



CONSULTANT'S CORNER

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Top Ten Customer Service Tips

We all talk about, and as consumers crave, great customer service. How often do we actually have this experience?

Many dentists and team members will cringe at my next statement – but, for a consumer, this is a reality. Dental offices smell the same, look similar, and basically share the same service menu and fees. What then distinguishes one practice from another?

If word-of-mouth is your marketing tool of choice, the answer is likely customer service. Sound too simple? Consider this: For an adult patient, in a general practice, much of what you will provide has been delivered before by another dentist. Why then has a patient chosen to leave another caregiver for your services? Certainly there are the obvious reasons patients change dentists. The patient may have moved, the former dentist may be deceased, the practice wished the patient not to return, and so on. But the most common reason is the failure of the practice to consistently deliver quality customer service.

Often, dental practices lose their best patients, who somehow get lost in computer patient lists. They aren't missed until that fateful day when the dentist says: "What ever happened to Sally Jones? I haven't seen her for a while."

Here are some customer service facts to consider:

- Dissatisfied customers tell an average of 10 - 20 people
- The cost of attracting a new customer is 5 times more than keeping a customer
- 96% of customers do not complain – they go to a competitor
- 95% of dissatisfied customers will return if their complaints are handled well and quickly
- Quality customer service may be the only variable to distinguish your practice
- Customers are willing to pay more to receive better service
- Service that builds customer loyalty can increase profits, reduce costs, and lead to increased employee productivity

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Challenge yourself and your dental team to examine and implement these Top Ten Customer Service Tips:

Tip #1: Know Your Customer Service Turn-Offs!

They can be broken down into three areas: value turn-offs, system turn-offs, and service turn-offs. Value Turn-Offs represent poor value for the product, workmanship, or service. System Turn-Offs include poorly trained staff, inadequate record keeping, and computer systems. Service Turn-Offs are behaviors and actions that make customers feel they are not valued.

Tip #2: Avoid Customer Turn-Offs

These include the "I-don't-care" attitude, the brush off ("I don't know"), failure to greet and smile at the patient, and robotic responses ("Have a nice day").

Tip #3: Learn the Five Universal Criteria for Customer Service Satisfaction

- Dependability and Reliability: Follow through on what you promise to do.
- Confidence and Assurance: Know your job and communicate with confidence.
- Courtesy and Concern: Show you care by communicating with sincerity.
- Helpfulness and Willingness: Attend to needs in a timely manner.
- Congruent Professional Presentation: Send a consistent message through choice of words, tone, body language, and appearance.

Tip #4: Adopt the Elements of Courtesy

We know that 75-80% of a customer's judgement about service is determined by how courteous they perceive us to be. Smile! Maintain eye contact. Listen. Introduce yourself and your role. Respect the patient's privacy and confidentiality.

Tip #5: Take Action

How do you want customers to perceive you? What steps can you take to achieve the customer perception you desire? List six things you can do right now to take more control over customer service. List six things you do unknowingly that may create negative service interactions.

Tip #6: Align Customer Expectations

Provide general information about "how things operate," so the patient will feel comfortable. Encourage questions and respond. If providing a lot of detail, provide documentation in writing as well so the patient can review later. Seek to understand and clarify expectations, and acknowledge disappointment when expectations differ.

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Tip #7: Use Positive Language

Choice of language can produce positive, neutral, or negative responses.

- Demonstrate helpfulness: *"Please call if I can assist in any way."*
- Express willingness: *"I can do that for you."*
- Specify time lines: *"We will have that prepared in five minutes."*
- Check on satisfaction: *"What else can I do for you at this time?"*
- Maximize courtesy: *"You are very welcome."*


Tip #8: Strike NO from Your Vocabulary

Eliminate "no, can't, won't, shouldn't, didn't, and never," and replace with "yes, can, do, will, should, does, and always."

Tip #9: Handle Service Complaints

Create customer loyalty. A dissatisfied customer will tell an average of ten people. A complaint is an opportunity to win a customer's loyalty if you can listen, apologize, and problem-solve.

Tip #10: Listen Actively

Learn to be a good listener. Be present by giving the patient your full attention. Reflect back with gestures or paraphrase the patient to ensure you have a shared understanding. Listen with empathy. Put yourself in the other person's shoes to understand their "feeling state." Be with the person without judging feelings. Understand the difference between empathy and sympathy. Sympathy is feeling the identical feelings, empathy is being present while the other person experiences individual feelings. 



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