



MANY DENTISTS
SPEAK TO PATIENTS
WITHOUT PROPERLY
COMMUNICATING,
WRITES ASHLEY
LATTER

Talk the patient's language

Ashley Latter is a business coach who specialises in coaching the Ethical Sales Programme for dentists and support staff. Over 850 people have taken part in the programme over the last three years and it is unique in that coaches people to develop new skills and attitudes that bring about a behaviour change and bottom-line results back in the practices

Have you ever wondered why sometimes patients do not take up your treatment plan? I think there are several reasons and I will take a few at a time and explore.

REASON 1

The major reason I think is that the dentist talks too technically and uses language that the patient doesn't understand. Let me give you an example:

- Dear Patient,*
I enclose details of your treatment plan for anterior implant retained crowns.
1 Mount study models on a semi adjustable articulator in RCP
2 Take bite record using face bow to be mounted on Denar
3 Diagnostic wax-up

- 4** Make Michigan splint so RCP = ICP and establishes anterior guidance for protrusive excursions and canine guidance for lateral excursions with no non-working side interferences
5 Provide provisional restorations maintaining occlusal balance
6 Place implants. I'll advise of number at later date
7 Take bite record using face bow to mount working models on Denar
8 Laboratory make crowns on Denar, RCP = ICP, guidance as already established
9 Fit crowns on implants
10 Make another Michigan splint to protect crowns.
 TOTAL COST= £7500.00
If all this is Swahili, ring me.
We can start next week.
Yours sincerely,

The Dentist.

This is actually a real life example. Now, I know this is an extreme example and maybe you are not as bad as this, but what type of language do you use when you are providing a solution?

REASON 2

In life when we make a purchase of a product or service we buy the benefits of what we are purchasing and not the product itself. Let me give you an example. I recently bought a laptop so I can work on the trains as I travel around the country. I bought the laptop so that I could work smarter and ultimately spend more quality time with my family. When people are buying teeth



whitening, they are really buying a nicer smile. So the dentist not talking about the benefits of the treatment has not motivated the patient to make a purchase.

REASON 3

Lack of reassurance. A friend told me recently that when he visited his dentist, he was told that he had grinding teeth and that it would be beneficial to have some treatment done. However, in the same breath, he was also told he could put it off if he wanted to. So my friend was confused and wasn't sure what to do. In the end he did nothing, as it wasn't a high enough priority.

REASON 4

Lack of passion, or enthusiasm.

REASON 5

The dentist, or their staff hasn't spent time building a relationship with the patient. They haven't spent time doing the basics.

REASON 6

The dentist is just not clear or concise. They mumble, or they

waffle. They impart too much information that is not relevant to what the patient wants to know. In other words, if the patient has three issues, then you have ten different ways of explaining the solution. Please just use the three - don't confuse the patient.

To help you overcome this and motivate your patients to make a purchase (so that you can deliver high value dentistry), there is a formula to follow and it goes like this.

Say a person wants to have some treatment, but can't make the normal hours. This is an example on how to sell the late night opening:

Feature: We are open on a late night on Thursday

Benefits: This will mean you will not lose any time off work. You will also be able to continue with the project you were talking about and have white teeth for the presentation.

By following this process, you are motivating the patient to buy off you and also you are talking about their agenda. Here is another example of selling the benefits of a crown:

A crown is a longer lasting option (**feature**). This will mean that it will save the tooth and blend in with the rest of your teeth (**benefit**), which will

mean that you will have a natural smile like before.

So now you want to gauge the patients reaction to your solution, so you ask what we call an evaluative question, or a 'test close'.

Examples of these are:

- How does that sound?
- Is that what you are looking for?
- Can you see that working for you?

So now we are using language on the patient's agenda and explaining the benefits of the services. If the patients say yes to the question, you are getting them to buy into the treatment. One of the additional things we can do to help improve our chances of getting the patients to buy is to use evidence. This can take different forms.

TESTIMONIAL LETTERS

There are two types of testimonial letters. They can be written, or verbal. Let's take verbal first. Verbal testimonials are when you ask your patient to make contact with someone who you know who has had the treatment so that they can explain in detail the benefits that they derived from having the treatment.

The other method is to get your patient to put in writing the benefits that they derived from being treated by you. Now I know what some of you are thinking that this isn't ethical and that we can't use the patient's name. All I can say is ask and see what happens.

A dentist I know from Bolton has a large photo album on his reception desk and in there must be at least 30 letters from happy patients telling them how happy they were to be treated. They are updated every month. Some people have left addresses on and others haven't. He says that people read them and often come in and ask for information on something that they have read. In addition to creating more opportunities (because people have read them already), it has convinced a lot of people of the value of the treatment and the high professional standards.

Here is how to ask: *'Mrs Patient, many thanks for allowing me to treat you and I would like to thank you for your business. I was wondering if you could help me? When I explain complicated treatment plans, it often helps if I can show them the benefits that other patients have received. Therefore, would you mind please putting the benefits in writing? Please find enclosed a pre-paid envelope and I really would like to thank you in anticipation'*.

I normally find if you ask for 10, you will get three to four. I have around 300 testimonial, card, and emails from happy customers. I ask someone every week if they will help me. A lot of them actually come unsolicited, which is always nice and a pleasant surprise. I also find that most people are happy

to help and feel honoured that you have asked them.

One last thought: what difference would it make to your business and practice, if you could show your patients 30 testimonial letters from happy and satisfied patients?

SUCCESS STORIES

Most people will often be persuaded about taking action if they hear someone else who has had a success. This is where you mention to your patient about a success from a previous story. So, for example, say someone is interested in an implant treatment, then you talk about someone else who had a similar problem and how he or she have benefited from having treatment from you. You don't need to mention names, because it may be unethical. The example must be relevant to the person who you are speaking to.

PICTURES

This is where you show before and after pictures, diagrams of patients who have had similar treatments to the one you are offering. You can also show people models.

FACTS AND FIGURES

This is when you discuss facts and figures to a patient to back up your treatment plan. For example, you might mention to a patient that you have done 100 of the treatment plans over the last 12 months. This gives the patient confidence that you can do a great job for them. When I am discussing my ethical sales course to dentists, I often tell them that I have delivered the programme to over 850 dentists, receptionists, hygienists etc. It

gives people confidence that I am a specialist in their industry and I know what I am talking about.

It is absolutely imperative that you build up your evidence folders, testimonials, models, diagrams etc. It must be on

show and also to hand.

On a recent programme I ran in Oxford, a dentist admitted he had all these things, but they were in drawers and in the storeroom. If you have a patient calling in to see you, then ensure you have these ready for

the appointment. You never know when you might need them. In addition, you must get permission from the patient to use the above. What I find in life is that if you just ask them, most people will gladly help you. **PD**

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