

# Achieving treatment acceptance

Getting patients to accept treatment is all about communication, writes Ashley Latter



pushy, as if you are trying to sell something

- You can find out about the patient's budget
- Most decisions are made on emotion and you can find out what the emotional reason are and why people buy.

From delivering the Ethical Sales and Communication Programme to over 1,000 dentists and their teams, here is a list of key questions that have worked very successfully in the surgery:

- 'How long is it since you last visited the dentist?'
- 'How did you hear about us?'
- 'Are you happy with your appearance at the moment?'
- 'What changes would you like to make?'
- 'If you had a magic wand, how would you change your appearance?'
- 'What image would you like to project?'
- 'If you could rate your appearance on a scale of one to 10, what would it be? Take one as 'I hate my smile/appearance' and 10 as 'I love my smile/appearance'
- 'If it is a five, what would have to change for it to be a 10?'

The two questions I get asked the most by the dental profession are the following:

1. What are the biggest mistakes dentists make when presenting a treatment case to a patient?
2. What is the most important skill you can develop?

I can answer both these questions in this article, because in my opinion it is the same thing.

Firstly let me answer question one. In my opinion, the biggest mistake dentists make is not spending enough quality time building relationships with the patients and not asking them questions about what their wants and needs are.

In fact, I believe it is a common mistake right across

all industries whereby sales people start selling products and services without first finding out what the customer requires.

The most important skill you can have is the ability to build relationships, ask questions and really listen to what the patients require, so you can truly understand what they want.

What are the advantages of spending time with your patient and asking those questions? There are many:

- You can find out the patient's goals
- You can find out what is important to them
- The best way to influence a patient is by asking the right questions. The idea becomes theirs and you don't sound

Many dentists tell me that the one to 10 question works extremely well for them and it really opens up lots of things to talk about. It also opens up a new way of thinking. It might feel awkward at first, but after a while it becomes part of the routine.

At this moment you have some very useful information. You know where the patient is at, what their goals are and what is important to them.

If you have experienced the situation where a patient doesn't take up their treatment plan, it might be for several reasons. One of them could be because they are not in enough pain to do some thing about it. That is not physical pain, but mental pain.

For example, if someone has stained teeth and they show an



**Ashley Latter helps dentists and support staff grow their sales and bottom line results, by developing ethical sales relationship skills**

interest in tooth whitening but it doesn't really bother them too much or impact their work or appearance, then chances are they will not make any investment over €350.

However, on the other side of the coin, let's take a look at a situation where it does bother someone. This is a real life story from a dentist called Neal Sampson.

'A woman came to visit me. She was having a check-up and, after questioning her, she told me that she was not happy with the gap between her front two teeth. Her daughter was getting married shortly and she had spoken to a few friends about the gap but they had turned her against the idea of getting it fixed. However, after some questioning, she went on to say that she would not feel happy at her daughter's wedding and would feel awkward about having photographs taken. Through my questioning and really listening to the answers, she convinced herself it was important to get her front teeth sorted and she went ahead with the treatment. In the past, before I implemented the questioning procedure, she probably would have walked out of my practice without having the treatment done.'

In this instance the gap was bothering her and therefore she wanted to do something about it. It was her daughter's wedding and she wanted to look good on the pictures.

So some of the questions you could ask are:

- 'Mrs Patient, why is it important that you do something about the gap?'
- 'What impact is that having on you?'
- 'How does it make you feel?'

These are just three basic questions to find out the impact on the patient if they do not proceed to have the treatment.

The last question you could ask then is:

- 'So if we could make the necessary changes, what would it mean to you?'


The patient will voice the benefits of taking up your treatment offer and then, of course, they will then talk

themselves into it. It becomes their idea and not yours. They have sold the idea to themselves.

The key to asking the right questions is to listen attentively and follow their agenda. For example, when we are listening to a patient, do we really listen, or are we thinking about what to say back to the patient?

You must be genuinely interested and be really keen to listen and understand. We need to listen to understand. Please

talk to a few people you know and trust, and ask them how they rate you as a listener. You

may not like the answers, but at least you can then do something about it. 

- Give yourself plenty of time to ask questions
- Listen to their agenda and do not focus on yours. Listen attentively
- Ask open questions. Get the other person talking about himself or herself
- Become genuinely interested
- Either you or your nurse should write appropriate notes
- Let them talk for 80% of the time. The more you listen, the more you learn
- Ask lots of questions and you can, through effective listening, influence a patient

PRACTICE PLAN
BREAKFAST & EVENING MEETINGS

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Date	Venue	Location	Date	Venue	Location
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Wed 2nd Nov '05	David Lloyd Centre	Finchley	Thur 3rd Nov '05	David Lloyd Centre	Chigwell
Tue 8th Nov '05	David Lloyd Centre	Solihull	Wed 9th Nov '05	David Lloyd Centre	Birmingham
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