In this economy, customer service matters more than ever!

By Roger P. Levin, DDS


Truly excellent customer service doesn’t happen by accident. It requires a system that dictates how every patient every hour of every day will be treated. And that system is absolutely vital to your practice.

In today’s economy, your customer service can be nothing less than top notch. Remember that patients are looking at every dollar they spend. They are looking for reasons to skip dental appointments. Something like poor customer service is all the justification they need. You can’t afford to let that happen. Your customer service must make it clear to patients that what your practice has to offer is worth their time and hard-earned money.

The far-reaching effects of customer service
Customer service has an impact on every aspect of your practice and helps lead to total success. Office appearance, staff members, location and even parking all combine to shape your patients’ attitudes about your practice. If their perception is positive, that’s good customer service. If their view of your practice is unfavorable, you should not be surprised when patients drift away from your practice.

Improving your customer service is a sure way to strengthen your competitive advantage. Every dental office should be trying to achieve what Levin Group calls Stage III Customer Service™. You want to exceed patient expectations at all times. Patients must feel special from the moment they walk into the office, whether it is the first time or the 50th time. It’s the key to case acceptance and long-term patient retention.

The quality of your customer service determines how comfortable you make patients feel. Their level of comfort therefore determines how successful your case presentations are. Remember that patients will not accept treatment in an environment that does not meet their expectations. In this economy, your goal is to exceed those expectations.

Superior customer service requires a system
Your system for customer service must be one that can be repeated for every patient, every day. You should outline the steps that lead to exceptional customer service so that all employees know what you want to have happen for every patient, every single time.

So just how can you improve the customer service in your office? Here are six of the many recommendations from Levin Group’s Stage III Customer Service Curriculum.

1) Give new patients clear instructions for getting to your office. This is easy to overlook. Some patients may become frustrated just getting to your office. Are you on a busy street or an unmarked side road? Will your patients have to pay for parking? If so, does your office validate? Give clear instructions and directions to patients when they call to avoid a negative reaction.

2) Do not make patients wait. When you fail to keep your appointment times with patients, you set the stage for their impression of your customer service — no matter what other positive experiences they had in your office. You ask that they arrive on time so make sure they can be seen on time!

3) Provide your staff members with clear job descriptions. Knowing exactly what is required of staff members will make them less stressed and friendlier to patients. Develop phone scripts so that your staff members are prepared when patients call. This will make for clearer, easier interaction with patients.

4) Be sure to greet patients warmly in the treatment area. Whether they are arriving for a hygiene visit, an evaluation or treatment, patients need to feel welcome. Something as simple as a smile or a handshake is a good beginning toward achieving this goal. Team training is the key, as I discuss in my GP Blog at www.levingrouppp.com.

5) Give patients something to help them remember your office. Pens, key chains, and notepads are just a few of the many mementos you can give your patients to keep your practice foremost in their minds. Giveaways like this don’t constitute great customer service — they merely reinforce it.

6) Think carefully about the specialists to whom you refer. If your patients have a bad customer service experience in a specialist’s office, then it will reflect poorly upon you. Make sure the specialists you work with have the same attitude toward customer service as you do.

Conclusion
Customer service goes far, far beyond simply being nice. It’s about making every interaction with every patient a pleasant experience. By consistently providing high levels of customer service, you are helping protect your greatest investment — your practice.

Superior customer service isn’t a luxury. In today’s economy, it’s a necessity.

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