“Stay in your lane!” If you’re a fan of my podcast, I’ve told you this a thousand times.

For some reason, after dentists go to eight, nine, 10, 11 years of college, they think they know everything. Smart people know a lot about their trade, but really smart people know a little bit about everything. Dentists understand this and take it to heart, so they consider themselves intellectuals, but what really happens is they come out of school remembering that they’re a doctor of dental surgery but forgetting that they don’t know much about anything else.

They know just enough to be dangerous to themselves. They think because they got a doctorate in dental surgery, they also got a side doctorate in real estate law, so they’ll sign a lease without having a real estate attorney look at it. Here’s where that can get you:

I have a friend whose office roof was leaking and, according to his triple-net lease, he had to replace and pay for the roof of the entire 10,000-square-foot building. (The other two neighboring tenants, a yoga instructor and a clothing shop, both declared bankruptcy and closed.)

Another dentist I know had his practice space garnished by an anchor-tenant grocery store that had exercised its option to annex the adjoining suites so it could expand. It was after he found out he had only six months to relocate his dental office that he showed his lease to an attorney, who said: “Well, you signed this. Why would you sign anything like it?”

Both dentists thought they could handle the lease details, and neither bothered showing it to an attorney. Almost every time I see a dentist 10 feet underwater, it’s because he’d been trying to act like he also knew everything about being a real estate agent or a lawyer. Stay in your lane!

“Dentist” ≠ “attorney”

My company, starting with my dental office, is now 31 years old, but my management team has all been on board for 20 years or less. What did I do for that first decade? I spun my wheels, went off the road, did U-turns. It took me about 10 years to master the foundations of a management team, and once I did, that’s where the company really launched, going from barely growing to 10x growing, from a dental practice to a multimedia conglomerate.

In his book *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell says it takes 10,000 hours before you’re a master at something. You can’t just Google “real estate law” before you sign your real estate lease.

You shouldn’t be playing the same game with human resources, either. Do you have an HR manual that addresses codes of conduct? We have a rock-solid handbook that is reviewed yearly by an HR attorney. When you fire someone, do you consult your attorney to make sure you have your ducks in a row?

If not, who are you going to turn to when it backfires and you’re served papers? Some people think they’re making the right move because they called the pastor at their church, who recommended a “great guy.” And sure, that attorney has been a member of your church for 10 years, but does he have 10,000 hours of dental HR experience? Because maybe your fired employee found a lawyer who does.

**What topics would you like Howard to tackle?**

What should Dr. Howard Farran talk about in his next “Howard Speaks” column? Visit dentaltown.com/magazine and tell us what you think his next focus should be in the comments section under this column.
“Dentist” ≠ “chemical engineer”

It even comes down to your bonding agents. I mean, we’ve got companies like 3M and Ivoclar that have 70 or 80 full-time PhD organic chemists who’ve worked there for a decade and were given millions of dollars and five years to come out with a new, amazing bonding agent. And what do dentists do? “Well, I like their primer but I’m going to use another bonding agent,” and they start mixing kits. You’re a dentist, not an organic chemist.

When I stand behind the most elite dentists in the world and the instructions say to brush on for 15 seconds, the assistant hits a timer and they brush on for 15 seconds. Dr. Michael B. Miller of the training company Reality taught me that—I was visiting a lecture at his office in Houston and right out of the gate, he says, “All the dentists want to know which brand to use. You know what I’m going tell you? I don’t care what brand you use: Just use it like it says.” It didn’t say mix the kit from 3M with Ivoclar and Ultradent.

“Dentists have this disease where they’re not doctors of dentistry, they’re doctors of the universe.”

And that 15-second brush-on, doctor? Yeah, that was more like three seconds. I’ll never forget the first time I went to a lecture with Dan Fischer of Ultradent. He took a bunch of us into a lab, sat us down and said, “Here are the directions for our bonding agent, and here are some cut extracted teeth. I want you to brush this on for five seconds, which is what every dentist does, and then I want you to brush it on for 15 seconds, like the instructions say. Then we’re going to go through the steps and cure each of them and see the difference.” The five-second ones were just a joke—we broke the machine.

Dentists have this disease where they’re not doctors of dentistry, they’re doctors of the universe. It’s important to remember to stay in your lane, before you run yourself off the road and total your practice.