

Recommendation is the key

Ashley Latter explains how referrals are the easiest way to grow your business and can potentially grow your private work by as much as a £100,000 a year



A few weeks ago I was delivering an in house ethical sales and communication programme to a dental practice and I was horrified to learn that this practice spent over £40,000 a year on advertising in trying to obtain new patients, yet this practice did not have a standardised referral system in place. On further investigation, the practice did not measure the success rate of the advertising spend and in short did not know if it was a success or not. This is a different article for a different time. What I am going to share with you is a proven way on how to increase the number of new patients

through the door, its free, it's easy and it is referrals.

My definition of a referral is when someone recommends a patient to you and they end up buying your services. The chances are, you probably receive these at the moment. Typically referrals are of a similar mind set from the person who introduced them to you and as you already have something in common, it is easy to build relationships with them. In short they are first class patients. The other main advantage of getting referrals it costs nothing, except a thank you card, more about this later.

So would you like more of them?

If you do then all you need to do is ask your existing dentists for them. By coaching my clients to ask for referrals and putting systems in place, they have seen an increase in work by as much as £100,000 extra a year. In some cases, it has literally doubled and in some cases trebled the number of new clients. In other words, if you ask your existing delighted clients for referrals, then they will more likely help you and you will receive more clients.

This subject normally brings about dread and fear into my clients and when I ask a group what percentage asks for

referrals, only about 10% of the room will actually admit to asking and having a system in place. From coaching several thousands business people, the reasons why they don't ask, or have a system in place vary from

1. They never thought of it
2. They took it for granted that the patients would recommend their friends anyway
3. They don't know how to ask
4. It is outside their comfort zone and they feel uncomfortable
5. They feel they are begging and they sound like they are desperate for new clients.

These are valid reasons; after all you weren't taught these skills. Another reason I often hear is that it sounds cheeky. However, if we see things from the dentist's point of view, they are probably delighted with the work you do, have enjoyed the whole experience and are delighted that you have taken the trouble to ask them.

One answer to point number 2, that they would take it for granted. I believe that if your clients have had a great experience with you, then yes they will recommend these services. However, if you politely ask your clients, they will more likely to recommend your services and thus you should receive more introductions.

So if there are many advantages to having a referral system let's look at how you ask and what you can do after to receive even more. All you need to is to develop a script and I suggest something like this.

'Mr/Mrs Dentist, firstly can I thank you for your business, we really appreciate it, can I please ask a small favour? If you ever come across any other dentist that might benefit from my services could you please hand them one of my cards, we would love to work with them, in the same way as always enjoy working with you.'

It is as simple as that. Hand your clients some of your cards and they will most likely keep them and put them in their bag if they are a lady or wallet if they are a man. Now when the dentist is out there in the big wide world networking, they can then hand their friends your card and tell them of the great experience they have.

Get lots of cards printed and hand



them out. You could have an army of dentists working for you as an unpaid sales team

All of a sudden you now have an army of salespeople working for your practice, who are working for you outside practice hours and there is no salaries to pay. Just think if 10 of your clients introduce a new dentist, is it possible that you could generate an extra £100,000 a year.

Once you have received a new client as a referral and you find out who the referring source is, then you must thank the referring client. I strongly suggest that you get some thank you cards made with your business logo on, with the words 'Thank you' on. Your clients will be delighted to receive them and in addition, I also suggest that you send a small gift. If it is a lady then a bunch of flowers would be a great idea. Can you imagine the joy and happiness your client will feel when they receive a thank you card and a bunch of flowers thanking them for introducing their friends.

During the relationship, you may have found out that your client has a certain hobby for example they might play golf, then you could send a golf book, or even some golf balls as a thank you. It shows that you care and you are going the extra mile. It is also something that your patient

will enjoy and remember. These things cost virtually nothing, but bring such joy to people's lives and are a great way of thanking your clients. I am certain it will encourage them to think of more people to refer to you in the future. Small things make a big difference.

It might feel uncomfortable asking for referrals at the start, however, as you start to ask, I can promise it will be come easier and enjoyable once you start getting better results.

Referrals is by far the most effective, most cost effective way of obtaining new clients, all you need to is ask. If you don't ask the customer cannot say YES.

For the last 10 years, Ashley has been coaching forward thinking dentists and their teams improve their communication and ethical sales/marketing skills, which has led to an improvement in uptake of treatment and their bottom line. He has personally coached over 4250 dentists on his two day ethical sales and communication programme. He has also personally coached over 27 laboratory technicians improve their own skills. To learn more and to register for Ashley's FREE email newsletter, please visit www.ashleylatter.com