

Ask the Expert

Dr. Kyle Fagala

Saddle Creek Orthodontics

Neon Canvas

The Digital Orthodontist





We should have a principles-based center or a values-based center. And from that should emanate a good father, a good husband, a good orthodontist, a good pinball enthusiast, so on and so forth.

Growing up in Jonesboro, Arkansas, with a father who worked in plant genetics and a mother who taught high school Speech and English, Dr. Kyle Fagala was raised with an appreciation for both science and language. From a young age, Dr. Fagala wanted to be a doctor. His foremost hobby of playing the drums directed his focus to dentistry, a profession that combined hand skills with helping people.

Dr. Fagala is a Board Certified Orthodontist. Dr. Fagala is also the course director and lecturer of Development of the Occlusion, a class for 1st year dental students at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center. Further, he is considered an expert on the topic of orthodontic social media and digital marketing, lecturing regularly on the topic to large audiences of orthodontists, and even hosting his own web series The Digital Orthodontist. In 2016, Dr. Fagala became a speaker and Key Opinion Leader for 3M Oral Care, a global leader in orthodontic technology, innovation, and research. He is also a Key Opinion Leader for Komet Burs.

Dr. Fagala and his wife Anna opened Saddle Creek Orthodontics in Germantown in the summer of 2013. Their second orthodontic practice, located in Collierville, opened in May of 2016. Dr. Kyle Fagala, his wife Anna, and their four children Charlie, Libby, George, and Lucy live in Germantown and attend Highland Church of Christ in Cordova.

Dustin Burleson:

All right. Welcome, everyone. I'm so honored to have Dr. Kyle Fagala here tonight. Kyle, thanks for being here.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Hey, thanks for having me, Dustin.

Dustin Burleson:

You've got the drums behind you, and I think everyone in orthodontics knows who you are, knows that you are a musician. But in the rare offshoot that there's a resident in the future listening to this who hasn't met you, tell us a little bit about who you are, how you got to where you are.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Yeah. So, I have to clarify, calling me a musician is funny. I'd say, I'm a music hobbyist, but I play from time to time. But I have lots of drums, if number of drums equates to musical talent, and I'm one of the best in the world.

So, but anyway, no, I'm Dr. Kyle Fagala. I'm an orthodontist by trade. I've been doing that for 10 years. We opened a practice from scratch, and we have two locations. I'm also a co-founder of Neon Canvas, which is a digital marketing agency. And I have so many hobbies, and I try to stay active with so much.

And so, I get to lecture. I have a podcast, a Facebook group, The Digital Orthodontist, which you should join. And many, many, many moons ago, the first private coaching and the first really consulting we ever did was with Dustin. So, this is like a retrospective type moment right now, for sure.

Dustin Burleson:

Yeah, if you look closely, there are gray hairs here. When we met, I had like hair down to here...

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

You had beautiful hair. Your hair's still very nice. Mine is thinning. My wife cut my hair and she's like, "You know, it's thinning." So, I'm going to go on Propecia, but I got to do the podcast first.

Dustin Burleson:

Your hair is thinning like I'm 6'8". No, you quickly went from this like, "This guy's got a lot of stuff going on," and you went just the hockey stick of growth. It was an honor too. You did not need any coaching, but we were honored to have you in the group for a little while.

So, I've said for years, you're the most creative orthodontist I've ever met, where I'm curious where that came from. What was your childhood like? Because to highlight, for people that are listening that don't know, you just won best creative agency, you just won an innovation award at the AAO. You hosted an awards event like the amount of stuff you do from the podcast to your event to Neon Canvas, which is brilliant. That's a huge creative spring. What was that growing up in your family?

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Yeah, sure. I'm a masochist first, so that's why I do all that stuff, but I can't help. So, I did review this question, and I don't really have an awesome answer for it. I'm just be honest. I had an older brother who was seven years older

than me and very smart. His brain works in a really beautiful way. And so, he can remember all things at all times.

And I think anytime you have a brother-to-brother relationship, it was just the two of us, you're innately very competitive with one another. Since he was six and a half, seven years older than me, it's really hard to compete with a brother of that age. And so, I think that there was this just intense competitiveness that I had with him to try to beat him, and we're friends now because we're almost in our 40s.

So, I think on some level that spurred me on it. Of course, there's a lot of it that's just God given or that that's written on the fabric of who I am. I think my personality type for what it's worth, drawing up Myers-Briggs, an INTJ, which is an architect. And so, I like to do things on my own. I like to plan things out, kind of in secret. I'm like Machiavelli or something in some ways, for better and for worse.

So, I think in that sense, I had parents that were always very supportive of me. I had a home environment where I always felt loved and supported, but I was very competitive with my brother. And I also went to a very small Christian school where you could do everything. And so, I played all the sports, I did yearbook, I did newspaper, I was in bands.

And so, I'm just one of these people that I've come to find out later that I'm ADD, which this response to your question would confirm that. And I didn't know that for the longest time, but I think part and parcel with that, with INTJ, it has made me where if there's something that



I have been very fortunate to be able to do a ton of stuff, and I just always lean into the things that fill my cup.

is interesting to me, I will go all in on it and I will try to do it to the best degree that I possibly can until it's no longer interesting. And then, I'm on to the next thing.

And so, my wife jokes that we should start a business where people like me, we get into pinball, let's say, because I've gotten really into pinball. We do all that stuff for a year and a half until we're no longer interested. And then, we find someone else that's gotten into fly-fishing or whatever it is, and we just trade hobbies.

Dustin Burleson:

Oh, like relay. I love that, that's so smart, yeah.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

That's a really roundabout way to say that I have been very fortunate to be able to do a ton of stuff, and I just always lean into the things that fill my cup.

Dustin Burleson:

How do you step away from it? Is that hard when you say, I've had enough of this thing or hobby?

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

I think also in keeping with the fact that I'm an INTJ, I don't have a lot of feelings. I wouldn't say I'm a non-empathetic person, but I'm not sentimental, let's say. And so, we just closed a location in Collierville. We're going to start a new one. We're not leaving, but. And it wasn't like I was tearing up for taking pictures like, "All right, I'm going home." So, for me, it's not hard at the point at which it's, again, I use this analogy, it's not filling my cup, I'm out, and it's okay.

And so, I think that's healthy for someone that's doing a bunch of stuff to be able to, and I learned a lot of these tips from you, but learn delegation. But also, learn not to be so emotionally invested in the identity of something because your identity at the end of the day is certainly not that you're an orthodontist or that you have a creative agency or that you're a drummer or a pinball enthusiast. It's a lot deeper than that.

Dustin Burleson:

We did this exercise with members; I think last fall. It was really eye-opening because when I say like, "Who are you, everyone?" In America, I think particularly, we always lead with who we are.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Yeah.

Dustin Burleson:

So, what do you do? If you're at a cocktail party and there's an American in the room, it's like, "What do you do for a living?" But in Europe it's like, "Where are you from?"

And who's your family?" They're more identifying in that way. What would you add to that list? I mean, I would think father, husband, but how many layers down do you go? And is that common in our industry to have those layers?

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Oh, I don't know, and I don't mean to be critical. And I certainly, don't mean to be like self-congratulatory like I'm a person. And so, it's very kind for you to say that I'm creative or whatever. And I think the extent to which I'm seen as creative is a reflection of the people that work with me and around me and that help me. And that's always the case. I have a wonderful wife. She's been with me 18 years coming up next weekend, but in the practice specifically 10 years.

Dustin Burleson:

Wow.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

And so, when people talk about having an orthodontic partner, she's my orthodontic partner. She just doesn't have the license. What was the question? Something about ADD now. So...

