



Dr. Grant Collins (pictured at top right) is an orthodontist, speaker, author and social media expert. As “The Braces Guy,” he has more than 1 million subscribers on Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Spotify and TikTok, and more than 100 million likes, shares and comments. Collins is best known for his “how-to” and “braces colors” videos on TikTok and Instagram, where he demonstrates orthodontic procedures and relatable moments in the office, and shows different braces color patterns based off popular TV shows, movies and other themes.

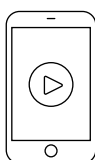
Collins is also the owner and orthodontist of Collins Orthodontics in Rochester, Minnesota, where he maintains his private practice.

Next year, he will launch Collins Seminars, private coaching opportunities for doctors who are serious about growing their business and improving the lives of their teams, patients and community. Information: lynn@rochesterorthodontics.com

What's TikTok

And Can It Grow Your Practice?

If Facebook is the caring mother of social media, YouTube is the accomplished father and Instagram is the perfect kid with the 4.0 GPA, then TikTok is the goofy little brother who never combs his hair and puts his shoes on backward (and we aren't entirely sure if it's on purpose). But despite all of his quirks, little bro is hilarious, fun and incredibly well liked because of one thing—he's relatable.



Still photos don't do them justice: To see Dr. Grant Collins' TikTok and Instagram videos in action, go to orthotown.com/magazine—we've embedded them in the digital version of this article.

That's TikTok: It's real. It's fun. It's quirky. I've been fortunate enough to amass more than 1 million followers, which really wasn't something I expected when I reluctantly agreed to a patient's request for me to start a TikTok account just over six months ago. We've had some success and a ton of fun using this crazy platform to give people a glimpse into my life and the office. However, if your goal is to grow your business via social media, then I do have some advice for you before you dive into this fun new app.

1. Focus on your office culture first

I know, I know—it's not as "fun" as social media, but it is absolutely crucial. Skip this step, and honestly, you'll just be toolin' around on TikTok, gaining followers while ignoring the single most valuable part of your business. If your goal is to grow your company, then you *must* start with your culture first.

I've said it before: You could take away all of my followers on TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Spotify, and it wouldn't matter. Our office is built on foundational principles that go far beyond social media and have helped to grow our company to what it is today. To truly be an elite orthodontic clinic, you must have a clearly defined mission and purpose; core values that guide your team members in decision-making; exceptional hiring and training systems; and a guest experience that feels much more like a trip to a Disney park or The Ritz-Carlton hotel than a standard orthodontic clinic.

Our success in social media starts with putting our office culture first, and I cannot stress this point enough. If you don't have systems, team members and leadership that promote exceptional guest experience and customer service for your patients, then I highly suggest putting your phone aside and spending some serious time in these areas.

[Editor's note: Be sure to read "The 'Culture' Conversation" sidebar on the facing page.]



The 'Culture' Conversation

Dr. Grant Collins may be writing about TikTok in this issue of *Orthotown*, but he also lectures nationally on small business and orthodontic leadership and office culture.

As one of the featured speakers at the 2019 Ormco Forum in San Antonio, Collins discussed leadership and employee empowerment. The full video is embedded in the digital version of this article online at orthotown.com/magazine, and we've excerpted some of the most salient points of his speech below.

1

It's not about you

This can be a hard concept to accept for dentists and orthodontists, who until now have labored under the precept that, "If I work hard enough, things will work out." But success in orthodontics depends more on service to others—which affects and dictates how your practice interacts with patients and the community at large, and how practice owners hire staffers.

2

Exceed guest expectations

- Great customer service is mandatory for your business. The fact that you and your staff are accommodating and friendly is a *minimum requirement*, not a perquisite or a bonus.
- You must exceed *the patient's* expectations, not yours. There are two times patients will talk about you: when you don't meet their expectations, and when you exceed them. (They won't talk about you at all if you're mediocre.)
- Learn from outside orthodontics: Extrapolate excellent customer service examples from other industries and businesses into your practice.
- Allow your staffers the opportunities to create "wow moments" for patients—even if it means they step "off task," as long as it's on purpose.
- Accentuate positive stereotypes of orthodontics, such as the improved confidence that is often a result of an attractive smile. You can't eliminate negative stereotypes, like pain or the appearance of braces, but you can mitigate them.

