



SEATTLE STUDY CLUB®

Seattle Study Club: A Source for Knowledge Flow
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The respected writer and future thinker Thomas Friedman has written a new book entitled *Thank You for Being Late*.¹ In it, he details many issues facing our world today, especially as they affect the generations who are under age 40. He also helps those of us over 40 understand the accelerating pace of change that often leaves us shaking our heads in wonder, or disbelief. Friedman refers to a 2009 article in the *Harvard Business Review*² about the value of knowledge. I read the article and found it thought provoking, especially with regard to the Seattle Study Club experience.

It has always been true that those who have special knowledge hold power. Control of knowledge was and continues to be a means of making money. The knowledge we learned in dental school makes it possible for us to diagnose and treat oral disease, and to earn money. It is clear to me that the value of our stock of knowledge is being depleted. New knowledge is replacing what we learned in school, and the pace of change is accelerating rapidly. For example, consider what we know about resin bonding. It took many years to develop the first generation of bonding agents, but several generations of agents and techniques have been developed since then. In this instance as in so many others, the original knowledge—the knowing *what*, or basic science—has been devalued in the knowledge flow in favor of the knowing *how*, or applied science.

“Knowledge flow” is the transfer of knowledge from where it is generated to where it needs to be, and the knowledge has additional value because it is more capable of adapting to our accelerated pace of change. Adopting a knowledge flow approach is not without risk. Change for the sake of change has little value. While change is a disruptive force in our lives, our capacity to adapt to change is an important factor in our future success. We have to be able to discriminate between science and fakery.

This is where the Seattle Study Club organization has great value. We can call the new knowledge *tacit* knowledge, or knowing how. We gain tacit knowledge by observation, participation, discrimination and sharing. In a good study club, all of these elements are present. The study club experience is built around our willingness to be continuous students. The learning experience requires us to be open to new ideas. This open attitude does not come all at once; we build it by developing trust in other members of our club, through sharing and listening to ideas and knowledge. We build trust in small increments, first sharing low-value items and gradually, over time, contributing to larger, high-value knowledge.

Good study clubs look for more than just the latest techniques. They want to know the basic science that supports what is purported to be a change for the better. The club should teach its members to be discriminating about what works and what does not, and why. That is where sharing of ideas and techniques comes into play. We can also invite members into our offices to observe as we practice. What looks good on a slide or video may be very different when observed in real life. If we choose to change a process or an approach based on our new knowledge flow, we must measure the results of the change quickly and question honestly whether the change is bringing us closer to our expectations.

The study club experience is an opportunity to tap into the knowledge flow that happens when positively motivated members of the profession gather together. This is the synergy of the Seattle Study Club organization, whether it is a local meeting or Symposium. There was a time when the basic knowledge one gained in dental school was sufficient for a career as a dentist. No longer is that the case. New dentists are entering a profession undergoing both technical and philosophical change, and it is now part of a competitive marketplace.

The Seattle Study Club experience offers a valuable opportunity for new doctors to observe and model the behavior of those who are truly successful in the profession. It also places a responsibility on the senior members to reach out and mentor new members of the club and profession. The pace of change in dentistry will continue to accelerate as we add more knowledge and increase our ability to share that information around the world at shocking speed. Take advantage of your Seattle Study Club experience. Grab the knowledge flow and give back by adding to it.

1. Friedman T. *Thank You for Being Late*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2016.
2. Hagel J. III, Brown J.S., Davison L. "Abandon Stocks, Embrace Flows." *Harvard Business Review*, 27 January 2009.