Dustin Burleson:

Yeah. So, the identity, I think. So, we'll go back and I'll share with you because the department chair at Children's Mercy asked me when we sold our practices, and Rock wants me to say that we partnered. They don't like the S word. So, if Rock's listening, when we partnered up, she said, "Do you miss it?" And I didn't even let her get

the sentence inside her mouth. I said, "No." So, it's a very Seinfeld answer like, enough already. We went back and did the math because we worked six days a week and long hours. I'm like, "I put 24 years in that in the last 16 years." A full career's worth in that many years.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Oh, so I'll answer your question because it was a very good question. And then, I got caught up on another rabbit, I was chasing. Identity. So, I know you are a fan of *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People*. I actually first heard about that book from you, and I'll let you in on a secret. You went through it in the whole day. I thought that was all from you. I was like, "Man, this guy's brilliant." And then, someone got me the book and I read it and I was like, "Oh, this was just a book."

Dustin Burleson:

So smart.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

You're still a brilliant guy. But yeah, so I actually have ended up lecturing on that same topic just because it's really, for me, there's not a better book. Anyway, and the point that I'm getting to is that, he talks about most people, their center or their core value or their grounding principles, so on and so forth, is something like money or success or their profession. I'm an orthodontist, or even things that seemingly are good. I'm a family man or I'm a husband. And what he posits is that, it should be a principles-based center or a values-based center. And from that should emanate a good father, a good husband, a good orthodontist, a good pinball enthusiast, so on and

so forth. And so, it's like that start with why concept. And there's 17 different bastardization of this same concept, but they're important.

And whether you're a Christian or a Buddhist or you're an atheist or whatever, you have to understand it at your core, at your presuppositional base, who you are. And that is not going to be the greatest answer to someone at a dinner party. But I think that is really the most important thing. And so, when you have all these other things floating around you, you have to understand that those are secondary and tertiary to who you are at your core. And so, when I say yes to something or I say no to something, if it doesn't support that value center, then it is easy to say no to it.

Dustin Burleson:

Yeah, that's a great answer. And so, we'll dig into religion. People laugh. They're like, "Oh, you sit down with Burleson and within two minutes he's talking about all the things you're not supposed to talk about. It's politics, money, religion." I'm like...

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

That's the fun stuff.

Dustin Burleson:

... "We've gone to war over these things. Millions of people have died over these things. Why would we not talk about them in a way that's open and maybe not judgmental?" But what's that like? I mean, I always struggled with in my Christian faith talking about that in the business. We

would sit little [copies of], "Our Daily Bread" or stuff from Charles Stanley at the checkout area.

So, if someone wanted it, they could grab one. But I was really cautious too, I think I didn't want to offend anyone or to be labeled some zealot or some Bible thumper. But it's been important, and especially reconnecting in my life now. I've been sober for over two years. I feel like I should have done more. What's that been like? Because I know, I think, if I know correctly, you and Anna are very involved in your church, and I'm curious how you've walked that tightrope in your professional life?

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Okay, great question. The first thing, there's so many answers to this question. First off, congratulations on two years of sobriety. That's incredible. My best friend from way, way, way back just celebrated three years. And anyway, I know how substantial of a decision that is and that's awesome. So, kudos to you.

Dustin Burleson:

Thanks, yeah.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

And to anyone else out there listening, you should consider that. I don't know if you did like any, it's maybe too personal question, maybe Alcoholics Anonymous or whatever it was. That's what he did. But...

Dustin Burleson:

Yeah, no, I just hit rock bottom and put on 40 pounds and my doctor said, "You got to stop drinking or you're going



You have to be able to love and take care of yourself wholly before you can ever love and take care of anyone else.

to go on three antihypertensives." I was just a bear of a person. When it started to like, I learned through studying there's either non-use, social use, abuse or addiction. And I was definitely in the abuse category because I was waking up hung over all the time. What turned it in dental school from one to two drinks a week turned into one to two drinks a night, turned into, now I'm drinking a Negroni while making dinner, then a bottle of wine. And every night at a certain point, it just wasn't working for us. Even my kids are like, "You're such a calmer person." Our AV guy at the last event, he's like, he talked to Ashley, he's like, "Dustin's a lot calmer nowadays." So, yeah, luckily, I never went... I mean, it could have been way worse. So, I'm grateful I caught it at the time I did. But my personality, totally, now that I know who I am a little bit better lends myself to this.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Yeah, I don't know that I'm so different. And let's come back to the religion question, if you don't mind, because you did bring this up. I'm a significantly better and easier version of myself now after going on anxiety medication. Things that you don't know about yourself until you've hit

a rock bottom, and everyone's rock bottom is a little bit different. And I pray that I never hit true rock bottom. But for me, it was just immediately after COVID due to the convergence of all of career and pressures of life and family, and all that hitting at the same time. And COVID didn't help, probably just not being able to function as I should, and falling asleep way earlier than I should, and just being sore and not having any associate and seeing a hundred patients a day over and over and over and having Neon Canvas, and you get it.

And I discovered that some of that was just my inability to cope. And I think some of that is my hyper focus, ADD, whatever you want to call that. Every little sound and thing bothers me when people chew, it bothers me. I have all these prototypical symptoms of that kind of thing, which is a superpower in a way until it's not. And so, I went on some anxiety meds. And I had not gone on them because a disability insurance salesman at a lunch and learn in dental school told me that I shouldn't. So, you make decisions like that based on the worst of advice from the worst of people, right? So, as I ate my free Chick-fil-A sandwich and waffle fry chips that they provided.

So, I would just say that to anyone out there, I know this is off the rails and random, but you absolutely talk about what's your core value? What's your identity? You have to be able to love and take care of yourself wholly before you can ever love and take care of anyone else. Certainly, until you can run a successful practice in such a way that you're sustainable.

So, for me, that made all the difference in the world. And it was almost like a light switch where I no longer heard all this white noise that was all the way just drowning me. I still have it. It's not like you're going to get rid of it, and you don't want to get rid of all the edge. But for me, that was huge. And therapy and other stuff is helpful too. But anyway, I doubt this.

Dustin Burleson:

Yeah, I mean, again, we talked about this with Amy Gallo on her interview. And the research is out of University of Texas on this, put your own oxygen mask on first. And I feel like COVID maybe helped us all in business. And maybe, it's just me, maybe I've got rose-tinted glasses on. But I think it helped us see that that's okay. Where it used to be just profit, profit, profit and growth, growth, growth.

One of my favorite New Yorker cartoons has two businessmen in suit and ties. They're scuffled up. They've got a little torn patch on their shoulder, and they're on the moon or Mars. And in the background, Earth is just a ball of flames. And they're saying to each other, and I'm paraphrasing like, "Other than destroying the Earth for a while, we created some really good shareholder value."

So, we get trapped in this mindset of growth, growth, growth. And you don't realize like, at what expense? Early in my career, I used to joke, I had to put a name tag on, so the kids knew who I was when I came home. They're like, "Oh, there's the guy who's here on birthdays, he's home." It was awful.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Yup, that's hardwired. I mean, that's *Happiness Advantage* concepts. I know you've read that. It was it Shawn Achor, I guess. But he went to Harvard and was taken with what, a day or two into being at Harvard. People were already pissed off about it and complaining. Same thing as in dental school.

I remember the first day of dental school, everyone's so excited like, "Let's go out, let's hang out, let's party." Day three sucks. And it's like, you immediately forget how fortunate you are. And so, we put success on the horizon. And if you put it on the horizon, you're never going to get there. And so, I think adjusting for that is helpful. So, let's get back to religion, if we may. What I would say, here's an interesting thing I read is that for the first time ever, fewer than 50% of Americans, I guess explicitly say they believe in God, which that sounds a little squirrely to me. I think actually, a lot more people than that would say they believe in God, but in this specific poll. We are obviously at a turning point there.

And so, I think any conversation of Christianity I think needs to begin with a couple things, at least for me, is that saying you're a Christian doesn't mean that you're a Christian. Christian in its sense is a little Christ or a follower of Jesus. And so, how many of us actually follow him in that way that you would think of the disciples actually following Jesus, very few of us.

And so, it's an endeavor. It's not a destination. It's a thing that you're always growing in. Faith is tricky. I'm an imperfect person. That's a large part of why I am a



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Christian is, I need hope and I need forgiveness. And so, that doesn't make me a special unique snowflake. It is just a part of the truth. And so, I grew up in it. I'm an organic Christian. And so, it was handed to me.