3

Develop a mission statement and values

- A mission statement is crucial to the way your practice operates. It's not an ad or a job description, or something guests have to read on a wall—they should be able to feel it by the way they're greeted and treated whenever they're in the practice.
- The mission statement can drive your practice's common purpose. Everyone at the practice knows what you do, and usually knows a little bit about *how* it's done, but the *why* is often overlooked when it should be crystal-clear. There's only so much excitement to get out of gluing braces on teeth; there's got to be something bigger that makes you and your team enthusiastic about going to work.
- Values help employees with their decision-making processes and prioritizing tasks and responsibilities.

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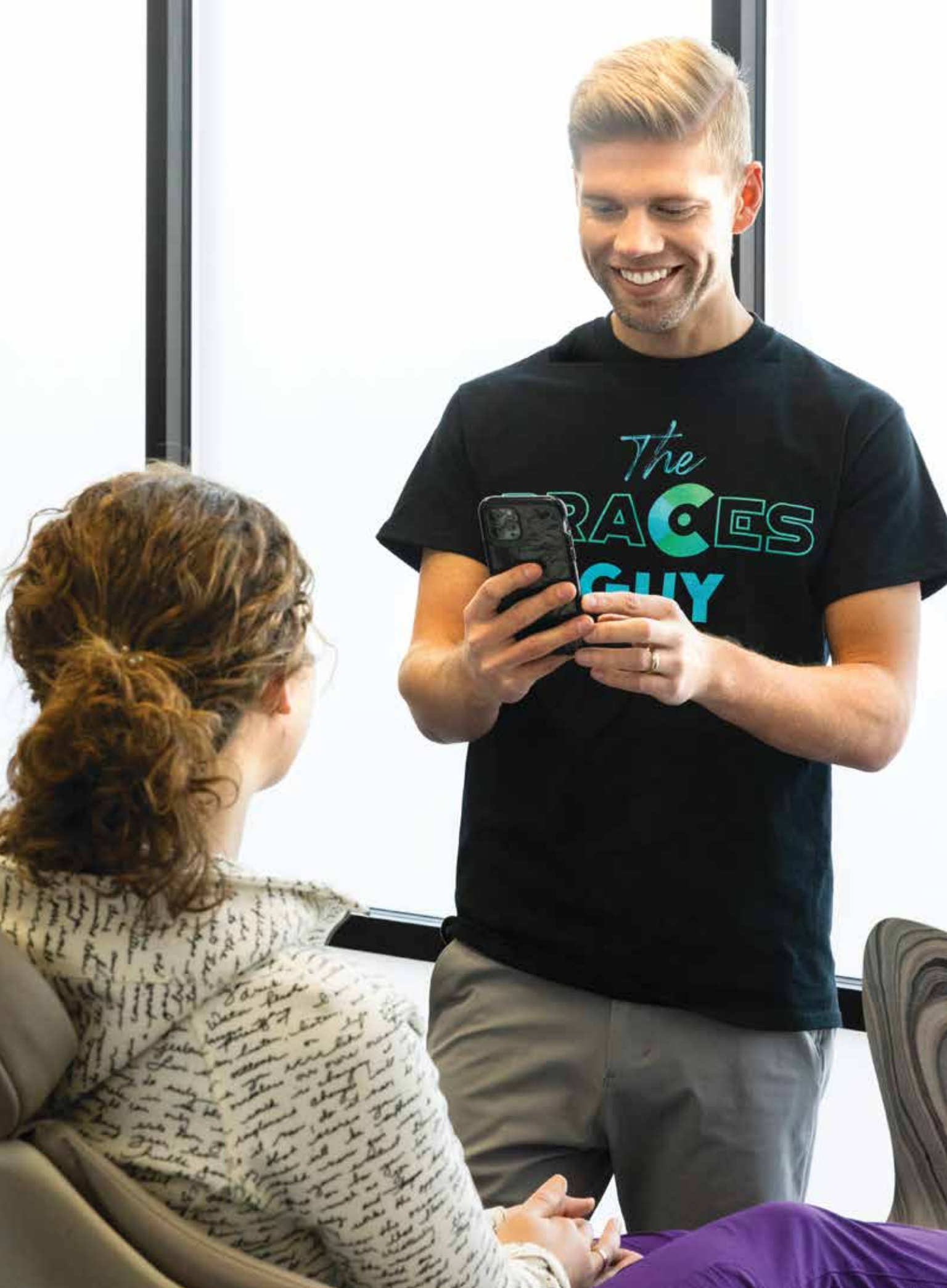
Train and empower your employees

