



The Power of Learning

*Know what your doctors know.
Become a resource.
Differentiate.
Provide knowledge and expertise.*

These are all ideals for laboratories to strive for in today's dental laboratory climate. Yet determining the best course of action to attain these indicators can be a bit daunting. A good starting point is to go direct to the source and hear from the organizations providing dentists the latest in education. Leaders in The Dawson Academy, The Pankey Institute, and Spear Education share their offerings as well as their thoughts on the role of the dental laboratory technician and future of the industry. Also featured are dental laboratory technicians who discuss the power they gained from these programs.

The Dawson Academy

St. Petersburg, Fla.

<https://thedawsonacademy.com>

"Technicians learn to build a knowledge-based relationship with the dentist."

— Leonard Hess, D.D.S.

LEONARD HESS, D.D.S., joined The Dawson Academy faculty in 2009 and is the clinical director. He owns Union County Center for Comprehensive Dentistry in Charlotte, N.C., and practices full time in addition to teaching continuing education courses.

Please share more about The Dawson Academy program.

We have a core curriculum composed of seven different courses. Each course is 2.5 days long and it takes on average 12-18 months to get through the curriculum. Courses are based on the fundamentals of diagnosis, proper treatment planning, advanced diagnostic and clinical techniques for complex cases, and finish with dental materials and current technologies as well as advanced problem solving. Every year we have several dental technicians who take the core curriculum, resulting in Dawson-accredited laboratories. This means that the majority of the lab's crown and bridge technicians have taken the same courses as the dentist. Those technicians can now speak the same language of functional esthetics that the dentists speak. We encourage our graduating dentists to work with a Dawson-accredited laboratory for predictable results.

Who is your audience and what can dental laboratory technicians gain from participating?

Dental laboratory technicians gain a much better understanding of overall treatment planning. With the technician exposed to the examination and diagnosis component, they can see the discrepancies related to function-based issues and worn dentition. When dentists treat a problem, but not the cause of the problem, dentistry is destined to fail because the issue that destroyed the natural dentition hasn't been addressed in the treatment. Dawson technicians come out with a better understanding of getting ahead of the problem and can encourage dentists to think differently, choose different materials, and start to solve the real problem. Even if a diagnosis is causing the tooth failure, if it results in a remake, the labs end up failing as well.

How does The Dawson Academy play a role in the collaboration between the dental treatment team?

Throughout our courses we encourage open communication between technicians and dentists in attendance. There are many mistakes that dentists could make, which creates a difficult environment for a technician to provide the quality a dentist commands. Too many dentists put technicians in a position they cannot win by not knowing what their own responsibility is, and the burden is unfairly placed on the technician. Our job is to help educate dentists to know the proper way to be the quarterback of a case and to give the technician what they need to make the dentist look good. Technicians also learn to build a knowledge-based relationship with the dentist and can more effectively say, 'here is what I need to do a better job for you.' If there can be symbiosis of mutual understanding and respect, then everyone wins.



How do you see the dental industry changing and how can dental laboratories best prepare?

What concerns me the most is the shortage of certified dental laboratory technicians. The number of education programs that train technicians to graduate with a CDT has gone down 90 percent. Yes, technology and AI will make it a little easier when it comes to single units or small cases, but for cases beyond 2-3 teeth there will never be a replacement for qualified technicians with artistic skills. We are evolving into a generic product. With digital design people are dragging a predetermined form and shape without knowing the nuance of function and esthetics, resulting in bigger problems moving forward. The problem with technology is that it is making it easier for dentists to do bad dentistry quicker. Another worry is that labs geared toward quality products will be so busy they cannot accept new clients, and less qualified technicians will be handling these cases.

REBECCA WADE, CDT, Dawson Scholar, is a manager and cosmetic ceramist at NDX Clearwater in Florida. In her pursuit of higher education, Wade began attending cosmetic courses to earn the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD) accreditation. One of the requirements was an occlusion course and the Dawson Academy was recommended. After taking the occlusion course in 2012, her aspirations took a new direction.

“I attended the course with Dr. Pete Dawson,” said Wade. “After I met one-on-one with him, my life changed. I decided to explore the function of the jaw related to the teeth during movement and changed my focus from earning AACD accreditation to becoming a Dawson Scholar. It took some time and funding to accomplish this goal.