I have tried to reevaluate those things, make my faith my own. I would love to talk to anyone who has just blanket, rejected the idea of God or of Christianity because I think there's a lot of really deep and important questions that a lot of us don't ask because we're so distracted by other things. And so, I think it's extremely significant and important to answer those questions, at least ask those questions. Why are we here? How did we get here? What's the point of life? Is there a point to life? And so on. I think a lot of us are just sort of casually agnostic and secularist, but that fails to answer a whole lot of really important questions. So, for me, it's important, it's grounding, it's significant in terms of how I live today, but also how I hope to live in the future. And again, I'm a work in progress. For me, I grew up in the Bible belt

where it's totally fine to talk about your Christianity, and in fact, it's culturally beneficial to do that. And so, I understand that I have that bias. And so, we start every morning with a prayer and people say, "Well, I couldn't do that." And it may be that it wouldn't be as popular where I don't know.

Dustin Burleson:

In your practice you do that? That's awesome. I didn't know that. That's very cool.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Yeah. But I'm also like, I will use bad language and I'm not a perfect person and I've made mistakes. So, it's like, I think that's the hard thing is that Christianity is under such a magnifying glass in the sense that, what's the worst thing for Christianity? It's Christians that don't act like Christians or they don't act like good people.

And so, I do my best to be the best that I can. But the grounding concept of Christianity is that when you look at the disciples, they were a really disappointing C team type people. And so, I think that's the idea of it really, is that Jesus chose men that were not first in line. And so, in that same way, he's chosen me.

So, and I know I'm dancing around a lot philosophically. But for me, I am okay being an open book. And if someone was to criticize me for playing Christian music in the office or for talking about being a Christian, to me it would be an opportunity for a conversation. And I think as long as you are genuine and authentic and willing to

have a conversation, and I'm totally open to whatever people want to believe and talk about.

I reject the idea that you shouldn't talk about religion and war and politics and all that. I can't help but talk about those things. That's the interesting stuff to me. But I'm never going to try to tell someone that they're wrong. So, I'm always open to hear more. One of my favorite things to say to people is, "Tell me more." Because I think it disarms people. And that's another seven habits concept is, seek first to understand, then to be understood.

I think a lot of the world's issues would be fixed if we were just willing to listen before we were trying to spout off what we thought. But anyway, this is the longest answer ever. I'm sorry, just edit it all out.

Dustin Burleson:

No, that's what I was hoping we would get out of this, is a really meaningful conversation. I read that same statistic about half the country in the US not having any faith in God. And I have some close friends who are very cerebral and extremely talented, Ivy League educated MDs, and they always pick on me, they're like, "How can you believe in this thing that you've never seen? How do you have faith?" And someone way smarter than me said, "Faith is what you find when you find you're not alone."

So, for me, that was that really grounding principle that there's something bigger than all of this. And certainly, in my own power that there's very, very little I can do. But connected to God, I feel like I've done a lot more. And David Brooks writes about this a lot and his wife runs... My magazine, has grabbed it up. I don't know if this is Spring of this year comment. So, this is a cultural journal



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that, and they're I think both Catholic Christians. So, I grew up in that persuasion. I have a lot of Catholic guilt in my background.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

There's some good things to Catholicism. I mean, come on.

Dustin Burleson:

Yeah, yeah, that's awesome. We've got some issues, right?

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Yeah, right. Good stuff, maybe not so much. Yeah, go ahead.

Dustin Burleson:

But David Brooks does a great job highlighting that. Even if my grandparents belong to Kiwanis or the Masons, they had some civic thing...

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Correct.

Dustin Burleson:

... that bound them in this common decency of like, love your neighbor as yourself, even if it wasn't Christianity. And somehow, I don't want to say we've lost that, but somehow some of that is being chipped away at in our society where we put ourselves up on a pedestal. And as long as you're happy and as long as... and I wrote about this, and I'm curious, I think I put it in one of the questions I had all these download of Dustin's brain thoughts. I was like, "I've got to ask Kyle all these questions." And one of them was, what are your thoughts on people who say, "Listen, I just can't buy into that. I don't believe that, but *my job* is my calling."

So, I think back to our grandparents had jobs. My grandfather was a coal miner. He went down in the Earth, chipped away a coal, came up, and they paid him in company script. I actually, found some of that script. You could buy, you could find it on eBay. People that don't know these companies in West Virginia would pay you and things that looked like money, but it was stamped with the company logo and you could only use it in the company store. You could only use it on company rent. So, he lived in a house that was owned by the coal mine, and he bought his groceries and clothes with money that was fake money. And so, I found some of that and I framed it and put it in my office, and as a reminder that we had these things that we think are our identity. And sometimes, it's just a job.

So, our grandparents had jobs, our parents had careers. And now, we have a calling. And I've been guilty of calling

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I think there's a general sense to calling as I see it, whereby the fruits of your activities should be in the service of others. So, can you do that as an orthodontist? Can you do that as an ice cream salesperson? Sure.

it this where like, it's got to be your mission and your passion in life. And a lot of orthodontists say like, "Nah, I just want to go home and be a dad or a mom when I'm done with this tooth stuff." Is that okay? Should we be shamed into making our practice, our "calling" in life?

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

No, we shouldn't be shamed into it. I think, ooh, calling is such a difficult term semantically, let's say, even in the Christian Church. I guess I would say that, for me, your calling, I don't see that as necessarily a specific thing. I think there's a general sense to calling as I see it, whereby the fruits of your activities should be in the service of others. So, can you do that as an orthodontist? Can you do that as an ice cream salesperson? Sure.

So, to me, that is my calling is you want to boil it down to the golden rule or that you should love God and love others or whatever these really central thematic concepts of Christianity are. For me, that would be my calling. I

find that when I am working or I'm living or I'm just being, and in those times I'm trying to be selfless and lean into others and fuel others that feels like I'm acting out of my calling.

I cringe a little when people talk about orthodontics in those big and lofty ways because let's say you're a Christian and what's the point of life? It is in fact to share the gospel, get to heaven. Okay, let's say you're an atheist, agnostic, a secularist, a humanist, whatever. It's going to be some form of legacy. So, you're leaving something for those after you're gone.

Orthodontics, the straightening of teeth and the aligning of bites, it can act on some level to do those things. But certainly, it's the activities in and around the straightening of teeth that is going to provide greater legacy. And so, I've reminded, this is another Dustin Burleson concept. The Eisenhower Matrix. And so, things that are important and urgent, seeing patients every day, those are important and urgent things. They're on our schedule. We have to do those things. There's nothing wrong with that.

So, we spend a good chunk of time on that. Those things don't create legacy. I mean, in small part, sure. But the things that create legacy, the things that should be your calling are the things that are important but that are not urgent. And so, urgency is what drives behavior. What should drive behavior is importance.

And so, what do we spend most of our time on things that are not important and that are urgent, like mowing our lawn? I remember your story about that. By the way, I use



But the things that create legacy, the things that should be your calling are the things that are important but that are not urgent. And so, urgency is what drives behavior. What should drive behavior is importance.

that as an example for why I never want to mow my lawn and I don't. I hate mowing my lawn. But then, things that are not important and not urgent, sitting around watching all six seasons of some show that's not even that good. We must delete those things.

And so, that's what I feel like should be our calling. Is it important but not urgent that we do orthodontics? I don't think so. And I don't think that in and of itself is going to create legacy. What could is, creating a pro bono concept inside your practice or teaming with some other agency in town that takes care of autistic kids or that works with foster children and dreaming up something bigger. It's not urgent that you do that, but it is certainly important and it will create legacy. I think both from a Christian standpoint and both just from a secular standpoint. And so, that's what I think our calling. I think our calling should be a lot deeper than I was called to go to dental school and to make \$600,000 a year.

