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Customer Service Revisited

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Customer Service Revisited

ALLEN VEAN, DMD



It is hard to believe it has been over seven years since I have had the distinct honor of being co-editor of our publication. One of my first Reflections discussed some reasons why the top companies in the world are rated number one. The fact is they not only have outstanding products, but their customer service is beyond reproach. Among these companies are

Amazon, Lexus and Ritz-Carlton. Anyone who

has engaged with these outstanding companies can attest to their excellence in all aspects of their business.

The last few years have certainly been an unbelievable challenge to our profession in maintaining the highest quality experience our patients have come to expect. In revisiting my first years in practice, it appears to me customer service has not really changed as much as we might think. We are in the people-pleasing business. In the early 80s, there were no cell phones, computers, Internet or social media. Equipment modernization was on the horizon and would change how we treated our patients. The digital age was about to explode at light speed. The practice management industry was about to blast off. Thus, we had to rely on “old-fashioned” customer service.

In my specialty training, rotations were required of the residents in all aspects of pediatrics. We would spend time in anesthesia, general pediatrics, orthopedics and surgical pediatrics. One of my fondest memories was of Dr. Tague Chisholm. Tague was a pediatric surgeon with a specialty in cleft lip and palate. He was an outstanding surgeon but, even more importantly, he was an incredible human being, whose brilliant communication skills were displayed every time he spoke to a child and their family. He and I would relax

in the physician’s lounge (yes, dentists were allowed) and I would ask him for advice about practicing dentistry. Among his many recommendations, his most emphatic was, “Allen, kill ‘em with correspondence.”

With that advice, my IBM Self-Correcting Selectric got plenty of use in writing thank-you notes to parents, referring dentists, physicians, and any other identifiable sources. In addition, there was always a personal note at the bottom of the letter. As we fast forward, the old IBM was replaced with state-of-the-art technology (e-mail and text messages). However, technology does not replace a pleasant and welcoming voice when a patient calls, nor does it replace returning phone calls and messages in a timely manner. Technology cannot replace an office environment that gives the patient the feeling they are in the right place. The most beautiful website, SEO and analytics cannot replace the “old fashioned” personal touch we seem to have lost in today’s world. I remember one of my mentors once advised me that patient retention is one of the keys to practice success. Patient retention is more valuable and much less expensive than patient acquisition costs. This still holds true today. Your practice has a built-in referral source. Take the best care of your patients with the best possible team that can be assembled, and you will be rewarded many times over. The adage, “You are only as good as your weakest link,” is completely applicable to dentistry.

Your patients and families will soon forget a complex procedure. But they will forever remember the kindness in the post-operative phone call to check on their condition.

As always, we encourage your participation in our publication by submitting your thoughts and comments or an article of interest. Thank you for being part of organized dentistry and making a difference.

ALLEN VEAN, DMD
ARTICULATOR CO-EDITOR