“I found with Dawson that the instructors and attendees love having dental technicians participate in courses. The experience evokes a family feeling and a sense of belonging. The knowledge I acquired enables me to have intelligent discussions with doctors and the confidence that I will make successful and accurate restorations. I completed all courses and graduated in 2022 as a Dawson Scholar.

“Since then, NDX Clearwater has become a Dawson-accredited dental laboratory, which means all of our technicians are certified. Having a Dawson-trained lab team increases overall awareness and elevates the quality of our restorations. Dawson refers clients to us because we speak the Dawson language and have earned their trust with positive results. We also attend lectures and teach alongside doctors as guides.

“Participating in the Dawson Academy is worth it. You learn how to communicate with doctors and complete challenging cases. You gain a better understanding of morphology and can identify and avoid potential problems by addressing complications and presenting them to the dentist. If dental technicians make the teeth, they should understand the different reasons or factors that cause failures. Doctors rely on technicians to be materials experts and to identify the issues. Technicians hold the restoration outside of the mouth and must use that perspective to partner with clinicians to prevent problems and have successful outcomes.

“I highly recommend taking at least the first Dawson course on occlusion. It is mind-blowing and will teach you a lot. It's allowed me to grow and collaborate with like-minded clients. I have gained business through my participation with Dawson. I wanted the high-end price of my products to have true value to my clinicians and to enjoy my career while delivering that value, and I've achieved it.”

The Pankey Institute

Key Biscayne, Fla.

<https://pankey.org>

"Our programs have always had a holistic approach."

– Dr. Lee Ann Brady

DR. LEE ANN BRADY currently serves as the executive director/director of education at The Pankey Institute. When not in her Glendale, Ariz. office working with patients or attending a continuing education course as a student, she is teaching dental education courses to other dentists around the world.

Please share more about The Pankey Institute program.

Our programs come in three separate pathways. Our essential series is a four-course curriculum that covers all the necessary didactic and clinical techniques of the exam, diagnosis, treatment planning, treatment sequencing, and execution for dental cases of any complexity. For technicians, the deep dive into occlusal theories and how to optimize functional design are a critical component. The other great value to technicians is understanding the treatment planning and sequencing thought process for complex restorative dentistry. Courses Essentials 3 and 4 discuss the interaction between the dentist and technician and how the cooperation and exchange of records make this kind of dentistry fun and predictable for both. After the Essentials we have our mastery series; each one is a very deep dive at an advanced level into specific topics from esthetics and occlusion to photography. Lastly, we have focus courses which are very topic specific, and often these topics change from year to year based on what new concepts are arising in dentistry.

Who is your audience and what can dental laboratory technicians gain from participating?

Our primary audience is restorative dentists, and we often have technicians in our courses. In addition to the knowledge the technician would gather at a very advanced level about restorative dentistry and function, the primary benefit would be learning how to attract and successfully work with dentists who are practicing with a focus on esthetics and prosthetic reconstruction.

How does The Pankey Institute play a role in the collaboration between the dental treatment team?

Our programs have always had a holistic approach and focus equally on technical dentistry, financial management, team collaboration and development, and personal philosophy. A huge part of the conversation in restorative dentistry is working with your lab technician and creating a collaborative partnership.

How do you see the dental industry changing and how can dental laboratories best prepare?

I think we are already well into our transition to digital dentistry and understanding how to use this incredible technology for more advanced restorative cases is the next challenge. For many years we have had a continuous wave of improvements in indirect dental materials and techniques, and the lab technician is taking on the expert role and guiding dentists as they plan cases for materials selection and prep design. As this section of what we do becomes more complex, the more valuable will become the relationship with a very knowledgeable lab and technician.



PHILLIP GOLD, MASTER CDT, with By Design Dental Studio, CDL, located in Atlanta, Ga., grew up with close ties to Dr. Peter Dawson and attended all his seminars. In the early years, Dr. Dawson's programs were strictly lectures, so Dr. Dawson would refer attendees to The Pankey Institute, where he also taught, for further hands-on experience. Dr. Dawson also introduced Dr. Spear's lectures to the east coast, and they later taught together at Pankey during Masters Week. It's an exciting circle of these teaching camps of Dawson, Pankey and Spear, and Dr. Dawson was the nucleus of the success of all three.

