

# Managing your Dental Practice better with a few Rules of Marketing - Part - XXXI



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Continued from IDA Times  
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## 18: Be Convincing, Compelling & Persuasive but give your patients a good service, consistently (Contd.):

Practice Management is not sweet or bitter syrup that we can drink in the night time and become effective managers, the next morning. As I always do in all my lectures and workshops pan-India, I share a lot of tips but I always encourage my participants to not just blatantly write them down and follow them blindly because that is not my ultimate aim. They all are most welcome to copy my ideas told on screen or verbally but what matters to me is that the audience imbibe the philosophy behind the same which can't be copied at all. For me, an idea without a logic applied or a philosophy followed behind it is a total waste of time and other resources. So, the key is to understand the basic logic and fundamentals; learn them, imbibe them in the working and slowly become an effective manager (Successful Practice Management). No one is a born manager, but with gradual years of practice and learning, one can become a perfect one.

with application of some smart tips for confidence and success. I have always encouraged understanding the broader concept which I have shared also in the past 30 articles and would keep sharing till the interest is alive in you all. We discussed 10 points in the last issue of IDA Times (Part XXX – June 2019 Issue) for creating a better patient experience. That list could have been endless but somewhere you have to draw a line and put a full stop. Before doing so, I would like to reiterate here that good patient satisfaction scores are difficult to achieve if our patient spends too much time waiting for his turn at the clinic, doing sometimes irrelevant paperwork, filling out lengthy registration and feedback forms and practically spending lesser time with the dentist during the appointments; the main purpose for which a patient is usually there at the clinic.

We dentists really underestimate the importance of waiting time as we find it as a social status symbol if a patient comes and sees 4 waiting patients already to create a falsified image that the dentist is a pretty busy one. Believe me, there is nothing more unpleasant than the tick tock of a long wait for a patient followed by a warp speed appointment. All this is known to result in fretting, frowning, clock-watching, foot-tapping, sometimes roaming in your waiting area similar to



(Image Courtesy: Google)

We can improve our patient experience in such matters by following a few quick tips and giving back to our patients some of their precious appointment time:

**1. Avoid paperwork or keep least of it:** As per a few patient satisfaction surveys, patients have usually complained that filling out long forms was equivalent to the hassle of applying for a new loan. Sometimes, incorrect or incomplete information does lead to less procedural or consultation time and more of paperwork. We have to understand that most mandatory out of all paper work is the medical-dental history along with consent documentation which should be a priority leaving out the rest for other visits.

**2. Don't make them wait:** Cribbing and whining starts in a clinic when someone has to wait for long even after taking a prior appointment. Time is a precious commodity for most individuals especially in today's times. When patients experience long waiting times, no wonder they turn crabby as taking out good amount of time from a limited span of 24 hours these days is a luxury for many and doing so just to cool off the heels in the waiting area makes them turn uncooperative, usually.

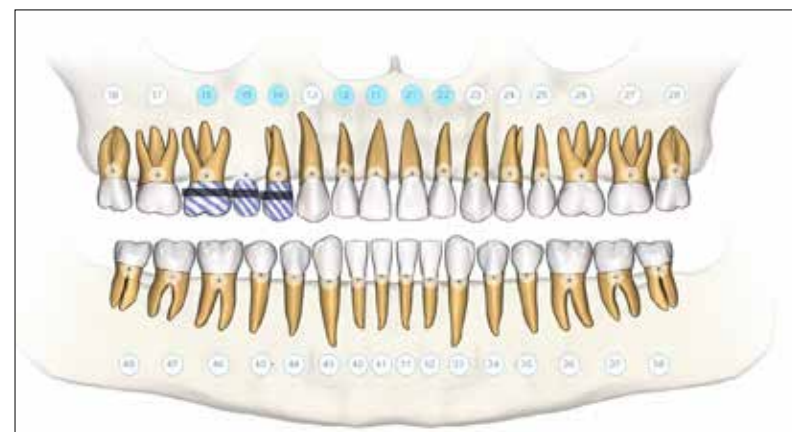
**3. Less treatment time with rushed appointments:** Patient satisfaction surveys have also listed that in majority of cases, an average dentist visit lasts only 45 minutes and of that amount of time, 15 minutes are spent in doing paperwork and verbally sharing the medical and dental history along with consent documentation. That leaves the dentists sometimes with much lesser amount of time to talk, understand and start the treatment and even from that some part is gone in local anaesthesia as well after overcoming all fears and prejudice associated with that (along with counselling especially if the patient is first timer or phobic to that). Even dentists are fond of leaving the patient about 5 minutes early to have a feedback leaving eventually further less treatment time in some setups. We have to understand categorically that