Dustin Burleson:

Life's deeper than that. Wait, what? That's a really brilliant answer. I'd love to go deeper on...

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

I got all the time in the world. So, you do what you need to do.

Dustin Burleson:

Don't tell me that. We'll have part three with Kyle Fagala. Like Yellowstone, we'll just make it a 20-year season in a different version.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Indeed. That's been all series, yup.

Dustin Burleson:

Which I heard is maybe coming to an end. So, something happened there because they said they wanted to tell a very long story. I thought, "Boy, they're doing it." Get me on a tangent. The concept I want to go deeper on is this idea of eliminating the non-urgent and curation, because that was always difficult for me.

I spoke with Leidy Klotz about this. He wrote a book called Subtract. He's a PhD, I think out of the University of Virginia. And it's so simple but profound. He was playing Legos with his 3-year-old son, and there were the big Lego blocks and they were building a bridge. And Leidy, by the way, is an engineer by trade, and he also got a PhD in Behavioral Psychology, I think.

But so, he's an engineer looking at his 3-year-old, build a bridge and it's not level. So, one side is taller than the other, one of it appears, and they were both building the same thing. So, Leidy, the author of this book reaches over and adds another piece to the bottom to make it level, but his son just subtracted one on the other side to make it level. He is like, "That's interesting."

So, he actually took that concept and did it with graduate students at the University of Virginia like, just gave them an uneven Lego block bridge and said, "Make it level." And almost everyone added to the bottom. And in our business, I think like, "God, all this stuff we added of like, let's do this and let's do this and let's do this and let's do this." We just kept adding and adding out. One day, we've got every widget, every website thing, and every CRM bolted onto our practice management software. And one day I'm like, "Why? Why are we adding all this stuff?" So, what's your advice and maybe some examples you've used to subtract and to pull things out of the business or out of your life or what you read or what you listen to because it's infinite. I do the same thing with Ashley. She's like, "Oh, we should start this new series." And I'm like, "I don't think I got 10 hours to commit to that." She always wants to...

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

I love that analogy about subtraction. That's really good. One of my favorite examples, and I always feel the need to preface what I'm going to share is, I heard this from someone, well of course, you did, idiot. But the idea of Cheesecake Factory and they've got 280 items on the menu. Do you think that they're really good at cooking

any of those shrimp tacos and lasagna and chicken pot pie? No. All of it at the same time.

So, I was fortunate to go to Eleven Madison Park when it was the number one restaurant in the world for a time, and now it's gone vegetarian, which I will never eat there. It's dead to me. But how many items did they have on their menu? One, really. I mean, it was an 11-course, 11-year retrospective meals. I mean, there's 11 items that they did, but there was no choice.

Dustin Burleson:

Yup, one choice.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

You get one choice. So, the point is, is that the best restaurant in the world, a three Michelin starred restaurant that people work for decades before they can even go and chop the little stems off of herbs to work there, they've got that figured out. They have subtracted everything away. And so, I think in life the same should be true.

So, for me, I think my quick answer to that is that, and there's a guy named Bob Goff in the Christian world that talks about this, about every week he tries to say no to something new. I think that's a good concept. It's also a flawed concept because I think there's a lot of things that we should say yes to, and that we should be active in. But for me, my guiding principle over the last few years is that, if something will happen without my unique input and presence, I cannot be a part of it.

And so, that sounds selfish and that sounds like self-congratulatory. Again, I'm sorry, that's not how I approach it. But it's just that I don't need to sit on a board that it will even thrive without me. I might add some unique pointers. I might help forge it into something. But if it would happen, and it's almost like in a video game, if this is happening with little NPCs over on the side, and I don't need to lean into that, let it happen.

And so, I think a lot of us as high achievers and the people that have always said yes to everything and tried to do everything, it's hard for us to turn that off. And so, I think a lot of us need to enter into a season, and COVID was this, is enter into a season of just eliminating stuff. I think what's difficult to watch is now three years post COVID, everyone has just added all that crap back on.

Dustin Burleson:

All back.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

They got all the patches on their jackets, all the flare. My kids play soccer 17 games a week. And I don't think that's healthy because again, what legacy is that creating for you or for your family? And if you're not available for those closest to you with the relationships, that will matter the most long-term in life, what good is that?

So, if you're slaving away your orthodontic practice to the degree that you're no longer available for those around you or for those that aren't even your family, but that you could be leaning into in relationship and investing in, it's a problem. And so, anyway.

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And so, I think a lot of us as high achievers and the people that have always said yes to everything and tried to do everything, it's hard for us to turn that off. And so, I think a lot of us need to enter into a season... of just eliminating stuff.

Dustin Burleson:

How's that been with your kids curating? We have the same challenge like, I grew up in a family where we almost never slept. It was competitive tennis, competitive soccer...

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

There you go.

Dustin Burleson:

... competitive, everything. And so, we were always on the road and it was a badge of honor. My mom's like, "I put 30,000 miles on the minivan this summer." I'm like, "Oh, my God, this sounds awful." And we were in that minivan going to Indianapolis and going to Dallas and going... I mean, it's crazy. And now, with our kids, it's been a 180. I'm curious what you do with your kids and how you curate, how much they get involved with?

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

So, my wife is a doer and a goer and a never stopper. And so, to the degree that I have tried to lean into more and more delegation and saying no to stuff, obviously, I'm guilty of not being the best at that. But she really struggles with that. And so, you have two of us that are just hyper-competitive like, doers and we're involved in everything.

And I think also, we're good at doing a lot of stuff. And so, we get asked to do a lot of stuff. So, our kids are active in all kinds of stuff, music lessons and sports. And if I'm guilty of anything as a parent, it's that again, I told you I'm not sentimental. And so, I don't have this deep need to be at all the games and the graduations and the programs, but I know it's so important for my kids.

And so, I wish I innately was like, "Yeah, I want to be there, and I want to be coaching your team." It's just, it's not. For me, I'd be more filled by being in my room alone, planning out the next children's book or something. So, that's a challenge. And I think my kids get it. I think they understand me. But that is hard is to try to, in some ways, rewire or reconfigure the way that I'm built to better support my family because I don't want them 10 years from now saying, "Yeah, my dad, he's just always off in his room working on some stupid children's book, whatever." So, for my kids, I mean, we do try to limit it to one key sport at a season or at a time. So, you got a spring sport, you got a fall sport. At the same time, I know how good it was for me to be active in a bunch of stuff, and I had parents that were literally so supportive of everything. We could do whatever we wanted. They never questioned it, they never complained. They're always there. And so, I

grew up with that. And here I am is like, "I'm too busy. I'm too tired. I can't go to church tonight." So, I'm like, "Dang it, is that really what I should be like?"

And so, we're trying to treat them, teach them, I should say those boundaries. But I also want them to be active and stuff. I don't know. Terrible answer, Dustin. I'm sorry.

Dustin Burleson:

No, it's a great answer. I think it's hard because there's so... I mean, the world is so much bigger and narrower at the same time because of technology. There's sports that I didn't even know existed until I went to college. I'm like, "Oh, you guys had a lacrosse team?" I didn't know what lacrosse was until college.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

I always use that as an example. My son plays it now. There were these kids from Michigan and they had these lacrosse sticks. I had to ask, what is that thing? And they started the club team at Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas. Yeah, same exact thing. Now, everyone plays lacrosse. What tag is this?

Dustin Burleson:

Yeah, so it's, they have so many more opportunities available to them. I do want to talk about your children's book. You won an innovation award at the AAO. It's beautiful. What was that like? Tell us about the process and anyone who hasn't seen it yet, let's talk about it.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Yeah, yeah. So, I mean, it was a fun process. So, Neon Canvas, we acquired a 35-year-old advertising agency

from Memphis called Signature advertising. And they did have and do have clients like FedEx and TruGreen, and a lot of legacy type clients, which is a whole another story because those are really hard clients to keep happy. You think worth clients is hard.

