

The Super Orthodontist

You recognize him just by his physical characteristics — 6'2", 175lbs., 33" inch waist, and of course a full head of well-styled hair with just a tinge of gray in the neatly-trimmed sideburns. He jogs ten miles each morning before he sees his first patient. Impeccably groomed in designer suits and Italian shoes, there is never a wayward hair growing out of his nose.

He is the perfect orthodontist we carry around in our head; the one with whom we compare ourselves just to fully experience failure, guilt and crushed self-esteem.

His office is located in a converted railway station with original antiques accenting the contemporary decor. The receptionist is a stand-in for Mom of the Brady Bunch, and each assistant is an enthusiastic ex-cheerleader never troubled by headaches, flu or premenstrual cramps. The spirit and morale among the staff would create envy in a Japanese women's volley-ball team.

Every family that enters his office eagerly accepts his treatment plan, frequently offering to pay the fee in advance. His patients brush and floss continually, and the only case of enamel decalcification occurred early in his career. Loose bands and distorted archwires are rare, and his molar bands fit like a Mercedes's pistons. Retainers, headgear, and elastics are worn as prescribed by virtually every patient, and rotations don't dare to return. He and his two associates get along perfectly, and it is hardly necessary to describe his homelife with a beautiful wife and two terrific kids.

Right? Wrong!

He's a myth. He doesn't exist, and if he pretends that he does, he's a fraud. There are some such pretenders on the speaking circuit. They travel across the country for daily honoraria far into four figures, usually from some small community.

I've looked closely at a few of these *Super Orthodontists*. The score — one nasty divorce, alimony battle still going on; a three-man group in total disarray and in the process of breaking up with only the lawyers getting rich; one kid on drugs; and a privately-held lab in chapter XI.

At the next orthodontic meeting, if the speaker walks in with a Pierre Cardin attache case or the aroma of Aramis after-shave lotion, I'm walking out. I want to hear from my kind of orthodontist, the one with open bites that don't close, the one who knows about relapse and broken appointments, about lost retainers and kids throwing up.

Orthodontics isn't easy. The oral cavity is small. Chewing ice bends wires. Some kids don't brush. People are human — *All* of us.

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— Robert M. Rubin