

## **Thomas, a 74-year-old retired dentist**

*(Name changed for anonymity. Shared with permission.)*

**INTERVIEWER:** What do you consider your greatest accomplishment?

**THOMAS:** Most people might think it's building a dental practice from the ground up, but, professionally, I'm particularly proud of the impact I had on my patients over the years. Of course, I took great pride in improving their dental health, but what's been more important to me is changing how they perceived dental care. I worked hard to make my patients feel genuinely cared for, and my staff and I acknowledged and addressed their fears and anxieties. It was about making a difference in their lives, one smile at a time.

On a personal level, my greatest accomplishment is the family my wife and I raised. We instilled in our children the values of kindness, the importance of hard work, and the endless possibilities that come with education. Watching them grow into compassionate people, people who are driven and thoughtful, has been the most rewarding experience of my life. It's a legacy that, in many ways, feels more impactful than any professional success I've achieved.

**INTERVIEWER:** What is the most important lesson you've learned in life?

**THOMAS:** The value of empathy and the power of genuinely listening to others. This is what my professional and personal achievements are based on. In my practice, I quickly learned that many people are afraid of the dentist and anxious about dental appointments. Because I listened to my patients—truly heard their concerns and fears—I could provide clinical care and valuable emotional support. It was about validating their feelings and working together to overcome their anxieties.

In my personal life, listening—really listening—to my family, friends, and even strangers has opened up a world of new perspectives and has taught me more than I could have imagined. It's about more than just hearing words: it's about understanding the emotions and experiences behind them. This has enabled me to connect with people on a deeper level, to support them in times of need, to celebrate with them in times of joy. It's enriched my life in countless ways that I hope to pass on to others.

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