- This is essential for a practice to be great. Many orthodontists have control and empowerment issues, but if someone has to talk to a manager before making something right, you're shooting yourself in the foot.
- Show staffers where the empowerment areas are; find areas in the clinic where they can "make things right" if things go off-course. When they must do this, it's got to be seamless.

5

Discuss immediate service recoveries

- What can you and your staff do when things go wrong—when a patient comes in late, if a parent's upset, if a bracket pops off three times in a day? When a patient is upset, your staff needs to know how to handle it—how to take a negative experience and flip it to a positive one—so you have to talk about it together. Talk through every little thing that could go wrong and empower your employees to address these situations.
- No company out there is perfect. The best ones know what to do when things go wrong.





A common (and popular!) type of video on The Braces Guy's social media is a gallery of different color combinations for brackets and bands, inspired by everything from football teams to beloved television series. Here are their picks for the cast of characters in Friends.



2. Know your platform

Listen, there are some awesome social media platforms out there, and they all specialize in something different. Facebook connects offices with patients and colleagues; photo-centric Instagram allows patients and fans to have a behind-the-scenes personalized look at you and your office; YouTube allows offices to share compelling stories and how-to videos in longer format; and TikTok thrives on short, meme-style videos.

Each platform excels with a different demographic. Facebook tends to attract an older demographic, TikTok draws a younger crowd, and Instagram is widely used by all ages. Personally speaking, TikTok and Instagram are the platforms that seem to best fulfill my need for a creative outlet. That being said, I do not sleep on the other social media platforms, because they all serve very specific purposes for our office and complement one another nicely.

For instance, YouTube allows me to create informational videos for patients, as well as training videos (which we often keep as private and share only with new employees in the onboarding process). Instagram gives me the opportunity to show people a glimpse of my personal life and some behind-the-scenes footage at work. TikTok allows me to fill my need for a creative outlet and connect with some of our younger patients.

Just know your fans in each of your social media platforms, deliver content that resonates well with each group, and always remain authentic when doing so.