patients want shorter waiting times, less paperwork along with more treatment time with their dentist and online access to various FAQ's or treatment instructions (preferably on the dentists' website). It is never too late to learn anything in life and an efficient way to do so is to implement such measures which improve the scheduling, patient check-in and dentist-patient interaction time.

The front desk (if you have) or the assistant setup should always be more efficient to make your patients happier by streamlining the patient documentation and waiting experience and reign in big bucks for the clinic, thus, becoming a big revenue generator for the clinic.

companies in European and American countries have added the option of a patient log-in option available as well where patients can securely read, edit and sign personal information and documents prior to their appointments. They can also fill out all needed forms at their available time that conveniently matches their time schedule.

With paperwork and documentation completed, the patients can schedule time according to their convenience and that also helps eliminate extra phone calls, needless trips to clinic or requests for information or knowledge. These dental software also help patients and dentists to send messages to each other, helps patients request prescription renewals, make online prior payments, view medical/dental history, allergy lists and track any progress or lab work or any medical lab results plus the biggest being appointment scheduling. Unfortunately, presently we don't have any such dental software options available in India. Through networking in the clinic computers though, the dentist can quickly go through the digital records of the patient, broadly meaning, having all the patient information at



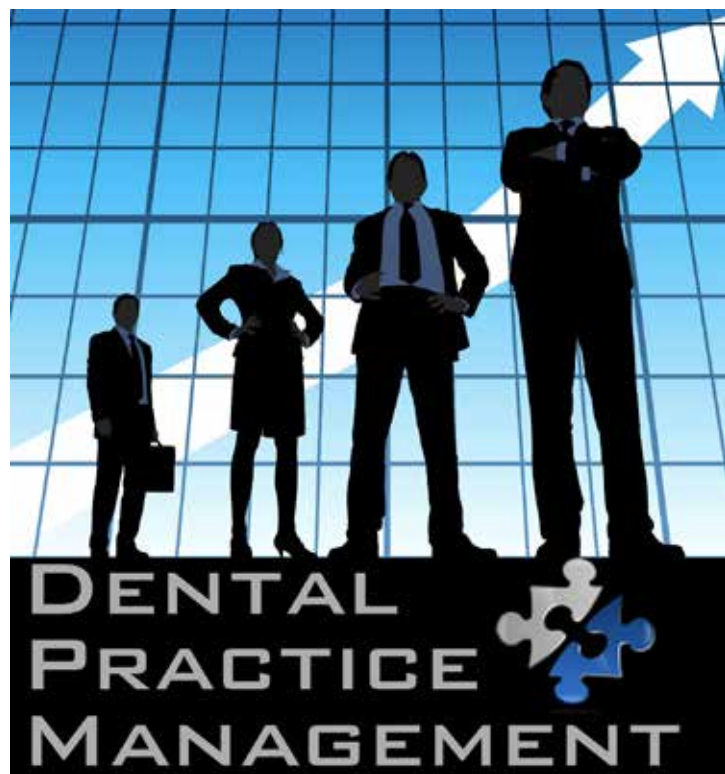
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We can take help of automated dental software to manage patient appointments and waiting time, giving the ability to proactively manage the patient flow by confirmation and deletion of patient appointments in a given day. Many of the dental software help us to do an intuitive calendaring along with appointment management functions which helps to better manage the practice and the patients by ending frustrating gaps and no-shows by the latter. Any patient who is rushed within 5 minutes of his on-time arrival to the dentist sometimes transforms even the grumpiest patients into the happiest ones. With the help of dental software, we can greatly reduce our paperwork and try to complete patient information on the first visit and store it for a ready reference in the next visit via networking in multiple digital devices or doing a proper homework before the patient arrival. A couple of dental software

