when absolutely necessary.

Isn't it funny that something you once thought you hated can become something you love?

Learning, presenting, researching and writing are now things I dearly love doing. I wouldn't want my life any other way, yet I fought them for so long.

The dental assisting profession is ever changing and growing. The changes I have seen in thirty-seven years are crazy—incredible. So, staying on top of those

changes is absolutely necessary if you want to be successful. No matter where you are, or what profession you are in, educating yourself is a priority.

I've had dental assistants tell me, "My doctor won't send me to that seminar." Or, "My doctor pays for the seminar, but not my wages while I'm there." I'm no expert in human resources, so I can't give advice on specific cases, but I will say *don't wait for your doctor to send you*. If your doctor pays for the course, but not your wages while there, *go*. Soak in all you can. Remember, the knowledge you gain will always stay with you. It doesn't belong to the practice or the doctor. Once you've absorbed it, that knowledge is yours.

With so many websites offering free education, there is no reason to not be educated. Whether you attended a yearlong program, a twelve-week program, or even trained on the job, it doesn't really matter. What matters is the education you have undertaken since the first day of your dental

assisting career. What have you done to grow? What have you done to expand your knowledge? What are you waiting for?

Back in the early days, I heard about this exam you could take to become a Certified Dental Assistant (CDA) through the Dental Assistant National Board (DANB). I also heard, “You don’t need that to get a job,” “You know that won’t get you any more money,” and “Why would you do that when you don’t need it here?” And I listened. At the time, I would just agree and move on. I was allowing other people to dictate my career. I was listening to their insecurities and took them up as mine.



Never allow anyone to dictate your future.

They aren’t you. They don’t walk your path. Their dreams aren’t your dreams. Their motivation isn’t your motivation. Don’t listen to anyone who says, “You don’t,” or “You can’t.” Do things for you. Do something because you want it, not because someone

else says you need it. I didn't take that CDA exam until I was in my twenty-ninth year as an assistant—and it was the best decision ever. Practicing for that exam ignited a desire in me to learn and grow. It made me realize just how much I loved learning.

With education comes confidence. The more you learn, the better you become. Not just in your career, but in everything you do. Because that confidence will radiate through your life.

TIJA'S TIDBIT

"A flower does not think about competing with the flower next to it. It just blooms."

SENSEI OGUI, ZEN SHIN TALKS

You are special in your own way. Be you.