



Six Cardinal Rules of Outstanding Patient Service

As I interact and work with businesses and dental practices around the country, one of the first things I notice is how I am treated, both in person and on the telephone. The sad report is, in general, most of us are too busy doing the technical parts of our jobs to pay much attention to the person who actually makes possible the opportunities that are presented to us. To be massively successful with your patients, take a look at incorporating the following 6 rules for outstanding patient service and I might add, an outstanding reputation with your patients and in your community.

1. PEOPLE BEFORE PAPERWORK.

How many times have you stood and waited while a clerk tallied up a batch of figures and then, after she was through, asked, "How can I help you?" And how many times have you waited while someone "fiddled" with a desk drawer, or wrote up a note, before they acknowledged you? Paper can wait --- people should not. At the very first inkling a patient is near, STOP. Put your paperwork down. Set it aside. It won't walk away, but the patient might. Make eye contact and immediately acknowledge the patient --- let them know that THEY come first.

2. ALWAYS BE NICE --- NO MATTER HOW BUSY YOU ARE.

Don't be too busy to be nice. Being busy does not give us "carte blanc" to be rude. We're all busy. When someone asks you how things are going, why not say, "Great! How can I help you?" If you lay the "I'm soooo busy" routine on them, you may scare them away. The patient wants all of your attention, and if you appear too busy, they can easily go elsewhere. Just pay attention to times when you are the customer and the people you are dealing with are too busy for you. While they may feel "they're doing the best they can", you may feel slighted or not very important. Invest the time to clear your mental screen and focus on the patient; one at a time. Your day will be better as well.

3. TAKE YOUR TIME WITH CALLERS --- RUSHING THEM CREATES ILL-WILL.

Let's face it ... most phone calls we get are an interruption and we usually are in the middle of something. How many times a day do we sit by our phone, hands clasped, saying, "Please, let so-and-so call"? So when you answer a phone call and rush the caller, they become uneasy. The caller needs your full attention. Give it to them. They deserve it. Don't write, type, or talk to anyone else unless it pertains to the conversation 100%. Quick, short answers are also very intimidating. Again, it's better to let the caller know it is not a good time for you to talk, rather than seem hurried, which makes you sound uninterested. Change your mindset. You're in the service industry; your patients aren't an interruption. They are your business. Remember, who you don't think you need now, you may need later. Rushing through the conversation may get it completed once, but won't help those people become repeat business.

4. SPEAK ON THEIR LEVEL --- DON'T USE MILITARY LANGUAGE ON CIVILIANS.

Simply put, don't use "dentalese" when speaking to your patients. Mistakes and miscommunications thrive when communication is not clear. You'll be far more familiar with dental terms and abbreviations than the caller will. And, you're not impressing anyone with the your knowledge of what they don't know. Use terms that create benefit to the patient, not explain the technical process in "dentaleze". Find a common denominator --- a common bond. The patient will very much appreciate your thoughtfulness.



5. BE FRIENDLY BEFORE YOU KNOW WHO IT IS.

Have you ever called a company, or walked into a company, where you were treated in a fairly average manner, and when they realized you were a friend of the boss or someone other than an average customer, they brightened right up? Why wait to be friendly? Why discriminate? If you're friendly before you know who it is, you're giving the same fabulous service to everyone. That's the way it should be. Don't discriminate...be friendly before you know who it is.

6. "THERE 'YA GO" IS NOT "THANK YOU," "UH-HUH" IS NOT "YOU'RE WELCOME".

Count, starting today --- for one day, how many times people forget to say "thank you," and "you're welcome." "There 'ya go" just doesn't hack it. When I've spent my money, I want to hear a big smiley "Thank you. We appreciate your business." And when I take the time to say "thank you," I don't want to be grunted at with an "uh-huh." "You're welcome" is a wonderful phrase. Please use it more often. Don't be a grunter. Tell your patients "thank you" and "you're welcome."

Look for opportunities to let patients know how much you appreciate them. In today's world it is unusual for people to be listened to, acknowledged and appreciated. Just paying attention to these details will make your days go smoother and make practicing dentistry much more enjoyable.