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wants, and can afford, the latest "cosmetic orthodontic sleep implant sedation makeover" new product of the hour couched in high pressure sales techniques. The "cosmetic only" practice has seen its day. Using sedation, implants, cosmetics, sleep dentistry, etc., as your only outreach has become a self-limiting growth strategy that most of the general population no longer finds attractive.

Is the Monday thru Thursday, 9-5 practice model becoming the dinosaur of the profession? How are you going to compete against highly funded corporate practices or even National Health Care when it finally passes? It's time to pull our heads out of the sand and take a look around. Managed care is not going away. The cost of running a business is not diminishing. With almost 5,000 graduates a year from dental school, senior doctors delaying or never retiring, retired doctors coming back into dentistry, and doctors letting their associates go due to lack of business, it is time to step back and come up with a better model.

What will the future look like in dentistry? One thing's for sure; it's not what you see today in 95% of the dental practices in the country. It won't be located in any metropolitan area with excessive competition and eroding demographics. Allow me to give you just a short list of some of the areas you should be addressing in your practices.

- **Convenience:** *The public wants consumer hours and a convenient location. These include but are not limited to 7 AM to about 9 AM and 3 PM to 5 or 6 PM every day of the week. And yes, this includes Fridays and Saturdays. Ever walk into a mall on a Saturday or Sunday? Are people spending money? Why are they there? The answer is obvious. They are spending money on the weekend because they work all week. Rethink your hours and add consumerism to them. Consider your location in terms of convenience. Whether or not you take their insurance, whether or not you clean teeth on the first appointment, and whether or not you actually listen to the needs of your patients should all be evaluated. One last area to consider is the "threshold test" How many hurdles does a patient have to crawl over to get into your practice?*
- **Keeping prices comparable:** *When was the last time you did a fee survey to see if your fees are in the ballpark for your area? Keeping comparable fees in the 80-90th percentile is paramount to embracing consumerism. People shop and 98% of them want a good product at a fair price. Look at your fees and how you bundle them in case presentations and begin to listen to your public.*
- **Eliminating double standards:** *It's funny how dentists complain about cancellations and no-shows, late patients, and patients who don't pay their bills. I would have to say that most of you are never on time, are always running late, and always have maxed out credit cards and are at least a month behind in paying your lab. Is it any wonder that your patients emulate your behavior? Take a look at the messages that you send out through your own actions and clean them up and consumerize this area of your practice.*

- **The highest standard of cleanliness and sterilization in your offices:** *This includes smells, bugs in the overhead lights, smudges on the carpet, landscaping outside, fresh paint, up-to-date facility, along with the maddening sounds of a high speed handpiece. Invite your families to take a critical look at your offices and consider their comments to be just scratching the surface of things you need to change, and change today.*
- **The overall personal hygiene and appearance of you and your staff:** *Everything is marketing. Your employees are the face of your practice. Much of what you do is being judged by the way you and your office looks. Body piercings, body art, weird hair color, wrinkled uniforms (or no uniforms at all) communicate something about you and the work you do. To the patient, it says you don't care. And if you are perceived as not caring, the patients are moving down the street to the next dentist.*
- **Caring and compassionate staff:** *Every staff member I have ever met would say that they are caring and compassionate. The problem is that the public is the only one with a vote. So if you find yourself with less than a 50% direct referral rate and few new patients, you can rest assured that no one who visits your office feels the love.*

Keep in mind that all of us have a "donor" personality some of the time. We drive patients out of our practices without really knowing it. Consider this: A typical hygienist can see about 500 patients twice a year. If yours is an average practice with 25 new patients a month, you would need to be hiring an additional hygienist every 24 months. If you've been in practice for five or more years and still just have one hygienist, your patients are telling you that they were not inspired. They will say it by never sending you a referral and by not returning for a periodic cleaning and exam. This very symptom of not seeing your hygiene department grow is a black and white signal that you are a donor practice. You are trying to give your patients something they don't want and have long since stopped listening to the one person who could turn your practice around: The consumer.

This is a tough message to swallow, but also a message that can change the direction of your practice. We have clients write in and describe what is happening in their own practices. Believe it or not, these normal doctors in cities and towns all over the US are having the best months of their careers. Regardless of the economy, competition, staffing and finances, they are implementing ideas that continue to give them record-breaking success month after month.

You may contact Dr. Michael Abernathy at abernathy2004@yahoo.com or 972-523-4660. Dr. Abernathy sends out an email newsletter every month discussing practical ways to better listen to your patients. If you would like to sign up for this newsletter, contact him at the email address above.



by Chris Mullins²

I'd like to ask all of you who are reading this right now to stop for a moment and be grateful for the business you have and for every time the phone rings in your office.

Getting the phone to ring with the right type of prospective patient is no easy task. It's extremely time consuming and very expensive. In many cases it can cost a minimum of \$500.00 just to get the phone to ring. I listen to a lot of mystery calls from all types of businesses and while I do hear improvements with script usage and tone of voice, I have to say that I don't hear that wow, grateful, joyful tone that says, "I appreciate you and your call."

It's easy to take your phone call prospects and established patients for granted, but I'd like to suggest that you imagine for a moment what it would be like if your phone didn't ring... it just stopped ringing 100%; then what?

So when your phone rings you should be elated, joyful and very grateful. Do all you can to wow that caller no matter who they are because you, the front office expert, are the practice! Everything you do will dictate how that call and ongoing relationship will go with that patient or prospect.

The Front Office is the Most Important Sales & Marketing Tool in Your Practice.

Importance of the front desk. To properly reflect your brand you must focus on appearance, behavior, attitude, business manners and communication skills. No matter how busy the reception area is, you can count on the receptionist to always project a professional image and make a great first impression on everyone they encounter. The front desk (office) is your sales and marketing commercial.

