



Most Valuable Asset in Your Dental Practice

Most Valuable Asset in Your Dental Office?

Believe it or not Doctors, it is not you. It is your front office person/team. These are the magic people who project the image of your office to new and existing patients. These are the people who can make or break your practice without you even knowing. This team needs to have above average abilities in communication, with your patients, vendors, clinical staff, and of course, you.

Anyone can answer a phone, but it is difficult to find someone who will represent you and your practice in the best light. How do you want others to see your practice; Guarded by a fierce dragon who they have to bypass to get to the treasure (your amazing dental skill), or directed by a welcoming guide who will be able to take them from start to finish with the smoothest experience possible? I choose option two. Before hiring just anyone to “answer the phone”, think about your experience with customer service in your life. What are the best experiences you’ve had, or the worst experiences, and why. The best experience will help in finding someone who can offer that same great feeling to your patients. The bad experience will remind you what traits you want to steer away from.

Once you find that perfect person, be sure they are fully trained before releasing them into your practice. A lot of damage can be done in a short period of time by someone who thinks they know more than they do. Be sure they have the tools needed to complete their job effectively; forms to gather the correct information from new and existing patients, or insurance companies, and where and how to use this information in your dental software and within the office. Have them SMILE when answering the phone, and for the duration of the call. Make sure they welcome each and every patient like family, on the phone

or in person, because these patients are your family. If done right, you can retain your patients for years, seeing them through all phases of their lives.

With the proper person representing your office, your day will be smoother, your team will be happier, and your patients will not hesitate to return. Your practice can and will grow at a steady rate, and your patient retention will be off the charts. Too many dentists spend thousands in marketing to new patients, while the patient retention is what needs to improve in their practices. Internal operations must be reviewed to see where the gaps are.

Top 10 Reasons the Front Office Creates Happy Patients

1. **Answer the phone by 3rd Ring:** New patients get annoyed when they call an office and no-one answers the phone or it rings and rings. The result is that the new patient hangs up and calls the next office in line. It is imperative that the front office answers the phone SMILING and by the 3rd ring.
2. **Greeting on arrival:** There is nothing more disrespectful than when a patient enters the office and the front desk has her head down with her nose in papers not acknowledging the patient. The elephant is in the room and everyone knows that the front desk saw and heard the patient walk in. Without excuses, the front desk MUST look up and greet the patient. Rudeness is inexcusable and will leave a negative impression on patients.
3. **Don't be all business:** Very often the front office is overwhelmed with the daily tasks, and tries to rush patients through their experience and interaction with the front office. Friendliness and a few minutes of pleasant conversation is necessary to keep patients feeling like they are welcome and not an interruption. Spend a few minutes with each patient and make small talk before you throw a financial agreement in front of them or ask them to pay for today's visit. People hate paying for rudeness and will find another office that they feel welcome spending their money with.
4. **Keep Smiling:** A smile says a thousand words. Here is what a smile will tell your patients: I am happy with my job. My boss is good to me. I love working here. My teammates are amazing. My doctor is awesome. I am a friendly person, come talk to me. A frown or seriousness has just the opposite effect and poorly represents the operation.
5. **Be Helpful:** Think to yourself how you can elevate your patient's experience at the office. Offer yourself to help patients. If they can't fill out a form, ask to help. If they don't understand something, clarify it. If they need to make special arrangements, whether it is scheduling or financial, be understanding, but be professional. Do not take things personally, or be sensitive to patient's objection, since most of the time it has nothing to do with you personally.
6. **Negative Attitude:** Get rid of a negative attitude. It usually takes much more effort to be grumpy all day and complain than to roll with the punches and be happy-go-lucky. Negative attitude breeds resentment and leaves a negative impression with patients.
7. **Follow-up:** There is nothing more annoying than to be promised to be contacted and the calls never comes. We recommend that the practice creates a "follow-up" column in their appointment book. That column serves for appointing patients to be called and followed-up on, and for messages reminders about patient contacts. Anyone that leaves the office without an appointment, or tells you to call them, is scheduled in this follow-up column. On the day of that appointment, the front office is reminded to clear their messages from the follow-up column by contacting all the patients.
8. **Systematic approach:** Do things the same way if it works. Provide the same positive, welcoming,

friendly, experience to all patients. This is important when patients refer other patients for the great experience. There is nothing worse than a patient awaiting a certain experience that was told to them by the referring patient and finds themselves to be disappointed. At the same time, if you are providing a consistent negative experience, it will kill the practice.

9. **Brag on The Office:** It takes years to gain patient's trust and build a long lasting relationship. But there is one thing that will accelerate this process. The team MUST believe in the office philosophy, the Doctor's skills, and be happy at their work place. There is nothing more powerful than a testimonial from the front office about the Doctor's skills or the team's professionalism. Confidence in the practice can be facilitated by the front office communication with the patients about positive differences between other offices and your practice. The patient wants to be reassured they have chosen well and have come to the right place for their care.

10. **Love Your Job:** It amazes me how many people stay in a position they are not happy working every day. If the front desk employee does not like her position, it will shine right through and leave a negative, long lasting impression. There are many jobs out there, so if you do not enjoy a front office position, I say "Move on". At the same time, when an employee loves what they do, they do it with pride, enthusiasm, and charisma. They create a positive experience for patients, and keep patients coming back. Those employees are true keepers and are the most valuable asset in your dental office.

If the 10 items are not followed, by the time the patient is seen by the Doctor, they already have had a negative experience and are in a bad mood. The Doctor then tells the patient more bad news, that they need dental treatment. Most people are afraid of getting dental work done, so a bad experience with bad news throws them over the edge, and the result is lack of treatment plan acceptance. Furthermore, the patient usually decides to just stay away from dentistry all together, or leaves the practice to look for another provider. Remember that patients have a choice of Dentists. Give your patients a reason to return, otherwise the patient will chose to spend their money on dental treatment at a friendly office where they feel welcome and are treated well.

In closing, when you hire, hire for personality and train the skills.

by Dr. Dorothy Kassab & April Warner (my amazing receptionist of 15 years!)

Front Office Systems and Training, includes operations manual and forms available. Check out our website for more information. <http://www.dentalclaimscleanup.com/consulting-training>

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