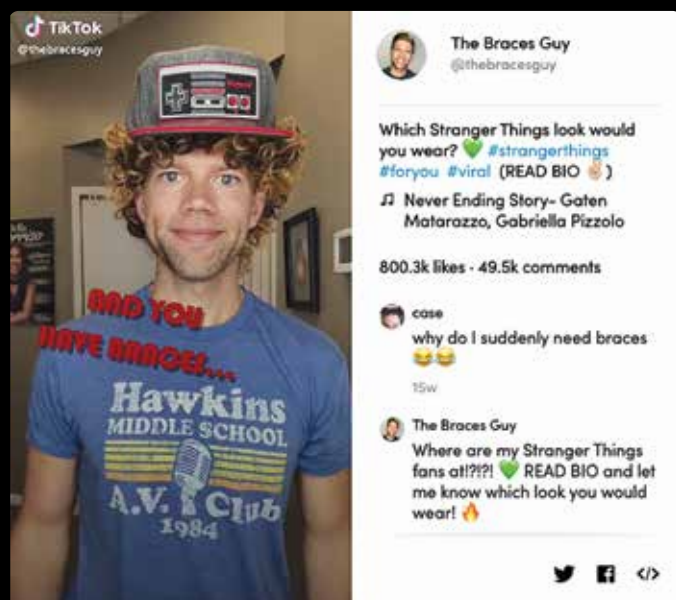
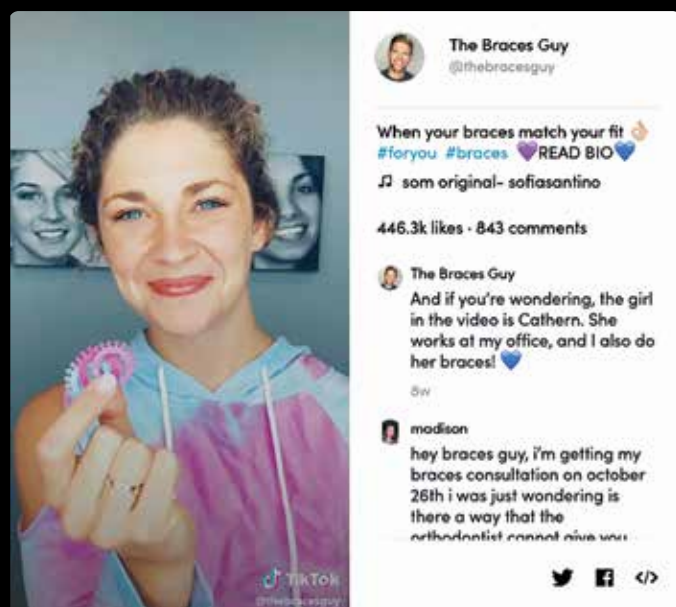
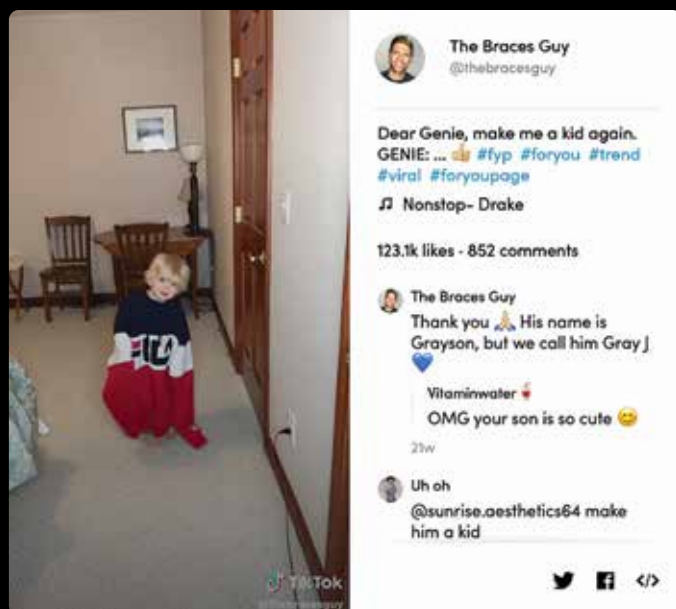
3. Be original and be creative

When you're ready to give TikTok a try, I do have a few tips.

First, start simple. Honestly, it's not the most intuitive app to use, especially for old guys like me.

My first few TikTok videos did OK at best. When my videos finally did begin to get more engagement, the users of TikTok weren't very warm to me; I was "just another orthodontist" on the app, and many TikTokers seemed to be content with not needing another one showing up on their feeds. So I decided to dedicate my efforts to becoming completely different from anything they had ever seen on TikTok, and I finally found success in originality.

Being original does not mean ignoring trends completely, but it does mean taking pride in being as creative and authentic as possible in your content. I recommend getting in the habit of looking outside of the world of TikTok, as well as outside of the world of orthodontics. Some of my best ideas for content have come from simply paying attention to human behavior—at restaurants, at malls, at resorts—and then finding creative ways to incorporate those observations back into the orthodontic world.



