

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



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Continued from IDA Times
May 2019 Issue

18. Rule 18: Be Convincing, Compelling & Persuasive but give your patients a good service, consistently: (Contd.):

In the May Issue (29th part of this series), I and my co-author for that issue, Dr. Vandana Dhameja, had discussed the WIIFM approach in private practice gradually turning into WIIFT and finally into WIIFU. Overall, a fellow colleague had once remarked to me a few years back (), that after a few years of good practice (when you have close to 1000 satisfied patients), money merely becomes a by-product. You keep on doing the good work and money will keep flowing itself without you really having to bother where will the next buck actually come from. So technically speaking, after investing a few initial years with more than 100% commitment and dedication and by taking more than active interest in your clinic () and you will see that good money becomes part and parcel of your life, automatically. It does not surely mean that when money starts coming in, you can be callous or casual but you can do well with a normal commitment and dedication towards the same afterwards. Realistically speaking, if you do so (initial more than 100%) and get success, your body is automatically accustomed to take the load and mind is trained to do the same as well, so you will hardly lose an iota of the same (focus) unless your work ethics are seriously impacted due to any reason whatsoever. There is usually no one stopping you and only you (yourself) can cut your strings and pull yourself back (with bad work ethics, over confidence or other malice's).



(Image Courtesy: Google)

When we talk of that list of 1000 satisfied patients, there are quite a number of things which we can do to actually wow our patient's service potential genuinely. For this, I would recommend a few tips for a really happy patient experience:

a. Patients are customers first: Taking care of patients is our first priority in healthcare or as such dentistry, per se. It is difficult for most of us to presume dentistry as business but realistically speaking wherever there is P/L (Profit and Loss) or I/E (Income and Expenditure) involved, we have to believe that it is a business, first and like in every business, there are customers. It may even be further hard for some of us to think of patients as customers, but they definitely are customers, first. Our customers' choices bring thousands and even lacs of rupees into the clinic's coffers. So treating them like a customer and offering good service is paramount and even if you have big names coming as visiting consultants to your clinic but still not offering good service, they will care a damn for those names and look out for options closer to you (your neighbours or say competitors) some times which 'treats' them better (not always from medical/dental point of view but otherwise).

b. Respect begets courtesy and respect: Making sure that the patients in office are treated with courtesy and respect will yield fruitful results always. Making the dental treatment like a routine mundane and a monotonous activity sucks

away the empathy part from dentist-patient relationship plus becoming totally unprofessional and bad for our business of dentistry. Don't sound your treatment simply like just another job because this infests boredom and the behaviour inside the practice changes to an indifferent one.

c. Treat the patients with an empathetic approach without any indifference: It is imperative to watch very minutely in your office (especially in your absence or just before arrival in case you come after the staff comes) the way your patients are treated by your staff in waiting area or separately in your reception (if you are having a similar system in your clinic with a receptionist). Many clinic staff has been known to show a very disappointingly cold behaviour to patients. Remember your staff is the first encounter of the patient in your clinic and this aspect needs to be controlled very strongly (I reiterate here as I had mentioned in May 2019 issue that I would be covering staff in detail in upcoming issues very soon). Any dental treatment involves multiple visits to a dentist and during those repeat exercises, the patient interacts with the staff multiple times. Each of these interactions has a disparate impact on the way the patient feels. Whenever the



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patient finds staff in a jubilant mood, the same feeling being contagious transcends on to them. Content and cheerful staff does usually equate to content and gratifying patients. Alternatively, if the staff is cold shouldered or dentist is unapproachable, courtesy the staff, patient always feels lonely, un-welcome and secluded. The hospital / clinic is a place known to increase the uneasiness and induce indignation, if already, having seeds of the same. At many clinics even in urban areas especially the one with huge numbered OPD, close to 35-40 (Although, I believe, you can't 'treat' this big numbered OPD in dental practice, but of course can do consultation for all, anyways, that is a different point altogether), patients are

virtually allotted a number and are made to wait sometimes for infinite times. Giving the patients a feeling that they are an inconvenience and a bother is an offensive thought in my purview but many competent and brilliantly sharp colleagues especially medical ones indulge in such behaviour. I know of a famous Gastroenterologist in my hometown, Ludhiana, who is known to see OPD till 3 am or 4 am and patients keep on waiting for endless hours (even after taking a prior appointment) altogether in pursuit of a consultation. I vehemently believe in present times, you have to make patients feel superior and well-informed in any way or manner so that they can make their



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adjustments in your practice accordingly.

d. Never try to contradict, argue or match wits with patients: There are always minimum two ways of dealing with a situation and manytimes bluntly telling the patients that they are misinformed about anything on their face is nothing but just plainly rude.