But anyway, but they're great clients. But anyway, in that, we had this really incredible creative guy named Charles Marshall, and he's easily the most creative and gifted writer. I mean, there are some people like, "I think I'm pretty good at writing. I think I'm pretty good at coming up with ideas." And then, you have the chance of interacting with someone like that and it's like, "Yeah, I'll come up with some poems, I'll get them over to you tomorrow." And the next day, literally, 25 perfectly written rhyming poems that are funny and pithy and pun, and all that. And I'm like, "Oh, my gosh."

You think ChatGPT is impressive. This guy is incredible. I mean, just a truly gifted, uniquely gifted individual, okay. And so, he came to me this idea like, "Hey, we did for this hotel chain, these books, and I feel like there could be something for orthodontics." And so, I was like, "Okay." And he is like, "And I got this cartoonist Greg," and when look up Greg, Greg Cravens, and he's done all these cartoon things. He is at cartoon conventions and so on. And so, I was like, "Okay, well let's do a book about braces. Braces are funny." And so, we ended up, spent about a year, came up with 14 different stories with this really cool art style, which I am, another one of my hobbies is I love, and I don't have any tattoos, but I love tattoo art. I love fine art. I did a summer study abroad in Italy, and it was an art trip. And so, I got really into that.

And so, I curate the art in my house, and I'm really into that. I'm into photography. I mean, again, I'm a total geek. I was into comics as a kid. I think you were too. So, all this stuff converges. I used to actually draw my own comic books and video game ideas as a kid.

Dustin Burleson:

Cool.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

So, I am not an expert like Greg and Charles, but I get it. And actually, Charles, he worked on the Mortal Kombat Comic back in the day. He worked with the creators of that game. So, I mean, he's done everything. And so, we're like, "Well, let's come up with a book." And so, I had all these ideas and we would get together once a month and collaborate. And it turned out it's awesome.

And so, how do we make it a business idea? Offices can customize it to their practice, get a caricature, and it looks like they've authored the book, which I think you've done similar stuff with book. And you said this, I think...

Dustin Burleson:

Ours are pretty boring though. Yours is really cool.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

But the thing about a book, and this is I think the point that you made is, is that, people don't get handed a book with your name on it. It is the coolest business card imaginable. Another thing about a book is it's like a promotional item that people never throw away. So, they

probably don't read it. Let's be honest. Now, children's book a little easier to get through, right? But...

Dustin Burleson:

Yes, exactly.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

... they don't throw it away. And so, it is this really cool, unique thing. Now, what's been interesting is I thought, "Oh, we're going to sell 100 copies of this." I mean, we sold a good number, but not as many. And the number one reason is people just like, "Don't get it." They're like, "Can I get five copies?" It's like, that's not how a book works. And you're like, "What am I going to do with all of them?" It's like, "Give them to people." So, this feels like an advertorial. I don't mean it as such. But...

Dustin Burleson:

No, I want it. It's so beautiful. It's so cool.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

This is what the book looks like. And there's all sorts of cool, it's all like, custom. There's me as a drummer. This is based on a photo of me as a kid.

Dustin Burleson:

Ahh, it's so well done.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

But this is, real quickly, this is one of the doctors who got it with his caricature. And so, the book on the front changes, they can change the color and so on. And then, we have a new book that's on a liners. So, we got...

Dustin Burleson:

Oh, cool. I haven't seen this one. Yeah, that's cool.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

It's hot off the presses, even smells good.

Dustin Burleson:

That's like a raised, I'm going to geek out. I love paper.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Dustin Burleson:

Yeah, that's an embossed. And then, that's a clear ink or something, or...

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Yeah, they've done some sort of, it's an applique that's raised off. And this is the paperback. But the hard back, which I should have. But it's actually got little silvery braces. So...

Dustin Burleson:

When I saw it, this is genius. I'm curious, what was that like from start to finish? How long like, was it a year, two years?

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

We spent about 11 months on it. And so, it's a huge, just big hairy task. And I love optimizing and pushing for that last little 1% of juice at the end. That's fun part to me. And so, I'm an improver, that's my number one skillset item.

So, I think honestly, they're incredible. And so, I invite people to look into it, at least. It's neoncanvas.com/book. And I would also say, we're going to do a podcast because yeah, you don't want to do this. It's fine. You want to do your own thing. That's cool. I would love to help work people through like, what does that process look like? Because I think it's an awesome thing to be able to share with patients and parents and any parent that's in publishing or in art or that's a librarian. It's a great conversation to have.

We leave them out in our consult rooms and kids are always reading them as I come in. And I just think it's cool. I think the further we get away from being creators, and we're just consumers, I think to be a creator and to make something new in this world. And I don't mean a little cottage that you've built, Minecraft like, something actual. It's just fewer and further between, right?

Dustin Burleson:

Yeah, it's awesome. I will definitely post a link below this video. Are they handing those out to pediatric dentists and pediatricians?

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Yeah, I think, and we're actually working on retooling to get it for pediatricians because I think their waiting rooms make a lot of sense, and they can give the books to OB-GYNs, and so on.

And again, this is not building me a house or buying me a boat. This is a labor of love, just to be honest, because we're not even charging a huge profit margin for it. But I

just want people to have it because I think it's cool. I don't know. I mean, there's some things that I just do because this is fun for me, and it's fun for my patients.

Dustin Burleson:

How it elevates the specialist, right?

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Yeah.

Dustin Burleson:

When you're thinking about competing with direct-to-consumer aligners or just indifference, and it's just very well done. It's so smart, so cool. So, I didn't know that was an agency there at Memphis.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Yeah, because I mean, they're part of Neon Canvas now. But they still have a lot of those clients and they do their thing. And it's more of, in a traditional sense, projects-based marketing where we're more retainer-based marketing. And Neon Canvas is probably 90% orthodontists, and we have some other verticals. But signatures all over the place. And again, everything from like a FedEx to a small lawn care service, but it's mostly Memphis based.

Dustin Burleson:

Yeah, cool. Can we talk about Neon Canvas? What's new there? And then, I mean, everyone wants to talk about AI, basically, everything like, "Just bolt AI into it." And I'm curious your thoughts on how you're using it or where you see it going? But let's talk about Neon Canvas.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Okay. So, yeah, Neon Canvas as of April, it's 7 years old. We are now effectively in all 50 states and in Canada. Again, mostly orthodontist, which is just unreal. I did not expect that at all. We started with five clients.

Dustin Burleson:

Wow.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

My partner, Alex and I, and he was a digital marketer, had been doing that for maybe a decade or so, and a friend. And we had worked together in a local agency and decided to start this thing. And it felt like orthodontics needed it. And I think that was true. We are not a perfect company. I say this about myself, this is my number one preface. We're not perfect. Of course, we aren't. But digital marketing is hard, much harder than orthodontics. Making someone happy in orthodontics, while there are exceptions, pretty easy. The bar is pretty low. We can make it as high and as lofty and difficult as we want, and oftentimes, we do. But at the end of the day, it's pretty good. And it's mostly interpersonal more than it is based on ABO standards, right?

Dustin Burleson:

Yup.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

But anyway, digital marketing is hard. At the same time, it's also easy because it is the only marketing that is truly measurable. You do a shotgun approach, direct mailer,

whatever, billboard. Those are great ways to market. Good luck measuring it. And so, I feel good about having digital marketing agency that supports orthodontists. For all the reasons you might assume, I think it does help elevate the specialist. I think it helps bring business into people that should be doing orthodontics. But I also feel good about it because I know that I'm providing value at all times. Even if we're imperfect, even if we missed something or oh, man, we had the wrong address on the website, because stuff like that inevitably happens in that line of work. I still sleep well at night.

And so, I could only own and run something where I feel like the value is there and then some. And so, we're always innovating. We're up to 50 team members now. And with that, comes all the institutional knowledge that has developed over the years, but also just comes more and more talent, more and more collaboration. And so, we're doing the best work we've ever done.

I think the challenges for us is just continuing to make it unique to each practice. That's hard with digital marketing. But our systems get better, we're quicker at things, we're more efficient at things. We've added things in systems. And so, there's like, 13 systems for my practice that every Neon Canvas client gets now.

