

Six Diamond Customer Service In Today's Dental Practice

The Richards Report

June 2000

The first thing we notice as we open the front door and step inside is the aroma of freshly made coffee, a hint of, could it be, cookies baking? As we step further through the door we notice fresh flowers nicely arranged in a cute glass vase, we are greeted warmly by name, by a smiling face welcoming us. What a pleasant surprise. Yes, in case you have not guessed it, we have just entered the dental office of the new century, where customer care is a primary concern.

In today's dental practice you need to be very aware of the need to provide exceptional customer service. If you are attempting to make your practice stand out as the best in your community, the way you treat the guests in your office should become a priority. You must do your all, as a practice, to set yourself apart from the rest in the care you give to your patient family.

Practices today should be aware of how smells impact your patients state of mind, and make some kind of effort to overcome the "dental office smell". You need to go all out and be way ahead of the rest.. In our practice I hear many times during the day, as a patient enters, "Gosh, it smells so good in here." We work very hard to accomplish that. From the first thing in the morning when I arrive and start our fresh ground decaf and regular coffee brewing. Umm the aroma is so good as it brews. I then start baking our Otis Spunkmeyer cookies, usually a dozen to start, and that smell climbs the stairs to our main floor operatories. On most days by noon we are baking our second batch. They sit in a nice cloth lined baskets at our beverage bar. I offer them to our patients upon arrival, but most choose to take one in a bag when leaving. Want to get your UPS and Fed Ex deliveries promptly? Here's a secret, I offer a cookie to each delivery person as they leave. They love it. We also utilize scented candles from a great little shop right across the street from our office. I try not to pick heavy scents. The shop's owner tells me their business certainly has picked up since we started buying our candles from them. Patients are always checking out label s on candles for the scent and then go directly across the street and buy the. The store now gives us a 30% courtesy discount off our purchase price, and we win again in the smell good department.

Every Monday morning before 9:00 we have fresh flowers delivered and place in our reception area. Patients often commit on what a homey feeling they ad and how good they smell. The flowers serve several purposes. They smell great, create a nice atmosphere for our guests, and make a great gift. At the end of each week, on Thursday ,we pick a patient to give the flowers to. The patients love it. I purchase vases in bulk at a local distributor, tie a little ribbon around it and *viola* another happy person. It is these kind of little things that mean so much in making our patients feel special.

Our reception area offers our guests a minute to read their favorite magazines, we subscribe to over 30 different ones. They are all of the current month. We have many coffee table books also, for their reading pleasure. One of the end tables in the room has a cut crystal bowl with SMILE sugar free assorted hard candies. We have a clear glass container holding sugar free suckers also. Moms and Dads alike love to enjoy cup of coffee and read their favorite magazine when waiting for the children. They also are made aware of the large variety of high tech dental procedures we have to offer by watching The Smile Channel by the folks at Casey, that runs continually in our reception area. To make our patients aware of all the "comfort" items we have for them to enjoy, we have a ,"For Your Comfort" plaque ,listing all the extras. Do not assume because you utilize these type of things that your patients know about them. You need to make them aware of your commitment to make their visit to your office, a pleasant experience.

The beverage bar in our practice is very well stocked. I love the look on a guest's face when I offer to get them coffee, tea, juice or lemonade. We have real cream in the refrigerator for their use and a variety of flavored coffee creamers to add to their enjoyment. It is not what they expect in a dental practice, and that is what makes it so much fun to do. Many times Mom or Dad will not be finished with their cup of coffee or tea when the kids are finished, or they will quickly pour one on their way to the front desk after their own treatment. They look quite surprised when you tell them to take the cup with them. What a simple thing to do. It really accomplishes two things, the patient feels special and great advertising for you if the ceramic mug bares your office logo and name. Kids also love to take a trip to the refrigerator at our beverage bar to pick out a juice to drink when running in for those after school appointments or on their way out the door after treatment We have bottled spring water also available for those who prefer. We keep brightly colored napkins near the cookies on the beverage bar, for quick clean ups.

