Case acceptance and the orthodontist chairside manner

By Scarlett Thomas, Orthodontic Management Solutions

A casual “love ya” tossed at your spouse in the morning, without a warm hug and a loving look, can feel like nothing more than an empty gesture. But when you say it like you mean it, the other person can really feel the love, warmth and a genuine sense of care.

Patients are no different. They, too, can feel if you really care or not. Genuine concern for their well-being and happiness can help you win their hearts and their business. When it comes to people, you really have to show that you care by your actions and behavior, not just words. A kind and caring demeanor goes a long way in establishing strong bonds and relationships.

Often it’s the simplest things that matter. Here are some suggestions that can make a world of difference in how you are perceived by your patients.

• Take the time to sit down in a chair during the exam process. I have observed many offices over the years where doctors will stand during the entire exam. Guess what message you are giving out when you do that? “I’m in a hurry and I don’t have time for you.”

• Carefully review the health history form. It validates the patients’ time and effort in filling it out and shows you are really concerned about their well-being.

• Call out the clinical findings to your treatment coordinator in front of the patient. Don’t just view the X-rays in the clinic and then go into the exam room ready to give your treatment recommendations within the first few seconds. It is more about how you present the treatment plan than what your actual recommendations are. Remember, you have to sell it before you can do the treatment.

• Give ample time to the patients and/or parents to express their thoughts and concerns. Listen actively and really try to understand what they are saying and feeling instead of projecting your own ideas or recommendations. Forget about the task of diagnosing and treatment planning for a moment and think about the person.

If you go to the doctor because you have a stomach ache, you don’t care if he’s seen 3,000 other people with stomach aches during the course of his career. The last thing you want is for him to rush in the room, look you up and down, mumble some technical phrase you’ve never heard before and scratch something on a prescription pad, before hustling away again.

Asking the questions, even if you know the answers, establishes rapport. The patients want to know you care and that you are willing to take the time to understand what brought them into your office. When a practitioner gives patients undivided attention, he not only makes the patients feel comfortable and relaxed at the moment but also gains their loyalty and trust for the long term.

Another key element is patient involvement. You should make an effort to include the patient in your diagnosis and treatment planning. Doing so not only makes for a better atmosphere, but it also increases the likelihood that your patients will have the positive attitude that becomes the driving force behind your case acceptance and the growth of the practice.

To learn more about improving case acceptance and the clinician’s role during the new patient exam process, you are invited to attend one of Orthodontic Management Solutions’ Webinars. As a participant, you can ask questions and get answers in real time. Course materials are provided via e-mail, and participants are able to view a PowerPoint presentation during the course, using a Web conferencing tool. Webinars offer convenience and are very cost effective.

Visit www.Orthoconsulting.com for more information or to register!
Early breakthroughs for ortho makeover winner

By Kevin Johnson & Emily Ely

“Y ou know what? We’re operating in first-year mode when we’re in year three. That’s a problem ....”

These were the words of Dr. Brian Hardy of Hardy Orthodontics as he and his team began their Levin Experience® at our Advanced Learning Institute in Baltimore. As the winner of the Total Ortho Success Makeover, Dr. Hardy was beginning his year of management and marketing consulting with hopes of kick-starting his production.

Dr. Hardy’s practice was suffering growing pains that many young ortho practices experience. He is ready to go to the next level, but needs some tools to get him there.

The biggest issues addressed during Dr. Hardy’s and his staff’s visit to Levin Group were vision, goals and scheduling. These are key issues that need to be handled early in the consulting process. Vision, goals and scheduling serve as the foundation for all further progress.

But we will have to wait to discuss the topics in their own column. An important tool was missing from Dr. Hardy’s practice that had to be addressed before we did anything else.

The importance of meetings

Early on, we discovered something that was going to deprive Dr. Hardy’s practice of the valuable progress it wished to achieve — his practice did not have regularly scheduled meetings. Dr. Hardy couldn’t see the value in meeting because his practice didn’t have a good history with them.