Greeting promptly with a smile on the phone and in person. Your office is crazy busy, patients are waiting, co-workers are standing in line to speak with you, the phone is ringing off the hook. How do you handle this with ease? Breathe, be calm, count to 10, ask for help, use the script; it will help you to focus on where you are now.

Greeting Wow Patient Experience. Go around the front desk to personally shake the hand of the patient. Give the patient a book of testimonials to read while waiting for the appointment. If someone is sitting waiting for an appointment, check in with them. Any team member that walks through the front office should recognize the patients waiting. The greeting helps you to transition from the task you were doing before the phone rang to the actual patient call.

Communication. When patients call, two of the most important needs they have are to be listened to and respected. Have you ever noticed how good it feels when someone really listens to you? When we're listened to we become more open and relaxed.

Appearance. Examples of what's not professional or what says, "I'm not here for you..." Too much per-

fume, clothes wrinkled, dirty, stained, ripped, smell like cigarette smoke, messy desk, shirt hanging out, hair a mess, etc.

Behavior that says "I'm too busy for you." Cell phones, texting, reading, eating at the desk, talking to someone else and not acknowledging the person waiting, no one at front desk when someone walks in, talking to colleagues and to family and friends on the phone.

Body language that says I can't hear what you're saying. Posture, arm placement, facial expressions, not smiling, body movements, hand-shake and your posture at your desk. Are you slouched over? Mirroring the body language of someone else indicates that they are understood.

Physical expression. Waving, pointing, touching and slouching are all forms of nonverbal communication. Gestures can emphasize a point or relay a message; posture can reveal boredom or great interest and touch can convey encouragement or caution.

Remember, each team member in your business is a sales and marketing tool on the job and off the job. What do you want your patients to see?

Chris Mullins, the Success Phone Doctor™, can be contacted at 603-924-1640 or chris@mullinsmediagroup.com. Also visit her website at www.greatbottomline.com

SUMMER SCHEDULE:



We hope you are enjoying the much anticipated summer months! Please know that we have opened up every other Monday on our schedule to accommodate patients during the summer months, while Dr. Hart is not in the OR. If you have any questions or if we can help schedule your patients, please let us know!

FACIAL TRAUMA -DID YOU KNOW?



With Dr. Hart's extensive education as an Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon, he is an expert when it comes to surgery of the face, mouth and jaw. Injuries to the face, also known as facial trauma, can create a high degree of emotional and physical trauma. While working as a staff surgeon at Fort Hood, he treated many soldiers coming back from Iraq with a wide range of facial trauma conditions. During his training, he garnered particular satisfaction in helping soldiers by reconstructing

complex explosive injuries and gunshot wounds sustained in war. This experience enables Dr. Hart to provide high quality care to patients with facial injuries. Currently, Dr. Hart is on the medical staff at Sky Ridge Medical Center as well as the Centura Medical Centers at Castle Rock and Parker. He is also on the facial trauma team at Parker Adventist Hospital. To learn more about Dr. Hart's experience and procedures he provides, visit our website at www.castlerockoms.com



by Dr. Mike Abemathy!

Over the last ten or fifteen years, dentistry has moved from a "needs" based profession to a "wants" based one. Patients don't really need cosmetic dentistry, implants, sedation, sleep apnea appliances, fast braces, etc. - they choose to buy them. This is the sign of an affluent society that is obsessed with the way they look. This has been great for dentistry and has made us all more financially secure. With this trend, we have also entered a consumer driven marketplace: nothing happens until the patient says "yes."

"Consumerism" has become a buzzword embodying your ability to give patients what they want, when they want it, at a price that they can afford. What you think or want doesn't matter. At a time when patients vote with their feet, with increased competition from other dentists and corporate practices, added to the already dominant insurance incursion, it's a different ballgame that most of us struggle to understand. If you fail to listen to what your clients are saying, you are destined to struggle to compete in tomorrow's dental marketplace. You asked for it, and you got it. Welcome to the new face of dentistry. Are you listening to your potential patients?

If you are finding yourself with fewer than 25-30 new patients a month, less than a 50% direct referral rate, struggling to pay your bills, while slowly entering a death spiral when it comes to increases in productivity, then the public has already voted. The results say: **you are not listening.** You are definitely not listening to the consumer if it is becoming more difficult to compete and you are struggling to get at least a 10-15% increase in productivity each year while constantly lowering your overhead. The good news is that there are strategies and actions you can take right now to improve your results. The neat thing is that 95% of the dental practices out there are clueless. There really is very little competition for doctors who "get it" regarding consumerism.

If you've reached a plateau, and just can't seem to break out, embrace "consumerism" and learn how to inspire your patients. The Webster's definition for **consumerism** is the promotion of the consumers' interests. While a lot of you turn up your noses at what you might think consumerism represents, I would have to say that Mr. Webster thinks it is almost biblical. It almost sounds from this definition that you might substitute the "Golden Rule" for it. You could take it a step further and assume that you need to "serve" your patients. The key here is to identify what the "consumers' needs are," not what "you" would have them to be.

Ask yourself this: Is my practice more about me, the procedures I do or don't like to perform, the hours I do or don't want to work, the area of town where I do or don't want to be located, or is it focused on my patients' interests and needs? A failure to grow in any environment is a clear signal that you have lost all relevance to your patients. Failing to inspire them should have been a clanging siren of distress, but many dentists today seem deaf to a very clear message.

The old model of dentistry that we were taught in dental school is dead. It was replaced in the early 90s with a new paradigm of smile makeovers and self-proclaimed pseudo specialists who have limited their practices to the top 2-3% of the population that

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