The respect to opinion is one aspect I always lay stress upon in all my talks and write-ups. Opinions are to be respected if you don't even partially agree with them. Patients may have incorrect information (courtesy Dr. Google), but that should still be dealt with showing respect. The different (from theirs) or the correct viewpoint can always be explained politely with genuine and verifiable reasoning, albeit in a softer undertone. As a healthcare professional, our primary goal should be to communicate to explain followed by explain to communicate.

The communication should be crystal clear and transparent which should help patient make an informed decision after knowing and understanding what treatment is going to be instituted. Patients have to be made feel very important in the scheme of things as us, primarily, because there has been a paradigm shift in the treatment philosophy where the doctor had been the 'best

judge' for decisions to an autonomous informed choice by the patient or may be a shared decision making by both as a middle road pathway.

e. Convey to the patients that you value their presence and visits: Since customer has traditionally been God for us in Indian culture, it's our duty to tell our patients that you appreciate their visits.

Everybody likes to be thanked when purchasing an item in a retail store, but in Indian healthcare setups, saying "Thank You" is seen as an inappropriate thing or an inferior thing, dare I say that? I believe the word "Thank You" has magical vibes for any kind of relationship, be it personal or professional. There is no harm in trying the same as it has proven to be a great way to receive your patients' repeat visits in western countries and there is no reason why it can't be good for our businesses as well in India.

f. Avoid technical terminology using simple words in communication with patients: Although medical/dental science is full of technical terminology and sometimes, we find it difficult to decipher and convey a few words in patient language lest it should be mistaken by the patient in any way, for example, explaining what is a RCT (root canal treatment) to an illiterate or a patient with a village background can be a little tricky and cumbersome sometimes; some colleagues explain the same as a treatment to deaden the tooth. Believe me, sometimes, this translation is not taken to be very kindly by many patients, especially the ones with less educational background. So, dentists sometimes to avoid this kind of unsavoury predicament resort to throwing up complicated jargon to the patients, but that also has shown to result in misunderstandings and sometimes errors as well. The latter is extremely undesirable in today's competitive healthcare environment. We, as dentists have to make absolutely sure that our explanations are not clouded with excessive and complicated verbiage to be labelled as extremely lengthy discussions. It is best to be brief and to the point. On the flip side, this does not mean that we have to be

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silent always. Rather as a true professional, we should go out of the way to explain things in simple, declarative sentences. Our patients want to connect us on an emotional level. We can use stories, metaphors and colourful anecdotes instead of just clinical facts by engaging maximum of their senses possible. It might be very surprising to believe this truth that such stories convincingly tap into the emotions adding depth to the talks, making it surreal sometimes. We just have to make sure that our stories are relevant enough, concentrated and should attract full patient attention making sure to avoid idle gossip or unnecessary prolix. I gave the examples of a few stories in Part 19 of this series (July 2018).

your profession giving the best leaving mistakes part far behind. Today, there are so many complicated variables in healthcare that it is easy to get off the track. We have to remember who we are and what our core work ethics are.

As I said above at the start, after a few years of good practice, money merely becomes a by-product. Yes, being in a profession which is akin to a business, it is our right to earn but doing so ignoring our primary responsibility (to heal) is a blot on our character. The micro level principles of medico-legal aspects and ethics of dentistry of beneficence (doing only good) and non-malefeasance (doing no harm) makes it prudent for us to follow the same ignoring the lure of money, first of all.

with patients after rendering the treatment and hardly care to follow up. Some find it too cumbersome, unnecessary and a stress creating activity. In my purview, follow up and contact with the patients is a gesture which always pays back and should always be encouraged in your fellow colleagues and friends if they are not doing the same.

j. A word of mouth promise should never be broken: We all make so many unfulfilled promises to our patients which we usually don't keep. A couple of them are, "We provide the best care in the area", "Please be on time for your appointment to help us treat you on time", "Why worry? I will complete all work in 3 sittings" and "We use the best quality of materials" etc. Firstly, let me be very clear; I am not saying all of us make all these promises and secondly, that all of us break these promises and thirdly, it is just an example of many tall promises made by various colleagues in many parts of the country. The difference between empty talk and promises is that promises must be kept and if it turns out, you over-promised, but under-delivered, just remember to own up to it. Rather, under-promise and over-delivery should be the mantra of every practice, making sure customer (patient) is the king. Being honest usually does pay off in the long run. We all know the childhood saying, "A promise breaker is a shoemaker." We have to make sure we follow it.

