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**SPECIAL EDITION:
ATHLEISURE > 45**

**DISPENSING
POLARIZED LENSES > 90**

**INSIDE THE FRAME
WITH COSTA'S
HOLLY RUSH > 116**

**AVILA FROM
KAENON**

FOLLOW A LEADER

BY PRESTON FASSEL

In the classic science fiction film “Star Wars,” young Jedi-in-training Luke Skywalker, knowing that he is not yet capable of defeating the evil galactic warlord Darth Vader on his own, takes the advice of his mentor Obi Wan Kenobi to seek out the storied “Yoda.” Yoda, as Luke Skywalker soon discovers, is the last remaining Jedi master, a wise and sagely figure who trains Luke not just physically but intellectually and spiritually for his inevitable confrontation with Vader. When Luke decides to prematurely end his training near the climax of the film, it’s a crisis moment: He has not yet learned all he can from Yoda, and without these valuable lessons, there’s a high chance he will be killed in his next confrontation with Vader.

Though it’s largely a fun blockbuster space opera, there are a few practical life lessons to be learned from the Star Wars saga, and the Yoda scenario is one of them. On his own, Luke is physically capable, honest, true of heart and wants to do the right thing. He is also inexperienced, naive and prone to run into a fight swinging in every direction and screaming at the top of his lungs. He needs Yoda to temper him, to hone his talents and sand off his rough edges. He needs, essentially, a mentor—someone who has come before and who can show him the way.

Even though opticianry in the U.S. today is largely continued on through mentor-

student relationships, as a whole, the industry has suffered in recent years from a general failure to look at those who’ve come before. As online optical and big box retailers have become an ever more present threat to brick-and-mortar operations, many solutions have been offered—withholding PDs, filing lawsuits and refusing to do business with entities who support online or big box optical are all solutions readily offered in the optical realm. One idea that’s rarely offered though, is looking to those who have come before—those who have demonstrated their ability to succeed in the face of adversity, stay the course, survive the radical changes of the industry and fickle public opinion to demonstrate themselves as true masters of the optical world.

One such master is Jon Jacobs, OD, of Vision Source of East Broward in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. After graduating with honors from Emory University, Pennsylvania College of Optometry, Jacobs went to work as an optometrist in Florida in 1970 and opened his own practice in 1972. Since then, his list of accomplishments and achievements have grown to read like a list of qualifications for the position of Optical Grand Master: He has been elected to the

offices of president of the Florida Optometric Association and twice president of the Broward County Optometric Association; he has been recognized as the Florida Optometrist of the Year, Florida Optometrist of the Decade and twice as the Broward County Optometrist of the Year; and has served as chairman of the Florida Board of Optometry. In other words, if there is a figure for up-and-coming ODs and opticians to look to as a source of wisdom, information and inspiration, Jacobs would be a good start.

At the forefront of Jacobs’ success is a medically-driven approach to optometry. “Once a patient comes in, they quickly learn the difference in the eye exam and the way services are delivered,” he says. “Technology in the past 10 years just keeps

Continued on page 98



Continued from page 96

moving faster and faster. We have Opto-maps in both offices, we have OCT, so our offices are very much up to date, and our patients can get the best possible care. I think it's critical that when patients come to our offices, they think they're going to the eye doctor. They're not just going to make a retail purchase. So they're getting the health of their eyes checked, and they're getting contact lenses that are medically necessary, or eyeglasses."

Recognizing that for many patients, physical eyeglass frames form the focal point of a visit to the optometrist, Jacobs has ensured that his frameboard is stocked with unique, quality frames that draw patients' eyes while not wreaking havoc on their checkbooks.

"We have one frame buyer, and that's my wife, Lydia. She has very good taste... we try to have frames that meet the price point at all levels, whether that be luxury or something more basic that some people need because we want them to decide what they can afford. WestGroupe comes to mind, because when we met them at a national meeting of Vision Source, we noticed right away the owners were in the booth. We weren't just talking to reps, we were talking to the actual owners. And they had a very wide selection of frames as far as styles, men and women. So we brought in three of those lines—Evatik for men, Fysh and Klik, and we did very well right from the get-go. The frames are consistent in quality, the fashion is good, and the patients like them. We've since added the Superflex line from WestGroupe, which is a really terrific line at a very good price point, so that's very good for the patient who has a vision savings plan and wants to stay close to the plan. And patients aren't coming in and out with repeated adjustments, because the frames are very solidly built."

Far from being an exclusively WestGroupe office, Jacobs tells me, his dispensary also stocks more readily recognizable brands:

"We also use other frame lines. Silhouette, Ray-Ban, Oakley, others... We have Tag Heuer, a high-end men's fashion line that's very popular. The patient knows its quality with the Tag Heuer name. Then there's the people who want all rimless, and we find that Silhouette is a major frame line for us. And we have several different sunglass lines. Smith, and I already mentioned Ray-Ban. But my favorite line is WestGroupe, because they have a very distinguished line

It can be the most beautiful frame in the world but if it doesn't appeal to your patients... You've got to know what appeals to your patients.

for men, the Fysh line has beautiful colors; it's a little different, and a lot of patients like that. The Klik line is more for the patient with a smaller face—a female, and that gives us a nice wide range of what the patient wants. And the Superflexes are a very strong and stylish line."

Of course, a pair of frames are only as good as the lenses going into them, and to ensure that his patients have crystal vision while also looking their best, Jacobs relies on quality lens products, as well. "We are 100 percent Essilor," he says of his practice's commitment to superior vision. "Their progressives are very easily adapted to. We like their anti-reflective treatments—they don't scratch and come off." When I asked him what his go-to progressives and AR coatings are, he told me that the office favors the Physio Enhanced, W3+ and

Avance AR, but he sees the latter as quickly losing relevance. "Blue blocking ARs are the future," he tells me. "We use Previncia and we use Smart Blue Filter. The public has become more and more aware of it. For children it's important because they're using smartphones, the computer; they're exposed to the UV. So I think this is the future. But the public isn't totally aware of it, and I think that will become a major add-on to lenses in higher percentages each year."

Ultimately, Jacobs feels creating the perfect frameboard, designed not just to draw patients but also keep them, comes down to establishing a list of priorities. What does he consider the top of that list? "The quality. The quality of the product. Then consider the price point. Then look at the styling. And if it doesn't move in your office, move on to something else. It can be the most beautiful frame in the world but if it doesn't appeal to your patients... You've got to know what appeals to your patients. What are your demographics? And people want to have choices when they come in. And that's what you're giving them. If the opportunity is there, have the frame in multiple colors, maybe three and multiple sizes." And what's the most important consideration? "The doctor has to get involved at the chair in speaking to the patient about options that are available in the optical. The handoff between the doctor and the optician is a real key factor in the success of the optical."

Although optical has become a rapidly changing beast, Jacobs remains an inspiration to be followed. Through the advent of CR39, poly and Trivex, through Wal-Mart optical and online optical, Jacobs has not only survived, he has also thrived. And while Yoda may have faded into the sunset at the end of the original trilogy, Jacobs has no plans to slow down anytime soon. "I bought a second practice eight years ago, and people said, 'Why are you doing that?' And I said because I enjoy it. I love the people. I enjoy taking care of patients." ■