



# Practice Transitions Made Perfect™

## Newsletter Article Reprint

### Excellent Service

Fall 2005

Successful companies recognize the changing needs of today's consumer. The modern consumer seeks more convenience and more flexibility, not less. Customers require it and successful companies provide it at a price the market will bear while factoring in a profit. A basic law of consumerism promises that if you do not provide what the consumer needs or wants, some other business will. With that in mind, try to distinguish those conveniences that really matter to your patients from those that either have very little impact upon them or are not appropriate from a return-on-investment standpoint.

Some years ago, in an interview with the then president of American Airlines, the interviewer badgered the executive on items such as more leg room, better food, more convenient routes, etc. Finally, the executive responded by stating, "We can provide all of that and more, but very few American consumers are willing or able to pay for it." To engage our staff's time and our financial resources in activities and expenses that are unimportant to patients or do not return more revenues than they consume is financially irresponsible. Every practice is different and so, too, is the service mix that each will deliver. The conveniences and services that patients find desirable can provide an environment where a fee-for-service private practice can thrive.

Think about how these services and conveniences correlate with the reasons patients leave their dentists. Does your practice offer flexible or extended appointment times? When patients are concerned about job security; they are less likely to take time off from work to make a dental appointment. Thus, flexible hours are an important and a timely strategy for continued practice growth. How do you do your scheduling? This can further influence your ability to offer convenient appointments. If you block schedule by procedure, and a patient requires a crown at 5 p.m., how will you ever see that patient? If a new patient calls for an initial oral examination for 8 a.m., are you restricting your ability to see that patient by only seeing examinations at 2 p.m.?

Common sense would dictate that no professional service business in a competitive, capitalistic economy could prosper by offering less service and less convenience while charging more. Ask new patients: "Why did you leave your previous dentist?" You'll find their most common responses listed below.

1. I relocated far from the office.
2. The dentist retired and I did not like the new dentist.
3. I was looking for a new dentist, and my coworker raved about you.
4. My wife told me I should see you.
5. It was difficult to get an appointment with my previous dentist.
6. The dentist always exceeded my insurance maximum.
7. I had a broken tooth and the dentist could not see me for six weeks.
8. It hurt when he drilled and he didn't believe me.

Although the first four responses do not describe any disappointments with the dentist or the practice, all of the other responses are clear descriptions of a lack of service.

Today's patients are more pressed for time than ever before. They also are becoming increasingly familiar with excellent customer service due to the efforts of many companies to secure customers, both inside and outside of the healthcare industry. Dentists need to understand that many patients are employees on fixed salaries. They can't spend more than their budget allows without spending less in some other area of their lives.

They cannot simply work more hours or sell more products whenever necessary to make ends meet. Assisting those patients by monitoring their insurance usage throughout the year is a valuable service to them. Most dental computer programs can easily track this. It does not benefit anyone to try to have them to disregard their budget plans.

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Many dentists believe they cannot provide ideal care if they are restrained by insurance plan limits. It is simplistic to recommend only ideal dentistry and a rigid up front payment policy to every new patient. Providing ideal dental treatment results, while honoring the patient's fiscally responsible budget, calls for excellent treatment planning skills, proper sequencing of specialty treatment, a responsible front office staff and effective communication. Although certain cases demand an "all at once or no treatment at all" approach, most cases including complex ones can be completed in sequential phases the patient can afford. More skill and insight in treatment planning results in more patients being able to engage in complex dental treatment. When a new patient or a patient of record has a true emergency, he or she must be seen immediately (during normal business hours). It is absolutely necessary to consistently project to every patient that "We exist to serve our patients and our community." Not seeing a patient with a real or perceived emergency immediately destroys that very image. Learn to build some flexibility into your schedules and your personnel, and your practice will receive greater numbers of respectful patients who, in turn, will refer others. Keep in mind that these emergency patients usually need considerable treatment. They also are usually motivated to proceed with care.

More than a few patients complain that their previous dentist was not able to anesthetize them adequately, they will usually go on to say that they informed their dentist of the problem, but the services may not seem new or novel, but they are the core services of any practice. Offering fruit juice and freshly baked cookies every hour in the reception area or a machine with different moisturizers and colognes in the rest rooms are amenities may have a place in some businesses, but they may not have the desired impact on your patients or your practice. Seat your patients on time and finish their treatment on time. This is the most appreciated by today's busy consumer. If you like to treat affluent, successful patients, it is extremely important to be time-efficient. These people did not become successful by meandering through life. For them and just about everyone else, assorted beverages and cookies in the reception area will not make up for a doctor who consistently runs late. If you are consistently on time and seat your patients as soon as they arrive, your patients will have very little opportunity to utilize the beverages and the cookies anyway.

For longer appointments, consider offering virtual headsets for your patients to view movies through during their dental treatment. From a patient comfort point of view, this single service can have a tremendously positive effect on stress levels and the number of word-of-mouth referrals.

Other services that have an impact for the time, money, and effort involved include:

1. Personal CD players
2. Hot towels
3. Post-treatment phone calls

A thriving and growing practice is much easier to transition than a neglected practice. If you are considering the future sale of your practice, please contact Professional Transitions, Inc. to discuss your plans and let us assist you in preparing your practice for your successful transition.

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