Gold's first exposure to The Pankey Institute was when he was starting out in the early 70s in sales at Williams Gold (now Ivoclar). The Williams Gold sales force met at The Pankey Institute to hear Dr. LD Pankey teach the Pankey philosophy of balancing the cross of life and the importance of knowing yourself, your patient, your work, and applying your knowledge. Years later, Dr. Irwin Becker, director of education at Pankey at the time, was presenting at Gold's lab study group and spoke about the tremendous value of a dentist/technician course. He asked if Gold was interested and of course the answer was yes. Dr. Becker put together a team of Dr. Jim Kessler, Lee Culp, and Gold to kick off the first program and that was the start of Gold's long-standing teaching role at Pankey.

Gold ended up serving eight years on the Pankey board of directors. During that time, Dr. Lee Ann Brady, previously full-time faculty at Pankey, returned to orchestrate and lead as executive director and director of education. When she came back on board, her first task was to calibrate and organize the curriculum of the four Essentials, Pankey's foundation programs. Other courses offered include Focus courses as well as master programs. She opened the door and brought to Pankey the best educators in the world to be a part of faculty and guest faculty.

"Dr. Brady has a huge appreciation for technicians," said Gold. "Technicians can attend the same courses as dentists at a significant discount, allowing them the opportunity to learn right beside their dentist as well as others at a lesser cost. As a technician in the class, you are a tremendous resource of information for the doctors. In addition to meeting new clients who are like-minded, and relationship driven, you will have a blast!"

"At The Pankey Institute, classes run for four to five days, with education provided all day and well into the night. Guest faculty members discuss a variety of topics including sleep dentistry, esthetics and digital workflow, as well as business and finance. Your head will be spinning with so much information! The cool part is the four Essentials classes flow as a series. As you continue through the curriculum you have a tremendous opportunity to travel with the same group you started with. Building these kinds of relationships is invaluable and lasts a lifetime.

"The experience is totally worth your time, energy, and money. Everything is hands-on and technicians fit right in."

— Phillip Gold, Master CDT



"The experience is totally worth your time, energy, and money. Everything is hands-on and technicians fit right in. After technicians take these courses, they can talk not from opinion but from what they learned at Pankey! All the institutes provide great education, but if you want to be part of a community, then this is the place to be. This isn't a commercial for The Pankey Institute; it's just my real-life experience. Dental laboratory technicians need to know how to communicate with their doctors. Everyone can make a widget; being a resource is your differentiator, and education is the only way to make this happen. If you can learn alongside your clients, it's life changing for you both."

Spear Education

Scottsdale, Ariz.

www.speareducation.com

"Spear's treatment planning philosophy is centered on interdisciplinary collaboration."

– Steve Ratcliff, D.D.S., M.S.

STEVE RATCLIFF, D.D.S., M.S. is Spear's SVP of Strategic Partnerships, a role in which he helps specialists, and their restorative colleagues, embrace the gifts and challenges of interdisciplinary care. His primary responsibilities are working with business partners to widen the reach of the Spear learning community and creating content for Spear Study Club modules and Spear Online.

Please share more about the Spear Education program.

The Spear Education ecosystem of clinical and practice development was created to support and further the company's mission of helping dentists and their teams pursue and achieve great dentistry. The program consists of live, in-person seminars and workshops, along with a robust platform of digital content that reflects Spear's commitment to interdisciplinary collaboration. Through close partnerships among general practitioners, specialists, and skilled laboratory technicians, the ecosystem empowers clinicians to deliver optimal outcomes for their patients.

Spear offers more than 900 courses through the Spear Online digital platform, giving dentists and their team members the opportunity to learn asynchronously. These are supplemented by Spear Study Clubs—small interdisciplinary groups in which members learn together and support one another in their mutual growth. Club members can attend in-person courses in Scottsdale, Arizona, as well as regional- and national-level workshops.

Laboratory technicians, often the unsung heroes of dentistry, play a pivotal role in ensuring that treatment plans translate into precise and effective patient care. Recognizing their importance, Spear encourages lab technicians to become members and even lead Spear Study Clubs. This provides a unique opportunity for all members to gain insight into the day-to-day challenges faced by colleagues and to approach cases from various perspectives, fostering an appreciation for the expertise each team member brings.

Goals include:

- Enable dentists to advance their clinical skills in everyday and complex cases.
- Support practice growth by enhancing the skills of team members.



