

# Connecting with your patient

You have to connect with the patient if you want them to say yes. Ashley Latter, the ethical sales and communication coach tells us why talking to and interacting with your patient is of the utmost importance



Over the last 10 years Ashley has coached over 3100 dentists and their teams on his Two Day Ethical sales & Communication Programme. He is also the author of a brand new book 'Helping Patients to say YES'. To register for his FREE email newsletter, please visit [www.thesellingcoach.co.uk](http://www.thesellingcoach.co.uk)

**Y**ou have all probably heard the saying that people will only do business with people they like and can associate with. If we all agree with this, then the most important part of any patient consultation, is the building of relationships and I find it amazing through coaching over 3000 dentists and their teams on my Two-Day programme that this is the area that is most overlooked. To explain the importance of this, I would like to share a personal story with you.

I decided to finance a friend of mine who is a builder who was going to buy a very run down property, to develop it and then sell it on. It was in a good area and the deal fitted with my risk taking. What I needed however was the finance to do the deal quickly. So I contacted my existing bank and for the purposes of this article let's call them EXISTING BANK and I also contacted a client who I do business with and let's call them NEW BANK. On the basis that I am borrowing over £140,000 I decided to ask them to visit my offices, EXISTING BANK at 2.00pm Followed by NEW BANK at 4.00pm.

EXISTING BANK arrived and they were two advisors and they were nice and pleasant. They built rapport fairly well, although I was shocked when they asked me what I did for a living, as I had been a business customer for over 16 years. They offered a good scheme and I said that I would chew it over with my wife (who incidentally I hadn't discussed it with properly yet) and they left. It was an average experience. However, I could not believe that they did not know what I did for a living.

NEW BANK arrived on time and there was just one of them and he was called Brian. Brian spent the first few minutes asking me lots of questions about my business and ask-

ing me lots of questions about my web site that he had visited the day before and also some of the training that I had delivered. We must have spent at least 20 minutes discussing my business and my life and I was in my element. You see ME is my favourite conversation. He asked me questions about what I required and presented some quotations that he had already prepared on the basis of a quick telephone conversation we had the day earlier. You know what, I had already decided to do business with Brian and NEW BANK and this was before I had seen the offer he was making to me. I was very impressed with the way Brian had been genuinely interested in me and had taken the time to prepare for my meeting and he had learnt all about my business. We were connecting. This guy had Ashley Lattered me.

Let me tell you what happened over the next three weeks.

1. One of his associates came and collected the paperwork within 24 hours.
2. I had regular telephone calls from his P.A. Stephanie every other day informing me of the progress of the loan
3. Once we had completed, I got a telephone call telling me the money was ready and was in my bank.
4. A few days later I got a bunch of flowers thanking me for my business and for choosing NEW BANK.

It was harder to do business with NEW BANK, as I had to provide information that my existing bank already had, however it was joy to do business with.

I have now moved all my personal banking, all my Business banking including three mortgages and Insurance with Brian. They are now my EXISTING BANKERS.

I find in life that for every 100 purchases/ transactions I make about 3-4% are memo-

# Patient communication

rable and enjoyable. The other 96% are nothing special, or the service is average and you don't enjoy it. So I am delighted to share one of the 3-4% experiences.

I have recently observed some new patient consultations with a client of mine and from my experience, there are many key points dentists and their teams can take away from this story and apply it in their practices, especially new consultations. These include:


1. Prepare thoroughly for your patient consultation. Ensure that you have a detailed questionnaire from the patient before hand, so that you know information about your patient. Make sure that you have your evidence ready including pictures, testimonials etc. so that you can demonstrate to the patient the work you can do. Have a staff meeting and ensure everyone's attitude is correct. Everyone is in sales. Remember proper preparation prevents poor performance.

2. Don't put the patient in the dental chair first. Sit down in a consulting room and spend at least 5-10 minutes getting to know your patient. Do not talk clinical here. Become genuinely interested in your patient. Really focus on getting the customer to like you and CONNECT with them. The two easiest ways I know of getting someone to like you is to become genuinely interested in the patient (remember most people like to talk about themselves) and pay your patient a compliment. However, you have to be sincere.

3. You need to look the part here and that does not mean £20.00 shoes and Mickey Mouse socks. Do I need say anymore about this?

4. Encourage the other person to talk and become a brilliant listener. Show empathy for the patient's requirements and needs. Listening is such a skill that is overlooked here. You have to be 100% focused on the patient and listen carefully to the worlds they use. This is not a time to listen selectively. I normally call this men type listening.

5. The biggest mistake that dentists make is they ASSUME what a patient requires, or in some cases, can afford. I see this so often and I can't believe how many dentists make their minds up about patients on what they think the patient can and cannot afford. It is criminal. So once you have finished building rapport with your patient, ask



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lots of questions about their clinical needs and what is important to the patient. There are many advantages to asking questions, and one article cannot give this topic enough justice. On my programme, I spend five hours on this topic alone. However, the main advantage is that you can find out why the patient's wants the treatment. The vast majority of decisions are made on emotion and by asking questions you can find out what the patient's hot buttons are and why they want the treatment. Do this and you are on the way to getting the patient to say yes to you. Here are six key questions you need to ask:

- How did you hear about our practice? (if it is a new patient)
- Is there anything you would like to change about your appearance/smile if there were, what would it be?
- How do you rate your smile on a scale of 1 -10? 1 you are not happy, 10 you are delighted?
- What is your vision for your appearance?
- Why is that important to you?
- If you could achieve this smile, what would it mean to you?

The last question will not only give you information of why the patient wants treatment, but also they will also start to buy from you. You see the idea becomes theirs and not yours.

Many studies have demonstrated that 85% of a person's success is down to skills and attitudes and only 15% of a person's success is down to their technical ability. You see a patient takes it for granted that you have the technical ability to deliver the treatment. What they are looking for is if they feel comfortable with the dentist, which would probably mean that they like them. The patient is often thinking - 'Was the dentist genuinely interested in me?'

I have had literally hundreds of success stories from dentists who have adopted this new approach. They tell me that they have seen better relationships being built and also a significant increase in up take of treatment.

If you invest the time and become genuinely interested in the patient, the patient will become genuinely interested in what you have got to offer. People always buy people first. **A**