In our treatment areas our patients are treated to many very nice things. We offer a large selection of CDs for their listening pleasure. We have many movies they can watch on the overhead TVs. We have even been known to ask a patient ahead of time the movie they would like to watch and go rent it if we do not have in our office. We always ask them in advance when verifying their appointment if there is anything we can do to make their appointment more comfortable for them. We have Satellite TV or their entertainment. We provide warm, cozy neck pillows to help them relax and feel comfortable. If they chill easy ,we have blankets available also. After testament they are provided with a warm scented towel to use to fresh up with. We keep these white

washcloths individually rolled up in a crock pot set on low. We present them to the patient on a small silver tray or glass dish. Lip balm is provided also, we use it during and after long treatment. We then give it to the patient as they leave. We are currently waiting delivery of special chocolate candies, wrapped in sparkly foil paper with our practice name in gold on it the outside of the wrapper. We will give these to the patients after treatment is finished, just as that little extra to let them know we appreciate that they have been such a great patient during treatment and that they are very important to us.

Our restrooms have many amenities to pamper our guests with. From toothbrushes to Romance perfume for the ladies and Polo for the gentlemen. We even have a supply of diapers for the younger members of the family, just in case Mom forgot one. An electric shoe polisher is located in there too. Patients love to try new things, so we try to keep a wide variety of perfumes, handlotions, hairsprays etc. stocked for their use. We provide quality white cotton hand towels for the patients to use in place of the usual C-fold towels. In the restrooms there is a nice plaque advising our guests that the amenities are there for their use and to help themselves. You would be surprised how many of your patients will not use them if they do not realize they are for them. Once again, it is not how the expect to be treated in a dental practice, so it scores BIG.

In your hygiene operatories, you certainly want to pamper your patients. Make them feel very special so they tell their friends and relatives how great your practice is. We check our patients blood pressure at each cleaning visit and write it on a special card we have design for that. We give the card to them for their own records. Go above and beyond, give toothbrushes with your name on them, tongue scrapers and tongue gel, FlossCards®. FlossCard, resembles a credit card that the patient can carry in their wallet. FlossCard has your practice name and number on it, our patients love these. They have been known to ask for more then one. The quality of the floss is not as great as Glide, but patients love the convenience. For patients with tight contacts we give both Glide patient samples and FlossCard. Giving the tongue scrapper and tongue gel samples leads to the explanation of the importance of these products in their daily oral hygiene. Which then usually leads to office sales of these products. It is a winning situation on both parts. We also include toothpaste samples that we get at no charge from Colgate, being in Cincinnati, the home office of Procter & Gamble, we used to give Crest samples, but they are so hard to acquire that we gave up on trying to get our toothbrushes and samples from Procter & Gamble.

Customer service is contagious. When your staff sees these kind of things being done to provide patients with that next level of customer care in your office they want to be part of it. They become very aware of the smallest inconvenience to a patient and look for ways to make up for it, such as gift certificate etc. One snowy day in our office I saw our expanded duties assistant outside the front window sweeping the handicap ramp because she knew her next patient would use it, and did not want her to slip. I have seen staff members offer to take patients waiting for a ride home, or go pick them up when their car won't start. The point is that if we raise our awareness to "GREAT" customer service we can set ourselves above the rest.

Showing your appreciation for your patients is a must. If you reward them for referrals you can bet they will continue to refer. Of course, if you Do Not need new patients, you can skip this paragraph. The "Thank You" does not have to be expensive, something as simple as an instant lottery ticket can do the trick in many cases. We use a wide variety of gifts depending on the number of referrals a patient has sent to us. Each referral certainly increases the value of the gift. We have many times sent flowers to a patient's place of employment, as a "Thank You" or after completing their treatment, as a reward for being such a terrific patient. Boy, don't think that doesn't cause fellow workers to ask "What dentist do you go to, mine never sends me flowers." We also ask that our patients bring their reminder card they receive in them mail, to the cleaning appointment and we place it in a large fish bowl. At the end of each month we draw a card and send that patient a gift. There are many great gift ideas. I will share with you a few I use in our practice; a bottle of very nice wine, gift certificates from any of the following Outback Restaurant, Borders Books, Camelot Music, Toy "R" Us. Gift boxes of Christie Cookies, Godiva Chocolates, tickets to sporting events, or an evening at the theater. You and you staff can put your heads together and come up with what works best in your area. The important thing here is to train your patients to refer to you by rewarding them for doing it. Show your appreciation.

My hope in writing this article is to get all of you thinking ahead of the rest. Hopefully there are a few new ideas here that you can incorporate into your practice. As my boss, Dr. Thomas Hedge, always says "think out of the box", don't be afraid to be different. Make your practice stand out from rest. Good Luck!

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