- Foster professional growth for doctors, promoting emotional and financial satisfaction.
- Assist dentists in building a strong base of loyal advocates for the practice.

The Spear Core Curriculum is a series of three-day workshops taught by world-renowned faculty. Known for their clinical expertise and collaborative teaching style, these instructors help participants grasp new concepts and put them into practice within an interdisciplinary framework. The Core Curriculum typically takes three to five years to complete and is enhanced by content from Spear Online, providing participants with a comprehensive, collaborative learning journey.

Who is your audience and what can dental laboratory technicians gain from participating?

Spear's audience includes dentists, dental specialists, laboratory technicians and other dental team members. Spear participants gain value by enhancing their clinical, practice growth, and management skills; achieving greater interdisciplinary collaboration; having access to ongoing learning and development; enjoying career satisfaction and financial incentives; improving team



"You get one-on-one time with instructors who have lived and breathed dentistry for their entire lives."

— Michael Roberts

MICHAEL ROBERTS is the owner of CMR Dental Lab located in Idaho Falls, Idaho, where he leads digital diagnostic treatment planning and serves as the lead ceramist. He has also shared his expertise as a visiting faculty member at Spear Education and taught the Digital Adoption course with Dr. Franklin Shull from 2023 through 2024. The hands-on course addressed digital adoption geared toward dentists who haven't yet invested in new technology and workflow.

"This course outlined a predictable path on how dentists can move to a digital workflow, where the pitfalls are, and where the workflow excels," said Roberts. "I've also taken Spear courses including facially generated treatment planning and the occlusion class. These classes provide a great introduction to doing complex cases and demonstrate the best workflow to implement. It's both hands-on and theory tied together in one place. The best part about Spear is the multi-disciplinary approach. They teach people how to communicate across the board to do complex treatment plans with confidence.

"Spear courses are geared toward the entire interdisciplinary team. The technician needs to understand the same concepts as the dentist and Spear is good at teaching that. They have a great online learning system where courses can be taken from home, and for the most bang for your buck, there are the courses offered on campus. Attending these courses is amazing. You get one-on-one time with instructors who have lived and breathed dentistry for their entire lives. The value of showing up in person is not just gained from the instructors, it is also realized through the fellow attendees you will meet. As a group, you will discuss your experiences, including successes, failures, technology, and how it's used; the entire experience turns into a melting pot of knowledge. There is no divide between the dentist and the technician. Spear dentists want to know what I see just as much as I want to know what they see. It's equal footing. Especially for dentists just getting out of school, attending these meetings along with them is a clear path to a successful and more confident working relationship."

performance; and more. Laboratory technicians are welcome at all seminars, and frequently attend with their study clubs. Participating in live events together can be a powerful learning experience that offers the exchange of ideas as speakers bring forward new concepts. Technicians also benefit from working through the Spear Online curriculum.

How does Spear Education play a role in the collaboration between the dental treatment team?

Spear's treatment planning philosophy is centered on interdisciplinary collaboration, when general practitioners, specialists, and laboratory technicians work together to create the best possible outcomes for their patients. Dentists who work closely with skilled technicians come to appreciate their expertise and often rely on them for treatment planning help.

We believe general dentists should have the freedom to offer a broad range of services to their patients, and are equally dedicated to fostering strong, collaborative relationships among general practitioners, specialists, and laboratory professionals.

How do you see the dental industry changing and how can dental laboratories best prepare?

The profession is rapidly becoming digitized. As such, dentists and their teams are experiencing the effects of AI even faster than most can assimilate. It won't be too long before practices have completely integrated diagnostic and treatment planning tools. While such advancements will have great benefits, they also bring many challenges. For one, there will be more consolidation of practices and even private doctors will likely begin to form groups for economies of scale.

The opportunity for labs and their technicians comes in helping dentists understand the best uses of technology and acting as true partners. The learning curves are currently steep and, because it is now possible to gather far more data than was previously possible in the analog world, the expertise in evaluation of that data is the opportunity. Labs that stay current with technology and help their clients use it effectively will be the winners. It wasn't so long ago that many technicians were threatened by milling and feared being replaced. While these weren't unfounded fears, the truth is that the fastest way to be replaced is to become obsolete. The technician who is seen as a tech-savvy, valued part of the interdisciplinary team will flourish. **JDT**