What kind of impression is your practice making?

By Scarlett Thomas
President, Orthodontic Management Solutions

So my girlfriend calls me the other day. Her son has been a patient of a particular orthodontic practice for many years. Her relationship with this practice has always been pleasant, but nothing special.

One day she walked in for her son’s regular monthly appointment to find things just didn’t go well for seemingly no good reason. She became extremely frustrated and, as soon as she walked out the door, she called me and in a stronger-than-normal voice said, “I really dislike those people.”

This was a practice she had been loyal to for many years, but because of one negative exchange in a handful of minutes, the relationship and years of working together quickly turned sour. In a moment, the entire practice was reduced to “those people.” Because of one person, she now disliked them all.

Perhaps someone called in sick and the rest of the staff was running behind. Maybe the staff was training a new employee or possibly had just received bad news regarding a particular situation. Who knows?

But at that moment, she realized she no longer wanted to do business with that orthodontic practice anymore. She was ready to end a long-term affiliation because of a brief encounter over nothing significant. It was at that moment I realized how fragile orthodontic patient relationships really are.

The problem was that the orthodontic practice had not worked to establish a strong emotional connection with my friend and/or her family. It was just a group of people in a building going through the motions of handling daily affairs. The situation was simply a generalized indifference, but when the relationship was tested, it had no significant strength to support it.

In business and in life, we too often minimize or forget the impact we really have on others. Our reach can be deeper and wider than most of us could ever imagine. Unfortunately, it can take losing a valued patient to understand this.

Let this be a reminder to you that your orthodontic practice, your staff and you personally have a far greater effect on your patients than you could ever imagine.

No job is insignificant or exempt from making an important and impressive impact on the value and experience an orthodontic practice delivers to its patients.

To help your team understand its individual effects on your practice and patients, you must get specific. Training, role-playing and communication are keys to a successful business. Just saying, “You play an important role,” won’t tell the employees what they need to do or do differently every day.

Every decision, action and activity presents an impression. They must understand that what they do every day has a meaning far greater than the tools they use, the items they handle and the paper they deal with.

In fact, your staff may be the very reason patients do business with your practice and/or the very reason they don’t. This being said, before the members of your team can embrace the impact of each of their respective actions, they must understand the impact they have on the practice as a whole.

They must be trained how to communicate with patients. They must operate with constant mindfulness about their ability to build or destroy relationships in a heartbeat.

I recommend having regular meetings to discuss the following:

• What is the real impact your staff has on the well-being of your patients?
• What recent negative situations have come to the surface concerning your patients?
• How were these situations handled?
• What could have been done differently to resolve the issue?
• What effect on the patient does it have when things go right? Or when things go wrong?
• What does the staff need to know and do regularly to make a great impression with your patients?

Every staff member needs to be focused on the impact he or she has on the practice and the patients. It is a key factor in the greater success of your practice.

To learn more about the impact employees have on your business, please join the “4 Keys To Orthodontic Success” Webinar series. You can register and find out more information by visiting orthoconsulting.com and checking under events and seminars.

Scarlett Thomas is an orthodontic practice consultant who has been in the field for more than 23 years, specializing in case acceptance, team building, office management and marketing. As a speaker and practice consultant, she has an exceptional talent to inform, motivate and excite.