And so, we're always trying to add new little pieces like that year-over-year that add value. We're working on something I won't say, but a new system for following up on leads that I think is going to be great. So, this is a sandbox for me in some ways, which we have a creative

team that doesn't need me, but you're not going to get rid of me. I'm going to be there.

So, it's fun to come in and say, "What can I do? What can I add to this that helps as an orthodontist?" But also, as someone that really cares deeply about making things as good as they can be. And so, for me, Neon Canvas has been that. It's this really, really fun thing. And we had a grand opening. We built out a whole another half of the 21st floor of the Clark Tower in Memphis.

And it's gorgeous. And getting to be around these people. Some of whom I've never met in person, because I'm working virtually always. But I don't need to go up to office. I don't have to keep office hours. And it's just cool to be able to, as an entrepreneur, as a business person, be able to create livelihoods for people. And also, to engage with people that you wouldn't otherwise get to. Because marketers, creatives, totally different than the kind of people that work in an orthodontic practice. And God bless them both.

But I would invite anyone out there that is entrepreneurial in spirit to give that a roll sometime. Worst case thing is, you shutter it, it didn't work out. You had some fun, you learned some lessons. But fortunately, this has really worked out great for us.

Dustin Burleson:

Yeah. Wow. From five clients to 50 employees in seven years is, that's another rocket stick or hockey stick growth. We're going to call it rocket.



But I would invite anyone out there that is entrepreneurial in spirit to give that a roll sometime. Worst case thing is, you shutter it, it didn't work out. You had some fun, you learned some lessons. But fortunately, this has really worked out great for us.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Rocket stick.

Dustin Burleson:

Rocket stick.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

I think that may carry a negative connotation. Do not Google rocket stick.

Dustin Burleson:

Yeah, maybe, who knows?! Let's edit this part out! 🤔 The growth of that, it's seven years, is what's that been like?

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

I mean, I don't know that I was prepared for taking on a second job. And so, that a part of my rock bottom was trying to be all things to all people, constantly working. I also, one thing I struggle with, and this is part of my personality, is when people are unhappy or they're

frustrated with me, I have to fix it. I have to know what's going on. Why are you mad? What can I do?

And so, patients will do that. They'll give you a one-star review, two-star review. I lose sleep over that. I've tried to get better about that. I shouldn't let... It should not take that much out of me as it does. And I think this is getting the reps in, and the first time is the worst time. And then, after a few times you're like, "Well, this is not so bad. That is not my identity. I don't have to have a five-star perfect review score on Google." That thing.

And it's the same thing with orthodontists who they're frustrated because X, Y, and Z happened as we're marketing for them. I take that so personally. And so, when there's a post on a Facebook group and they're like, "Who should I use for digital marketing?" I'm like, "Oh, my gosh, I've got to watch this 100 times as people put posts on there and stuff."

So, I have had to learn to have a little bit thicker skin. And this is just a life lesson, especially as an entrepreneur, as a business person, you will not make everyone happy. Some of my hardest experiences as a business person has been dealing with X employees who are not so kind and are not happy. And I think you have to accept in that position that yes, I could have done better in some ways. I could have been kinder, I could have done my job better, and so on and so forth.

And, of course, the same is true of them. And I think the reality is ultimately is that everyone wants to be the hero of their own story. And so, for that to be possible as the

boss, you have to become the villain in that story. And I hate being the villain. I don't want to be the villain. I think I'm a good person. We all want to think that we're good people. And I also recognize that I'm flawed.

And so, to me, that's been the hardest thing is just all the additional bandwidth that's required to run these things, to know 50 names, to the degree that I ever know all 50 of them, right? Sometime, I have to check my notes. And so, to say yes to something like that, you have to understand what you're saying yes to.

Dustin Burleson:

I'll never forget, years ago we had, you've probably heard this story. But I was, for some reason, there were two periods of time when I was completely out of the business for two years just doing coaching, consulting, flying around. Ashley's like, "Someone give this man a stage and a microphone. He has things to say." Most of that was ego. And, but, it was one of those two-year periods where I'd come up to the office and I'm trying to get into my office. There was one in Raymore, which I went and checked my mail. I was like, 3 years old. I was like, "God, I haven't checked. I haven't been in this building for two years." And so, I'm fumbling with the key, and I'm like, I clearly look like this person trying to break into this building. And this is early in the morning. And this employee who I'd never met comes over and she's in her scrubs and she's like, "Can I help you?" And I was like, "I'm just, my key is not working." She's like, "Well, who are you?" I said, "I'm the guy whose got the name on the building. She's like, "Oh, my God, Dr. Burleson's." She's like, "I just never met you."



So, I have had to learn to have a little bit thicker skin. And this is just a life lesson, especially as an entrepreneur, as a business person, you will not make everyone happy.

So, that is hard. For me, Seth Godin said it, so I'm going to give credit where credit is due. He said, "You have to realize you're not everyone's cup of tea." And that was me and the trying to be everything to everyone and growing this thing we're like, "Everyone's got to be on board with the vision. Everyone's got to be growing in the same direction." That's just so insane to think that that's going to happen. He said, "It's okay if you're not their cup of tea. That's okay. You don't have to be everyone's cup of tea." And I'm still working on that, but I've been that person who has like, "Oh, well this new employee doesn't like our system for how we do referrals. She thinks it's too aggressive. I've got to flip her mindset to make her a believer in what we do." And then, at some point, I'm like, "No, that's just the bigger you get. Not everyone is going to think that you're their cup of tea."

So, I'm curious, I learned this from a family friend who's a VP at Amazon. And I learned a lot of our best stuff in management from, at that time was named Johnna Fogal. She's now Johnna Thomas. She's a dentist in Leawood,

and a wife of a good friend of ours who's a periodontist. She was a regional trainer for Houston's restaurant group, and she taught us how they train people and how they check out at the end of the night. And I was like, "Oh, we've got to take that idea and use it."

So, we learned this from Amazon. And I'm curious in your digital agency, and also in your practice at Amazon, I don't know if it's still true, but this is what the VP told us around the pandemic hiring frenzy. They said, "You can come work at Amazon, and you can get incremental pay raises for two years. And then, if you haven't taken on a new level of responsibility, gone from floor level assistant to assistant manager to assistant to the regional manager like Dwight Schrute. If you haven't taken on more responsibility at the end of two years, you just get to stay at that same rate. We're not going to bump it." And I was like, "That's really interesting."

So, we started building out these hiring roadmaps. And I'm curious, what do you think about that? In your digital agency, are there more paths to climb a ladder faster there? And what do we do in orthodontics? Because at a certain point, like Johnna at one point said, "I'm going to go to dental school because I can do this better than you." She just didn't want to be our manager anymore. And she is. She's doing it better than us. So, where do you see that in digital agency growth versus orthodontics? And is that something you believe in or think is crazy? I'm curious your thoughts.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Yeah, so I mean, I'm in the unique spot of being, let's say responsible. I'm not the CEO of Neon Canvas, to be fair. That's Alex. I'm the President of Neon Media, which just means, let this guy do whatever he wants to do. But I have some saying all that. I'm in meetings all the time. I'm trying to be a part of all that.

But I do thankfully, get to delegate all the HR, all the hiring, firing, all that stuff. But there's lots of room. I mean, in digital marketing, especially in a rapidly growing company, there's all kinds of room for growth, and there's people jumping around all the time. You'll hire in someone who has executive level talent, and put them into a position.

And so, the chess game there moves like speed chess, it's fast. And so, I think that's fun and a lot of people need that. And, of course, if you have people that come in, they're great for a while, and then their expiration date hits and they're gone. I think that would be like, there's some guiding principles with teams and I think that every relationship on some level has an expiration date, and some people thrive for a while, and then no longer.

And I think in those situations you either need to move them around within the organization or you need to free them up for more gainful employment. In the orthodontic world, we're a little bit more limited to be frank. And if we aren't growing rapidly or even at a regular 4% to 5%, or 6% growth year-over-year, it's going to be hard to create new opportunities for people.

