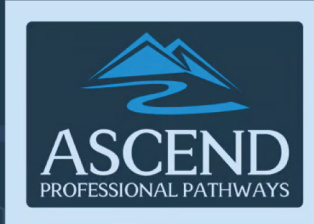


GETTING OUT OF YOUR OWN WAY:

How Executive Coach Thomas Passalacqua Is Helping Dental Professionals Lead with Clarity

By Dr. Glenn Vo, Editor-in-Chief of Dental Lifestyles Magazine



As the founder of the Nifty Thrifty Dentists community, I hear a lot from practice owners who are running on fumes. Not just physically, but mentally. They got into dentistry to take care of patients, and somewhere along the way, they ended up buried under the weight of running a business, managing a team, and trying to make smart decisions while the noise inside their own heads gets louder and louder.

If that sounds familiar, you're not alone. It's one of the most common things I hear from dentists at every stage of their careers. I recently sat down with **Thomas Passalacqua**, founder of Ascend Professional Pathways and a certified executive coach, to talk about exactly that. What he shared was one of the more honest, practical conversations I've had in a while about what it actually means to lead.

A journey built on helping people grow.

Thomas's path to executive coaching isn't a straight line, and that's actually a big part of what makes him so effective. He started his career as an educator, teaching throughout New York City and serving as a founding faculty member at three charter schools. That meant walking into a brand-new building and constructing a school from scratch: designing curriculum, creating programs, and figuring out how

to engage a completely new student body. It was demanding, formative work.

From there, he made a move that surprised even him at the time: dental manufacturing sales at Voco America, covering the New York City territory. He became one of the company's top-performing reps, earning President's Club honors multiple years running. What he discovered along the way was that his teaching background wasn't a liability in sales. It was a superpower. "I came at sales from the perspective of an educator," he told me. "My job was to educate my customers, not sell to them." That shift in approach, he said, changed everything.

After thriving in that role, Thomas moved into DSO business development with a growing group practice in the Northeast, leading sales and marketing for mergers and acquisitions. When he joined, the organization had about 40 locations. When he left, they had 115. He was part of the team that drove that growth, and he got a front-row view of what it takes to scale a multi-million-dollar dental organization. But even with all of that success, something kept pulling him back to his original calling: helping people directly. So he got certified as an executive coach and launched Ascend Professional Pathways.

Thomas Passalacqua

Certified Executive Coach
Ascend Professional Pathways

The doubt that almost held him back.

What makes Thomas's coaching so credible is that he's lived the same struggle he now helps others navigate. Every major transition in his career came with a loud internal voice telling him he wasn't ready. When he thought about leaving teaching, he convinced himself it was the only thing he could ever do. When he was thriving in dental sales and felt the itch to do something more, he told himself he'd run out of runway. When the idea for his own business came along, the self-doubt hit harder than ever.

"I finally hit a breaking point," Thomas said. "I was tired of making excuses for myself. I kept ending up in the same mental space, and I had to ask myself why." That question forced him to get intentional. He built systems and frameworks to work through doubt objectively rather than emotionally, and what followed was proof that most of the limits he'd believed in were ones he'd built himself. "Where I am today is somewhere I genuinely never believed I could be," he said. "I proved myself wrong, more than once."

What he sees in the people he coaches.

When I asked Thomas what patterns come up most often in the dental professionals and business leaders who come to him, he didn't hesitate. The first is overthinking. Getting too deep into hypothetical worst-case scenarios, letting the emotional side of things steer the ship. "You're breathing life into situations that aren't likely to happen," he said. "And it steers you in completely the wrong direction." His antidote to that is learning to lead with an objective mindset rather than an emotional one: looking at facts, identifying what you can actually control, and making strategic decisions from that foundation rather than from fear.

The second pattern is a matter of perspective. Most people, when they size up their situation, focus on what they're missing rather than what they have. Thomas consistently reframes that question for his clients, because the resources and capabilities are almost always already there. They just need to be surfaced.

He's also careful to point out that the goal isn't to steamroll those difficult emotions. "You have to acknowledge what you're feeling," he told me. "You can't just force yourself to correct course." The real work is in not letting those emotions take full control. Hear them out, understand where they're coming from, and then choose to move forward anyway.

The Ascend Clarity Process.

One of the things I found most refreshing about Thomas is that his primary framework is something he discovered rather than invented. As he was looking back at his own evolution and working with a coach himself, he recognized a cycle that had repeated throughout every successful transition he'd made. He named it the Ascend Clarity Process.

It starts with identifying a goal, whether broad and ambitious or narrow and immediate. From there, the work is in naming

what stands in the way: self-limiting beliefs, knowledge gaps, resource constraints, or any number of real hurdles. Then comes the part Thomas emphasizes most: pairing a specific action to each obstacle. Not analyzing the obstacle indefinitely, but doing something about it. "No matter how small the action, it's still action," he said. "It gives you something concrete you can actually control."

After taking action, the process calls for honest reflection: what worked, what didn't, and where to put more energy going forward. Then you repeat the cycle at the next level. Over time, it builds a new habit of achievement. The things that once felt paralyzing start to lose their grip, because you've accumulated real evidence that you can do hard things.

What Thomas wants you to know.

I closed our conversation by asking Thomas what he most

wants dental professionals to walk away believing about themselves. His answer was simple: "There's always something you can do. There's always an action you can take, a decision you can make, a more optimistic view you can choose." And on top of that: "You're more resourceful than you believe you are."

I've said it before, and I'll keep saying it: the skills that make someone a great dentist and the skills that make someone a great practice owner are two very different things. Most of us were never taught the second set. Thomas has built an entire coaching practice around closing that gap, and what he brings to the table is rare: real business experience at every level, a genuine talent for helping people see themselves clearly, and a personal story that makes every bit of it credible. As he puts it, "We all have the resources and capabilities to accomplish our goals. We just need to uncover them and get out of our own way."

If any of what Thomas shared here resonates with you, I'd encourage you to reach out. Visit ascendpropathways.com or connect with him on LinkedIn at [linkedin.com/in/thomaspas-salacqua](https://www.linkedin.com/in/thomaspas-salacqua). And if you're ready to get on his calendar directly, scan the QR code below to book a free consultation call.



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