our fingertips, all in a same and single view. The dentists can conveniently skip the paperwork and focus on the treatment appointments for providing personalized dental care to the patient or say, one-on-one attention. The computer records also make sure that we have multiple options (places) to store treatment notes, medical/dental history, lab work records and any other requisite critical medical or dental information to be kept in the digital records. For all this above to happen we have to make sure that we do a few of the following:

**1. Implement a system:** Dentist and staff have to work as a team to actually wow the patients rather than just waiting for an opportunity to pounce upon them (patients) and to work as a team, we need to have a formal system in place with adequate rehash or revision of the ensuing scenarios along with proper scripting to make

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(Image Courtesy: Google)

In Practice Management, the basics are always the key and it is a process which begins firstly with a series of changes in you, in your behaviour and finally, in your practice along

outside a pregnancy minor OT by the patient, leading to an overall unsatisfactory patient experience, however, best you might have dealt with his treatment otherwise.

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that happen. Team members (read: staff) should know their limitations on what to answer and what to delegate further in conversation with the patients and never ever lose their temper, frown or fret over anything. The exact mindset which has to be there is that the staff has to respect each and every patient making them feel valuable.

**2. Always be enthusiastic in your work:** The team (that includes the dentist/s also) has to be overzealous and enthusiastic while greeting the patient, an action which should exude friendliness and not fake. Patients have to be valued and not treated as an interruption even if they bump accidentally into the clinic on a busy day.

**3. Ask for a feedback:** A feedback is a vital cog in the whole process of a patient's sojourn with the dentist. There are two ways for the same either the dentist takes the same, himself or the assistant/front desk staff is trained to do it. It can be manual, verbal, paper or on website. A body language reaction to just a verbal inquiry is also sometimes good enough to know how everything went inside the operatory. Another option is via a short patient survey which can be taken on phone via a SMS or a Whatsapp message but only after a prior permission from the patient. Always be on your toes to immediately redress any grievance on the part of the patient to show that you really care and pay heed to such complaints quickly.

**4. Following up with the patient:** This is one of the greatest practice builder tools which have been shown to generate an excellent reaction from the patient that the dentist himself called to ask, how he was feeling. In that follow-up call, always repeat the instructions once again which are supposed to be followed in next 12-24 hours and tell them to feel free to confirm the same in case of any doubt. Always answer commonly asked questions (however, stupid they may be, in a cool and composed manner) or concerns in that position usually related to either of the symptoms of pain, bleeding, nausea or swelling or a combination of a few or all. The underlying aim is to send across the message that the dentist or the clinic really cares.

In today's times of extreme awareness, patients are always willing to spend not only for functional but aesthetic reasons as well. A superior customer service is one big reason for them to return sooner rather than later. Apart from being 'googlified' (equipped with knowledge from Google), patients don't have a benchmark, otherwise to compare the clinical knowledge

to recognize superior dentistry; their best yardstick is always on how we made them feel or how we treated them otherwise (apart from dental treatment). To create a better patient experience, we have to stand out in our patients' minds for excellent customer service and do everything we can to exceed their expectations. We all know 'customer is always right' philosophy but one will find it stranger to believe that there are situations and a strong reason for us to believe why "the customer is always right" is wrong sometimes (or say, not always right).



(Image Courtesy: Google)

A good point to ponder upon, I will say.

But how?

Let's look at this scenario minutely:

There can be situations and reasons 'The customer is always right' approach can be wrong or put it, in other words, say not right for our business.

