

An Interview With Lou Shuman, DMD, CAGS

2016 marks the eighth year of the Cellerant Best of Class Technology Awards (formerly Pride Best of Class Awards). *Inside Dentistry's* Editor-in-Chief, Bob Margeas, DDS, sat down with Cellerant Consulting President/CEO and founder of the Awards, Lou Shuman, DMD, CAGS, to discuss these unique laurels.

BOB MARGEAS, DDS: *Lou, thank you for taking the time to speak with us. I think the first question on everyone's minds is, "Why Cellerant?"*

LOU SHUMAN, DMD, CAGS: So it's important to know that the award is exactly the same; we've just changed our name. I'm honored and privileged to have been the president of the Pride Institute and to have had the Award start there. As most of the audience knows, the Pride Institute is a steeped-in-tradition, 35-plus-year-old practice management company dedicated to the growth and development of the individual practitioner. Once there, I was approached based on the success I'd had at Align Technology and was asked to help develop a growth strategy for a company. Pretty soon that turned into four, eight, 14 companies looking for help with growth and development. At that point I sat down with my partner Amy Morgan and said, "I think it's time to spin this off." She was wonderfully supportive, and I launched Cellerant Consulting, which is dedicated to growing companies at every level. Since I was the founder of the Best of Class Technology Award, it transitioned with me to Cellerant. Again, it's the same process, the same everything, just a different name.

BM: *Can you tell us how the Awards came about?*

LS: Before I became president of Pride Institute, I was vice president of Clinical Education and Strategic Relationships at Align Technology. The first year I was there, I won an award as

a result of the education I created for general practitioners with an orthodontic course. The whole process intrigued me, and I felt there was a need for an award process that focused just on technology as this part of dentistry was growing dramatically. Joining Pride Institute gave me the opportunity to step into areas where I wanted to make a difference. Pride, of course, is not a corporate entity, and that gave me a lot of flexibility to reach out. What I wanted to do was learn more about the award process and create an award process of the highest integrity in dentistry that would bring significant value to the dental community and to manufacturers. So I set out to create what became known as the Pride Institute Best of Class Technology Awards.

BM: *You mentioned an "an award process of the highest integrity." Can you elaborate?*

LS: Absolutely. In order to achieve those goals there had to be certain things put into place that were uniquely different. Chief among them was that I wanted to approach the top technology leaders in dentistry—those who were the most respected—to be my committee that would help in choosing the Award winners. I approached Drs. Paul Feuerstein, John Flucke, Martin Jablow, and Parag Kachalia, and asked them if they would be willing to help me truly make a difference in creating an award process that was unique to dentistry.

Next was to establish a rigorous selection process. First, the process is not for profit. Nobody makes any money in choosing the

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winners. Second, the program is completely unbiased. After a year of research and evaluation, we meet at the Chicago Midwinter Meeting, typically for 4 to 5 hours. The meeting begins with each committee member divulging the companies they are consulting for, and as a result they are not allowed to vote in the category in which those products are represented, so there is no bias.

BM: *Can you talk a bit about the selection process itself?*

LS: It's a very rigorous and demanding process. The committee members are out there all year looking at products and technologies. We're bombarded by companies on a weekly basis who want to make sure we've seen their product. You'll find Paul, John, Marty, and Parag on the show floor at all the meetings, going booth to booth, looking at every technology. We go through every category in dentistry. However, we do not give the awards out by category because I didn't want us to be forced to pick a winner in a category if we didn't think there was a deserving candidate. When we convene at Midwinter to make the decisions, the reputation of the technology committee is on the line, too, so we take it very seriously. For example, the first half hour or so that we meet, 50% to 60% of the products from the year before are typically eliminated, because the product has failed to meet a Best of Class standard, which is differentiated itself again from the rest of the products in its category. The remaining 40% are still considered competitive and given the opportunity to go back into the mix to vie for that year's award.

BM: *What are the criteria that separate the winners from the contenders?*

LS: To be a winner, the technology has to be not just the leader in its field but truly has to differentiate itself from the competition. That can include a product that continues to improve on itself, but we're looking for true differentiation. If we get into a category and there's no product or technology that truly differentiates itself, then there's no winner, and we move on. I have no interest in a top 20 or a top 40 or anything like that. I don't care if there are four winners or 14. The key is that the Award should have nothing to do with how well it is marketed or any other bias, but based on true benefit to the profession. To be an Award winner is a testament to that, and to be a repeat winner is incredibly difficult because of the intensity and importance we place on the selection process each year. In giving the Award we are saying that these are products that every practice should integrate for the benefit of providing the best possible treatment to their patients.

BM: *How do companies use this Award to advance their product line?*

LS: We have seen winners get distribution agreements as a result of winning the award. Some companies have been acquired as a result of winning the award. And then there are my favorites, the companies that no one has heard of, that don't even have a

marketing budget—they deserve the award because of the technology they have, and despite having no budget, here's their opportunity to stand side by side with a Schein, a 3M, a DENTSPLY. These are the winners that I'm also really proud of because we feel like we've helped introduce their benefits to the community.

BM: *How did the partnership with the American Dental Association (ADA) come about?*

LS: Simply put, the ADA thought that what we were doing was of such high integrity that they wanted to participate somehow. So, independent of the Award, we created the ADA Pride Tech Expo (which starting this year will be the ADA Cellerant Technology Expo), which has ultimately become the largest exhibit space at the ADA Annual Meeting. There are mini exhibit booths of each winner, so there's an opportunity for the participants to visit all of the winners in one location; and then there's the hottest ticket in town, our invitation-only VIP reception, which is the actual Awards ceremony. The focus of the Tech Expo is not only on previewing all the winning technologies but on education as well. We have a 270-seat classroom, which has grown over time and hosts multiple courses over 3 days. You get a free CE credit per course. The Technology committee lectures, which puts the top technology leaders in dentistry in one location, which is a tremendous benefit for the participants. Other Key Opinion Leaders are asked to present as well, such as Amy Morgan and Naomi Cooper, who educate about practice management and the social media aspects regarding technology. We sell out all 13 or 14 courses every year, which makes us the largest CE provider at the ADA meeting. We were also honored a couple of years ago when the Tech Expo was influential in helping the ADA win an award for best education on a trade show exhibit hall.

BM: *It's not just organized dentistry that has recognized the value of these Awards. Can you talk about response within the industry?*

LS: Over time, the manufacturers and the major journals in dentistry have recognized the integrity of what we are doing and have been incredible contributors in supporting this initiative. Today, the journals and manufacturing community consider it the most important and most prestigious award in dentistry, in their words "the Academy Award in dentistry." I am proud to say that the Awards are covered by every major dental journal in North America. That level of recognition is a tribute to the integrity and rigorous process, the respect the journal community has of the voting committee, and the acknowledgment they deserve for their commitment and service to the industry. As a result of so many people who have supported me along the way, the Best of Class Technology Awards that began 8 years ago as a vision to try to truly make a difference in dentistry has reached a tipping point that's more than I ever could have imagined. Thank you to all of you who know who you are for having the faith in me and supporting me with your time and expertise throughout this journey.