4. Find your niche

Do something you love and run with it. If you play guitar, do a short clip riffin' your favorite song. If you like to cook, show something you bake. If you have pets or kids, then make videos about their crazy, relatable antics. And if you want to showcase orthodontic specific things, learn from my journey and be as original as possible. Find a way to let your personality shine in your videos, and that authenticity will have the best chance to be well received by the masses of TikTok.

5. Instagram before TikTok

In my opinion, TikTok is the trendy up-and-coming app, but if you don't have a solid Instagram game, then I would start there. Instagram gives you the opportunity to speak to both the younger generation (i.e., kids in braces), as well as adults (i.e., moms of patients). Although I love connecting with the younger generation, moms are the decision-makers, so if you aren't connecting with them, then you're missing out on huge opportunities to grow your practice. It's rare to have a social media platform that both young and old co-exist simultaneously, so it's a great time to step up your Instagram game right now. It may not be like that forever either, so take advantage while it's here. Here's where I'd break it down:

- **Posts:** Shoot to post about 3–7 times per week, and use high-quality photos that tell a compelling story, show off team members, give glimpses of your personal and/or work life, and show amazing smile transformations from your office. Mix up the type of posts to keep your fans interested and engaged.
- **Story posts:** This underutilized part of Instagram is where a lot of the magic happens, because it allows offices to post in higher volume and still not annoy followers. We use our Story to highlight fun braces color ideas, show off new smiles at the office, promote new Instagram posts, and give people a behind-the-scenes look at my family life. Instagram Stories have been a game-changer for us in turning prospective clients into die-hard fans, and I highly suggest you spend some time learning the ins and outs of this part of Instagram.

The dangers of chasing followers and likes

We live in a world where there is an obsession with followers and likes on our social media channels. We've all been there—proud of certain posts or videos that result in a high volume of likes. And in a culture where social media influencers are becoming a new type of celebrity, the number of followers increasingly becomes a status symbol. Listen, as someone who has a solid number of followers on my social media channels, I can confidently say that for the health of yourself, your practice, and your friends and family ...

Do not chase followers or likes. Literally, if you get anything from this article, read that line again. Sure, it's nice to use metrics to gauge your content quality, but when you become obsessive about these two items, it can be dangerous to your mental health, your relationships and even your practice.

Multiple studies have shown that seeing “likes” and “followers” on your social media can give us short-term hits of dopamine that lead to transient feelings of happiness. This instant gratification feels good in the moment, but can lead to addictive behaviors where we constantly crave more and more of those short-term dopamine hits.

So you get to 1,000 followers and momentarily feel happy. But now you want 2,000. Then 100,000. Then 500,000. Then 1,000,000. Where does it stop? Guess what—it doesn't. (Just ask me how I know.)

Instead of chasing these momentary dopamine hits that lead to more anxiety than long-term fulfillment and happiness, I invite you to shift the way you think about social media and how you're using it. Rather than obsessing over likes and followers, start focusing on opportunities for influence. This comes back to your core values, your



mission and your purpose. Personally, I am grateful for our social media platforms for the opportunity to be a positive role model to youth, spread support and awareness of our program supporting pediatric cancer survivors, advocate for anti-bullying, and many other causes that are directly in line with our company's mission and greater purpose.

When I shift my focus from “look at my likes” to “blessed by the opportunity to influence,” that is when I truly find fulfillment and happiness with social media, and see the biggest positive impact on my business and community.

If I get only one like on a post, but the post changes that kid's life for the better, then that is far more fulfilling to me than thousands of likes without any meaningful positive impact.

So when you're ready to dive into the world of social media, remember to focus on your office culture first, be original and authentic with your content, and use your position of influence to make a positive and meaningful impact on others. It is this fusion of concepts executed together that will lead you to find the most joy and fulfillment on your journey in social media. ■