I will narrate a short story on this which I came across on my friend's social media page (names deliberately withheld/changed on request). There was a frequent flyer of XYZ airlines, a lady named Mrs. JKL, who frequently flew on a particular trip, but was a grumpy customer and was always whining and grumbling about one or the other aspect of the airlines, sometimes even those which didn't even exist or had been demarcated in company's policy to all its customers much before booking the ticket and were now a regular norm with the company and all customers were accustomed to it. Mrs. JKL had been fondly given a name of 'Pen Pal' because after every flight she used to write a complaint letter (via email) to the airlines. There were many reasons for her complaints viz. the airlines didn't assign proper seats at time of boarding (prior online booking done by people, so assigned whatever left); there was no first-class section; there was no in-flight meal being served (but sold on board), the boarding procedure was cumbersome, the flight attendants' uniforms were too sporty and not formal along with a too much casual or a friendly atmosphere. After a flight once again with the XYZ airlines, she shot off another email to the customer

relations department, this time slightly exaggerated in her verbose. The complaint letter reciting a litany of complaints, momentarily stumped the customer relations department, XYZ airlines. Already fed up of the client's behaviour, the customer relations department forwarded the email this time to the HR department along with a copy of all the old mails who then forwarded this to the CEO of the airlines, Mr. ABC. The CEO, Mr. ABC, a smart and witty customer himself, read all the emails in 5 minutes and replied in twenty seconds flat with a note 'Dear Mrs. JKL,

We will miss you, with Love, ABC'. That one line email reply practically says it all.

The maxim 'The customer is always right' was originally coined by Harry Gordon Selfridge, the founder of Selfridge's department store in London in 1909 and since then, it is being used by the business houses to convey and convince the customers that they will get good service with them and persuade the same to their employees to give the latter a good service on priority. But as of now, more and more companies are abandoning this 'axiom' ironically because it had been leading to bad customer service. There are a varied number of reasons for the same. Let us have a look at few of them:

**1. Sometimes, it works the other way and makes our employees unhappy:** Like the above example of XYZ airlines, let's see another example of UVW airlines and its CEO, Mr. DEF who was as witty and brash like Mr. ABC (CEO, XYZ airlines, mentioned above). Mr. DEF has been best known for turning UVW Airlines around from worst to first and had a book published on its 'rags to riches' success story as well. He wanted to make sure that both customers and employees liked the way UVW airlines treated them, so he made it very clear that the dictum 'the customer is always right' didn't hold sway at UVW airlines. He had been known to be pretty much employee friendly and usually, in conflicts between employees and unruly customers, he was known to consistently side with 'his' people. His words had been a source of encouragement for his employees as well, "When



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we run into customers that we can't reel back in, our loyalty is always with our employees. They have to put up with this stuff every day. Just because one customer buys a ticket does not give them the right to abuse our employees. We carry more than 3 million people through our flights every month. One or two of those people are always going to be unreasonable, demanding jerks and perks. When it is a choice between supporting your employees, who work with you every day and make your product what it is or some irate jerk who demands a free ticket to a destination just because the airlines ran out of peanuts, whose side are you going to be on? You can't treat your employees like serfs (slaves). You have to value them. If they think that you won't support them when a customer is out of line, even the smallest problem can cause resentment". This is indeed a staff motivating approach because somewhere down the line, you ought to maintain the right balance between the staff and the customers. As we saw in above note, Mr. DEF trusted his people more over unreasonable customers. What is best about this attitude is that it eventually evens out the balance between the employees and customers equally. 'The customer is always right' maxim squarely favours the customer which definitely is not a good idea for any business (speaking from staff point of view) and is also known to cause resentment among employees. There might be surely plenty of examples of bad employees giving lousy customer service but trying to solve the same by declaring the customer 'always right' has become counter-productive in recent times. In our clinics also, we might come across certain

situations where we have to actually choose between our erring but old staff member and/or a rowdy patient. In such cases, the decision is usually simple; you go similar way like Mr. ABC or Mr. DEF, i.e., you side with your staff. However, there might be situations where there is a toss-up between our old trustworthy staff member and an 80 category patient out of 80-20 Pareto's principle (IDA Times Part XVI - April 2018), the choice would be extremely difficult in such cases, however, common sense would say not to change ethics of choosing a customer over an old reliable, trustworthy staff member for the sake of money alone.

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