For while, he and his team had late-day huddles, but these soon ceased when Dr. Hardy discovered little was getting accomplished. He had come to realize that such late afternoon meetings could never really work because everyone wants to go home, not rehash the day.

With a staff of three people, Dr. Hardy believed that formal meetings in general didn’t seem very necessary for his practice. After all, at any given time, he could just pull them aside to discuss an issue that needed addressing.

We advised Dr. Hardy not to throw the baby out with the bath water. Meetings do matter. They serve a critical function in the office, no matter what the size of the practice. They improve communication, inspire cooperation and help build a stronger team.

Staff meetings should be held every four to six weeks, focus on larger issues and last 60 to 90 minutes. Morning meetings, on the other hand, should be held every day for 10 to 15 minutes and focus on the current day’s patients, schedule, opportunities and potential problems. If recurring issues are brought up consistently in the morning meetings, they should be discussed and handled at the staff meeting. Levin Group teaches that there are a number of steps that can be taken to ensure staff meetings are positive and results-oriented:

• Have a clear vision. It is critical the orthodontist lay out a clear vision for staff meetings. When staff members understand the purpose, they become actively engaged in the process. As the practice leader, orthodontists need to be good communicators.

• Put together a written agenda. If the staff meeting is to be considered worthwhile by team members, there should be a written agenda for the end of the meeting. The agenda should be distributed at least one day in advance so the staff members can review it and be prepared to participate.

• Maintain a respectful atmosphere. Run a meeting where all team members have an equal opportunity to participate when they choose to do so. Set a simple rule that when one person is talking no one else can interrupt. Effective meetings are dialogues — not a monologue.

As we discussed the importance of implementing morning meetings, we explained to Dr. Hardy and his team that they shouldn’t expect the first several meetings to be highly productive. It’s all about getting the process started.

Levin Group Senior Consultant

Kevin Johnson has spent the last eight years working as a Levin Group orthodontic management and marketing consultant. He manages a team of consultants and is a frequent lecturer at the Levin Advanced Learning Institute. Johnson earned his degree from Towson University in 1996.

With many years of marketing experience, Levin Group Consultant Emily Ely joined Levin Group in 2008. Ely uses her unique knowledge and experience to provide marketing solutions for orthodontic practices. She earned her degree in business from Towson University.

Both Ely and Johnson are members of the Ortho Expert Team, a specialized group of consultants who are trained in the needs of orthodontic practices.

Dr. Hardy had two concerns about these new meetings. He felt somewhat apprehensive about our request of turning over organizational responsibilities to one of his staff members. In fact, without being the one “in charge,” he wasn’t sure what he was going to do with himself.

Our advice was this — if you find yourself having free time, then you have time to contact a referring doctor or two. Dr. Hardy and his staff laughed, appreciating the message we were trying to convey.

Conclusion

Much was accomplished in this first in-depth discussion with Dr. Hardy and his staff. As Hardy Orthodontics’ experience at the Advanced Learning Institute drew to a close, an exhilarated Dr. Hardy admitted to being slightly overwhelmed but very upbeat and optimistic. As his team prepared to leave, he looked around the room at his team and us and said, “This is a lot to digest! But to achieve the end result, it’s well worth it. This is definitely better than just doing what we’ve been doing and getting the usual result.”

As consultants, we couldn’t agree more. His path toward becoming a Levin Practice® is now firmly rooted. Join us next time when Dr. Hardy starts putting what he learned into practice!

To jumpstart your own Total Ortho Success Practice Makeover, come experience Dr. Roger Levin’s new Total Ortho Success Seminar, July 24-25 in Las Vegas. Ortho Tribune readers are entitled to receive a 20 percent courtesy; call (888) 973-0000 and mention “Ortho Tribune” or e-mail customerservice@levingroup.com with “Ortho Tribune Coupon” in the subject line. For more information, go to www.levingrouortho.com.

About the authors

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For more than two decades, Levin Group has been dedicated to improving the lives of orthodontists. Visit Levin Group at www.levingrouortho.com. Levin Group also can be reached at (888) 973-0000 and by e-mail at customerservice@levingroup.com.