And so, yeah, you increase pay and you try to create new job responsibilities. You try not to connect pay to years of service. But inevitably, that happens. And I do believe in being generous and to the degree that I can and feel like it's a good business principle. But for us, what we have done is when we'd start from scratch. We had no playbook whatsoever, no turnkey systems.

For us to create, we recently did a core team. We're working with Dino Watt, and he gave us some ideas about that. But to take some people that have leadership abilities that are in different portions of your practice. So, our marketing coordinator or clinical coordinator or admin coordinator, combining them and being able to delegate more things to, it's like this triumphant of sorts that help run portions of our practice. I think that's great. And so, I think that there are always levels of leadership. And so, if you want to have your organizational chart, which how many orthodontists have that? Six probably. There should be levels to it. It should not just be this flat structure. And, of course, it is flat in the sense that culturally, we should have all the same concepts. We should all treat everyone the same, and so on. But there have to be levels such that you as the owner operator are not doing everything. One of your lines, I always remember is you need to work on the practice as much as you're working in the practice.

And so, I do think that there's a healthy level of stepping outside of the practice to work on it instead of just being buried underneath it. And so, I think a lot of that begins and ends with understanding that there are people on your team that you can delegate to not just because you



Delegation is important for yourself. Yes, you're doing too much, but you might even be able to give it to someone who does it better or, and/or that cares about it more than you do.

don't want to do stuff or because you want to put it on them, but because they want it put on them. They want to be empowered. They want it to be autonomous. And it will turn out that they'll not only do it as well as you do, but they can do it even better than you do most of the time.

And so, I think that is the healthiest concept that I've gotten from wherever I got it is that delegation is important for yourself. Yes, you're doing too much, but you might even be able to give it to someone who does it better or, and/or that cares about it more than you do. And I've found that so many times. And so, that is the lesson we're having to learn.

And having a company like Neon Canvas where I'm really the fun uncle that comes in occasionally, I've been able to see how things can thrive and operate without my unique input. And so, it's easy for me to say no to certain things in orthodontic practice because of what I've seen at Neon Canvas.

Dustin Burleson:

I think that's where it really gets fun at about 50 plus employees. We start to see like, "Oh, my gosh, there's entire initiatives happening that I didn't come up with, that I didn't green light that are just doing their own thing, which is really wild.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

I love it.

Dustin Burleson:

You're really neat, because you mentioned in this growth mindset. I'm going to float this idea past you because I floated it past Wendy Smith. Wendy wrote a great book called Both/And Thinking. I'm sure, there's...

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Oh, great.

Dustin Burleson:

... like, margin notes. I just interviewed her the other day. And Wendy's an endowed professor at University of Delaware. She got her PhD at Harvard Business School, and co-author Marianne Lewis, is the Dean of the Business School University of Cincinnati. So, they're really, really smart. And this is their 20 years of research, that's the most cited research in their field on paradox and organizational theory.

And I asked her, I said, "At that time of this recording, LeBron James has been eliminated in the Western Conference Semi-Finals. And LeBron is 38 years old, and

he's like the 'old man' of NBA." And I thought, "What other industry from law to executive CEO level, to orthodontics? What other profession would 38-year-olds be like the old person?" It's wild to think about it, and I get it's a physical sport and your body can handle so much.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Sure.

Dustin Burleson:

But I floated this idea past her, I said, "What if we made a rule that only 40 and unders could be running the AAO, for example?" Of course, now I'm going to get hate mail from all the people that sit on the board of the AAO. "Or what if, in our business we had the people that were the least experienced have a bigger voice in our meetings." I'm just curious what you think about without getting into, I don't want to get into ageism, and, of course, hate mail. But think about in orthodontics like, from student debt to should I start my own practice or should I join a large group? There's all of this stress and consequential decision making that happens at a young age, and they have almost no representation. I think about like, and no offense to the people that sit at the top of the AAO or the ADA or any other American board, insert your thing. But when you're 65, and you've made all your money, and you want to now give back to the profession like, how far disconnected? Are we the stagecoach operators trying to tell the people making automobiles what to do and what are your thoughts on this long rambling question...

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Oh, man, I love this question.

Dustin Burleson:

... or ortho, what do you think about this concept of, maybe we need to broaden the table for who has a voice and what's going on around here?

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Yes, I really love this question.

Dustin Burleson:

How old are the two men running for president?

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

No offense, yeah. So, a couple of things, this is a very great question with a lot of depth, and I'm going to talk forever. So, you just...

Dustin Burleson:

I just turn off this camera when it's done.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Okay. So, over the last decade and a half, we have continually coddled our youth. Youth, because of that, but also because of decisions they've made, also because of smartphones and social media and so on. And the increase in fantasy world, and the detachment from real relationship have started to delay adulthood. Some of that's financial debt, the academia, industrial complex. I mean, there's a lot of things that add into all this. But the reality is that people are no longer getting married until maybe their 30s. So, people are not growing up. So, certainly, they're not going to want to be a leader. They're not want to give of themselves. I do think that this is a

cultural pendulum swing that is at its worst perhaps now. And I think it will swing back the other direction as things often do.

But yes, for a long time, I have been a huge believer in the church. But also, organizationally, about letting young people lead and needing that. But who I think is guilty, not necessarily the boomers, I think it's actually our generations. And so, the millennials and below for whether we're being carried along by the wind of culture or we're just choosing not to suck it up and be an adult. It's very damaging. I think, not only to organizations that would benefit from a youthful perspective, but it's also damaging to those people themselves because I think that being thrust into a leadership position at a younger age is really instrumental in making you a better person, and a more efficient person.

I will say of Neon Canvas, we have a very young team. Even Saddle Creek Orthodontics, probably on average for the size of our team. We've got about 20 employees. I would say that we're as young as just about anyone because we were a cold start. We were young. I'm 39 still. So, when you're 29, who are you hiring? A lot of 20-year-olds.

And so, I don't think age on either side is an indication of knowledge. It is an indication of perspective, let's say, and on some level, wisdom. But in terms of innovation, you could probably say that someone that's younger is probably more apt to be change averse or sorry to be open to change rather than change averse.



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So, to me, that's a very long way to say that all organizations would benefit from the perspective of young members. And to the AAOs credit, they have tried to create systems by which they can get younger and diverse people in higher leadership positions to counteract this reality that for a portion of time, for whatever reason, whatever cause you want to say, it's a lot of older white males running this thing. And that's not ideal when the membership doesn't represent that.

Dustin Burleson:

It's such a great point. I love that. I want to highlight it because you mean, you said it and I want to make sure I got it right, that we need to be better followers, right? I mean, we often think. We need these great leaders or we need to change the leadership, but if we become better followers as younger members of an association, that we can actually do it together.

Gordon MacKenzie and his book, he's got a great book called *Orbiting the Giant Hairball*. And I think, I feel like it

had a great influence on Ozan Varol's latest book, *Awaken Your Genius*. And Gordon was an artist at Hallmark. And he basically, wrote this book for new artists here in Kansas City. And in their heyday in the 80s and 90s, Hallmark was a huge thing.

Currently, they're successful for what we all know and love as their holiday movie channel, but that's in Hollywood, not in Kansas City. So, you might imagine printing sayings on dead trees and mailing them is not an entirely popular thing.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

My family spent a lot of time in the Hallmark store at the Indian Mall in Jonesboro, Arkansas. So...

Dustin Burleson:

We thank you. And in Kansas City...

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

My precious moment statues, but go ahead.

Dustin Burleson:

Yes, yeah, I mean, they're literally right over here. I biked past them this morning getting coffee with a friend. So, we love Hallmark. And Gordon wrote this book about being a better follower as opposed to blaming leadership. I mean, this analogy is so great. I literally drew it for our most recent academic department chairman at UMKC before he resigned, I said to him.

