

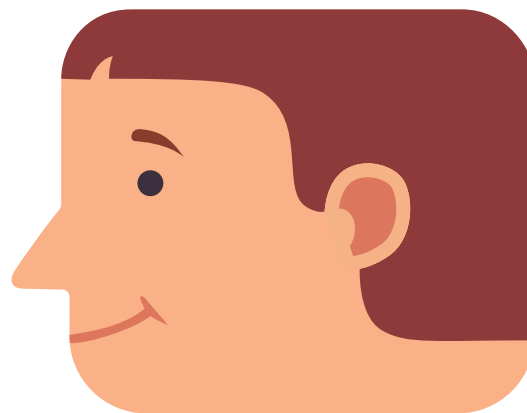
# TROJAN TODAY

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A NEWSLETTER FOR CLIENTS OF TROJAN PROFESSIONAL SERVICES, INC.

## Do you have Phone Power or Phone Phizzle?

by Belle DuCharme



Recent research on the continuing growth of corporate dentistry has solo practitioners wondering what the future holds for the growth of their practices. Look around and you will observe a fragile and competitive world that is more and more driven by social media and marketing strategies.

Even the insurance-driven patient is concerned about the provider of services when it comes to getting the best value and quality care. Relying on word-of-mouth referrals may not be enough to propel practice growth if corporate dentistry engages in extensive marketing campaigns in your area.

The competitive advantage of a small office is its service. Unfortunately, I still hear about and witness dentists hiring people for the front office whose temperaments, social skills, and customer service training are not suitable for their positions. The worn-out lament of *"How hard is it to answer the phone?"* just doesn't cut it anymore. You may have the best interactive website in town, a beautiful facility with CAD/CAM technology and Cone beam, but it doesn't matter if patients are soured by the person(s) answering your phone. Excellent phone skills require training to ensure the person answering the phone understands the big picture of creating positive impressions and branding the practice.

Anyone who answers your phone is the practice ambassador and first point of contact for your practice. The goal is to build immediate rapport and to schedule an appointment with as little distraction and interruption as possible. It is time to optimize the phone's power in gaining and retaining patients.

Many a dentist has paid thousands of dollars in direct mail pieces or other types of advertising to make the phone ring only to have the business staff tell the patient you are booked out for three months for a hygiene appointment. The patient is not impressed with your popularity. Or the staff insists the potential patient must



have a ninety-minute exam with the dentist before a hygiene visit can be scheduled. Unless you are doing dentistry as a hobby or have unlimited resources for paying your overhead, this is not the way to attract new patients to your practice. Statistics show the most valued service in a dental office is a professional cleaning yet you are blocking access to what the patient wants. *What if they have periodontal disease?* You can still give them a prophylaxis and then diagnose the services necessary on a treatment plan after the complete evaluation and necessary x-rays. The fact you want and need new patients but cannot offer them timely appointments is contrary to customer satisfaction. Patients calling your office want an appointment not a dissertation about how you cannot accommodate them.

Don't have an appointment for a new patient within a week unless you get a cancellation? Have you considered that maybe prescheduling all patients is not working for you or perhaps your clinical hours are not as convenient for the patient as for the staff? Do you offer extended hours or lunch hour appointments? Have you prescheduled all the prime times to existing patients without offering them other times? (For example: "Mr. Brown, I see you always like a 4:00," may not be most beneficial if even though he's taken this appointment for the last twenty years, he retired ten years ago and can come any time.) Have you considered blocking and holding prime times for new patients? If they aren't filled 48 hours in advance, you can offer openings to existing patients.

Creating a positive impression of the dental practice comes naturally on the days when everything is moving smoothly within the practice, but the key is consistency of positive impressions even when chaos has exploded around you. Even losing one new patient costs the practice thousands of dollars in potential services and referrals. Consistency takes focus on the caller and being able to separate yourself from what is happening in the office.

## Use the following to better phone power:

- **Think of the phone call as a chance for you to perform (like an actor) the best customer service of your life.** Keep your personal feelings and moods separate from your professional demeanor. It must sound like you really mean it when you say, "How may I help you?" Practice in front of a mirror or with a co-worker to see how you look and sound to others.

- **Answer the phone promptly before the third ring. Always announce the name of the practice followed by your name.** People want to know to whom they are speaking. Ask patients how they would like to be addressed before you call them by their first names.
- **Listen with empathy and concern for the caller.** Drop what you are doing to concentrate on the caller and remember the purpose is to connect and to appoint.
- **Build rapport with patients immediately by letting them know the quality of services they will receive with a caring supportive staff.** Repeat back facts so they know you are listening.
- **Speak in a clear and conversational tone.** Assure the patient you will be able to schedule a convenient appointment time. Smile!
- **Complete the call by repeating important facts.** Say, "We are looking forward to meeting you on (appointment date). If you have any questions or concerns prior to that time, please feel free to call us."

Communication by telephone is still the most powerful tool to the success of a practice and is critical for creating an image or brand of superior professionalism. People have a choice between a corporate dental practice or a smaller intimate setting where they are given more individualized personal care. Next time you answer the phone, remember you are the goodwill ambassador of your practice.



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## Quote-Worthy

“Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.”

— Dwight D. Eisenhower