

Interview with Dr. Mark Benner

- 1) Let's just start by you telling me a little bit about yourself. What are your hobbies, what are you passionate about, where are you from?

My name is Mark Benner. I am a dentist practicing in Winder, GA. My hobbies include motorcycles, scuba diving, hunting, fishing and boating. I was raised on a farm in Illinois. My passions include good food and good company.

- 2) College? What college did you go to for your undergrad? Why there? What did you plan on doing with that major once you got out?

Having grown up in Illinois, I went to the University of Illinois for my undergraduate work and University of Illinois College of Dentistry for Dental School. In 1984, I attended a residency program in Prosthodontics at Emory University in Atlanta. I have been in private practice since 1985.

- 3) Tell me a little more about your current job/business. What does it entail on your end?

My practice in Winder is a family practice that was established in 1961 by Dr. Golden. I have a partner, Dr. Cyndie Townsend. We provide comprehensive dental care to all ages of patients.

- 4) How did you develop the skill for the business you are currently in? Why did you choose this?

My decision to become a dentist was greatly influenced by my dentist during my high school and early college years.

- 5) Was the business you are currently in your first attempt at being an entrepreneur? Why did you fail, or lose interest in your other attempts? (If applicable)

I have owned 4 dental practices since 1987. As many young dentists do, I made several poor business decisions starting. Experience and questioning anyone trying to sell products are the best teachers. There is no panacea to a problem, so don't buy anything without looking into the opinions of the critics. In business, controlling overhead is just as important or more important as income.

- 6) Why have you been successful in this business?

I live my life and run my business with common sense and always try to treat others as I would have them treat me. There is much wisdom in the Golden Rule.

- 7) What fears do you have about being an entrepreneur? What excites you?

My greatest fear is certainly with the state of our country's economy. When our society has unemployment as high as it is, everyone hurts. It certainly hurts all businesses. Helping those with problems and providing a service to my patients is very rewarding and does excite me.

- 8) Obviously you've made the choice by pursuing entrepreneurship that your fear can be overcome...what's the main factor that's driving you over that hurdle?
The attitudes that my parents instilled in me as a child, such as I CAN do anything I put my mind to if I work hard enough, have certainly been a major driving force in my career.
- 9) Where did you find your motivation to take the step...why now and not before?
My motivation also comes from the attitudes my parents instilled in me as a child.
- 10) What have been your biggest obstacles outside of yourself? How were you able to overcome?
My family background is agriculture, specifically farming. I wanted to pursue a career in a medical field. I had no family member to show me what to do in school or in my business. I had to learn not to trust everyone. I had to learn the responsibilities associated with providing direct patient care.
- 11) How have partnerships in business worked for you thus far? Do you think you would have been able to keep that motivation without having that person by your side? (If applicable)
Partnership has been one of the best business decisions I have made in my career. It is like a marriage, many fail, and it is not always easy. You must be in business with the right person to make it work. My relationship with Dr. Townsend is built on trust and respect. We complement each other professionally in that a second opinion is immediately available. When one is out of the office, the other can keep the doors open. In my business, a licensed dentist has to be on the premises or no patient care can be provided.
- 12) Have you always seen yourself being an entrepreneur?
I knew I wanted to be my own boss, whether farming or a dentist. Yes I always wanted to be an entrepreneur.
- 13) What's your final goal with this pursuit? Where do you see yourself being?
I see myself practicing dentistry for many years ahead. I enjoy my patients and my employees very much. I will slow down but I don't see myself retiring, I'm having way too much fun.
- 14) Any final thoughts?
My final thought would be to have a career or job you enjoy. We spend a large part of our life working and it is a real shame when someone talks about how bad their job is. Don't live for retirement, live everyday like it is your last and enjoy every aspect of your life.