And so, the analogy is water-skiing. And so, if the leader of the boat is driving the boat and the follower is attached

back behind on the skis, Gordon says, "There are going to be times where the leader is in the boat and you are holding on and you know he's about to drive through some tall reeds that are going to hurt. You have two options. You can let go and you can then be out there in the lake by yourself, that's called entrepreneurialism. Or you can hang on and a good leader will let you swing around and almost come up parallel with the guy driving the boat." If you've ever water-skied, you can swing all the way around outside the wake, right?

So, the leader's doing this thing like, this is where we're going, we're going to do this initiative. We're going to open a new location or we're going to bring on an associate. And you're just driving the boat, and all these followers are behind you going, "Dude, this is going to hurt, this is me." The ability to let some of those followers first, to have the courage to swing out outside of my wake and come up and actually be parallel with the leader of the boat, but still attached was a really cool concept. And I was explaining this to our department chair, I was like, "You just got to either swing around the wake or realize that the leader sometimes is going to drag you through. The reason is going to fricking sting." And, but I love your answer because I feel like, we need to be better followers and we need to be courageous enough to sometimes swing outside the wake and come up parallel with the guy driving the boat.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Yeah, your answer was better. That's a great answer.

Dustin Burleson:

Well, it's Gordon's answer.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Okay. "Tomayto, tomahto," but still it's a great answer. So, yeah, I think it's all that. I think being willing to listen first, again, that seek to understand before being understood as a leader is extremely important. I've also learned that levels with employees allow for the creation of concepts and systems that initiate with the team. And when an idea and a concept initiates with the team, it very well could be better than the idea I would've had. But either way, at some level there's like, give on this. I don't care exactly how it's done. I just care that it is done. And if they're the ones that came up with the idea, their ownership of it and their action on it will be much greater.

Dustin Burleson:

Do you feel like it goes faster when they've come up with the idea versus you? You're on the top saying, "This is how it's going to be." And as opposed to them saying, "We have this idea."

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Of course.

Dustin Burleson:

What's the difference between those two?

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Oh, yeah, of course. If someone takes ownership in something that is the greatest thing you could hope for as



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a boss or whatever you want to say, as an executive. And I think the same is true with children, so that teaching kids how to be, and you handing them two tablets called the 10 Commandments is not going to get them to be good. It didn't work for the Israelites either.

Dustin Burleson:

It didn't work out.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Not entirely. Just go...

Dustin Burleson:

We already know we got to be bad.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

I mean, just days later. So, with kids and man, I'm not a perfect parent. But you lead by example, sure. But you also try to walk them along and allow them to come up with their idea for how things should be done independently.

Dustin Burleson:

Cool.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

And so, it's more of a mentorship as a parent than I think it is a dictatorship, than never really works out well.

Dustin Burleson:

Doesn't work out well, hardly ever. I told you this would be 30 or 45 minutes.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Oh, it's fine.

Dustin Burleson:

I'm staring at this. We're already over an hour.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

You said that I just laughed. I was like, "No, you don't know me."

Dustin Burleson:

Yeah, we're going to have to bring you back on. I'd love to hear about closing thoughts on what's next for you, and when we can maybe announce whatever you've got cooking at Neon Campus, following up with leads.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Yeah. Oh, sure. Yeah, so we're rolling that. I'll just say, so we've partnered with LeadSigma to build out an app. It's a LeadSigma Scott Hanson, who's in Kansas City guy as well.

He did OrthoChats historically, and he's been doing this for a little while. And...

Dustin Burleson:

Smart guy.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Yeah, he's great. And he's like 31, which is just painful to me as a 39-year-old. I looked younger than Scott, you know.

Dustin Burleson:

You look like you're 20.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Yeah.

Dustin Burleson:

When you said you and Anna have been together for 18. I was going, "Well, they met when they were four then."

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Yes, we met at summer camp, seventh grade. No. So, we're going to be doing that for clients. We want a system. It'd be easy to build some an app that manually follows up or we have a little spreadsheet system that we share with people because you need a system, you need a system for making sure that you follow up quickly. But also, multiple times because people are busy and you need to text them and email them and call them and yada, yada, yada. There's a lot of that detail.

But this is going to be a more automated system and it works great. We've used it in our practice for about a year and a half. And so, we've partnered with them to create something that's affordable for clients, but that's going to have a really dramatic impact on starting more of the people that we spend time and money generating as leads. Okay, so there's that.

Outside of that, man, I'm going to try to survive the summer. It's going to get busy. I got some trips. I'm going to take some photos and put those online. I love doing photography on vacations.

Dustin Burleson:

Cool. Yeah, where do you put your photography on your practice website or Instagram?

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Oh, just on Facebook. Just on my personal Facebook and Instagram or whatever. I mean, I've only recently leaned back into photography as a hobby, so I bought the Sony Alpha camera, and a couple of cool lenses and I love it. It's actually, an introvert's excuse to not have to engage in conversation. And so, I can be on a vacation and I'm working.

Dustin Burleson:

Do you get some cargo shorts and put fake rolls of film in it, so...

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Come on.

Dustin Burleson:

Get the reel, the socks pulled up to the knees.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

I could do that. Now, I'm going to be on Amazon looking for best photographer's cargo shorts. So, we'll go on some vacations as a family. The fall is when it gets really busy, again, for me from lecturing, having a company standpoint. So, I'm speaking at Orthopreneurs, which is in Orlando in September. And then, I am speaking at Mother of Pearls conference in San Diego, other side, in October. And I'll be playing with relapse both times. Neon Canvas will be at both meetings. It's a lot of fun.

I've been in the podcast. And man, there's always something. Again, I feel very, very, very fortunate. I'm very grateful to orthodontics as a profession that I can tell you, I would've never gotten to do any of this stuff without that. And sure, I would've been happy and I would've done other things, and I get to play drums at my church. There's just so many cool things that I get to do and I really am grateful for it to the degree that I complain about life, because that's just how I'm wired and I'm a cynic and all that.

I am really grateful and thankful, and glad to be on a podcast as a guest. I just get to talk. I don't have to think about what you're having to think about like, "Man, we're going over 20 minutes." I just don't care.

Dustin Burleson:

Yup, that's great. We laugh before we turn the recording on it, so if you're expecting production value like the digital ortho...

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

That's great.

Dustin Burleson:

We've got one camera. We don't have two cameras. We've got no studio sound. We've got a decent mic. And that's it. We're low budget. But I have the same microphone. We got the same micro. Yeah, I mean, it's the only one to get. We've done our research. I want to say thank you on behalf of orthodontists for what you do, because we're grateful that we get to learn from you and we get to see what's in your brain and coming out creatively. I'm so impressed and it's just an honor to see what you do.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Wow. And thank you again. If I didn't say it enough, there was a moment there in a cold start practice where, I mean, I listened to everything that you put out for a couple years solid, and I met some really incredible people at those meetings. I mean, people that are still close friends of mine, Jim Stork, Grant Collins, which Grant Collins now. We don't even call him Grant. He's the braces guy. He's like Dwayne Johnson is now the Rock. But I met those guys in Kansas City at your meetings. And so, really overstates it, but eternally grateful for that and the knowledge that we gained. And to be able to get some confidence to lecture and to share and be creative. And so, thank you for that.

Dustin Burleson:

Cool. And you're very welcome. It's a fun group to go back and look at some of those photos. Jason Hartman was in that group with you guys, who now with Spark with I think 75 locations.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

He's a killer.

Dustin Burleson:

I mean, I was just along for the ride, and we were showing this slide and Blair Feldman was there, who's now CEO of Retainer Club. And I said, "This is our 10th year." And Blair's like, "Oh, so I was in your first group." I was like, "Yup." He's like, "I didn't know that." He was like, "I thought you'd been doing this for years." So, a little bit of fake it until you make it. I was just there along for the ride and curating. I didn't have a whole lot to offer. But man, what a fun group. So, thank you. This has been the highlight of my year. I really appreciate you coming on.

Dr. Kyle Fagala:

Sure. Thanks, Dustin.

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