What these above 10 tips would tell you that for any business to grab a bigger share of market pie, they ought to have a lot of customer sensitivity in terms of providing good service. Same holds true for dentistry as well and to have a larger patient share in our area, we need to imbibe good work ethics in our minds, culture and working. Having an attitude of "Why do I care" leaves you sometimes in a no man's land and with a face difficult to hide.

A superior patient service experience always provides a valuable outcome for the business setting itself apart from its competitors who can be interpreted to be too busy, too stressed out or too oblivious to provide stellar assistance to their patients. In the dental practice, the bottom line aim should be to strive to become patient service role models, not just in the oral care profession but in the entire community. Patients are a lot judgmental these days and they judge our clinic and services not only in comparison with other dental practices, but also with all the stores, restaurants and other retail businesses that they encounter. Hence, it is imperative that we understand that excellent customer service is extremely essential for us

Charaka (300 B.C.) and Sushruta (800 B.C.), the oldest Indian physicians have summed up their thoughts on medico-legal ethics in the two foundational Hindu texts on Indian Ayurveda, viz., the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita respectively. A passage in the Charaka Samhita sums up the ethical injunctions of those times, "He who practices medicine out of compassion for all creatures rather than for gain or for gratification of the senses surpasses all. Those who for the sake of making a living make a trade of medicine, bargain for a dust-heap, letting go a heap of gold. No benefactor, moral or material, compares to the physician who by severing the noose of death in the form of fierce diseases, brings back to life those being dragged towards death's abode, because there is no other gift greater than the gift of life. He who practices medicine while holding compassion for all creatures as the highest religion is a man who has fulfilled his mission. He obtains supreme happiness."

i. Ensure that you follow-up with your patients by staying in touch: Many dentists or broadly speaking, all healthcare professionals find it improper to stay in touch



(Image Courtesy: Google)

g. Cordial behaviour is sure to take us places: Cordial behaviour coupled with good manners is a part and parcel of confidence, competence and true abilities. Truth, if hidden from the patient, is surely bound to create problems for us. Anyways, veracity (truth telling) is one of the essential micro-principles of medico-legal aspects and ethics in dentistry. Being a doctor or dentist surely means being compassionate, showing empathy, respecting values using the appropriate and congenial words in communication, establishing a proper eye contact and all those activities which show you as healthcare personnel in a noble profession are also part of cordial behaviour and good manners. We would always have to treat patients (behaviour wise) in the same way; we would want to be treated ourselves.

h. It's our duty to heal first and then earn and not vice versa: We as dentists are in such a profession where medico-legal ethics binds us down to such environment where we have to see healthcare as a calling and not as a mere job. There's a stark difference between the two. When healthcare becomes merely a job, mistakes follow you quietly like a spy while when it is vice versa, you enjoy

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and is noticed by one and all, be it the people pertaining to our trade or others because any extraordinary service will always create enthusiastic clients (patients) plus helping out with a lot of referrals as well. A big plus point always is that satisfied patients are more likely to remain loyal to the clinic and pay their due payments on time to risk losing a great service potential offered by you. Just think of it, most of us rather think opposite to this in practice and fear losing the patients. We all search for various Practice Management Gurus all around to teach us to give us some tips which can overnight create a beeline of patients outside our clinic and we just start 'printing' the currency literally. This happens with me in many workshops which I conduct on Practice Management in various parts of India where participants meet me during a tea or lunch break and although they are polite in asking the tips to double, triple or quadruple the practice, but in short, they mean to ask sometimes, "Sir, please cut the crap, give us the Guru Mantra (fast track tips) to increase the footfall in the OPD". Hence, since the past few years, I have started laying out a first disclaimer slide at the start-up which usually says that I am no PM (Practice Management) Guru but a simple person with system enabled different "fundaas" and my fundaas won't appeal & apply to everyone in practice. I am sharing them because they applied to me and gave me success but apply them in your practice at your own risk. Also, I believe that Practice Management is no magical wand that just a twist here (learn a few tips in the Saturday - Sunday Workshop) and Monday morning onwards,

more patients start walking in your clinic. Practice Management is all about marketing yourself and your practice & marketing is not only external (and Expensive) but internal too (and Cheap too). To create a better patient experience, we have to stand out in our patients' minds for excellent customer service and do everything you can to exceed their expectations.

Now what are they and how to go about the same, we shall continue in the next part of this series? We all know 'customer is always right' philosophy but you will find it stranger to believe that there are situations and a reason for you to believe why "the customer is always right" is wrong also sometimes (or say, not always right).

Point to Ponder?

Stay tuned for this wonderful elaboration in the next issue of IDA times (Part 31).

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