

Do Not Let Your Patient Experience Go on Holiday

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Best practices from the industry that knows hospitality best

Before we know it, spring break will be in the rearview mirror, and we will be starting down the peak travel season. There is no time like the present to “borrow” from what our busy friends in hospitality have down to a science: the “guest experience.” Of course, you are in the business of dental care. You do it well; however, to truly keep the care in “dental care,” you and your team must embrace the patient/guest services mentality and aspect of dentistry.

Delighting the “customer.”

Hotel giant Marriott popularized the notion of “customer delight,” going beyond removing hurdles or headaches throughout the lifecycle of the travel process. This process exceeds expectations and creates seamless and hassle-free experiences that are remarkable and consistently positive – the types of engagements that drive patrons to post good reviews instead of angry, impulsive,

embittered ones or to provide “good reviews” to their friends, family, and anyone else within earshot.

Look, we appreciate that health care is uniquely personal. Some sensitivities and nuances must be considered, which are not relevant to the hotels and travel “landscape,” yet, that is not to say those mainstays of the hospitality industry should be dismissed. You can give your office and its culture a world of good by injecting a little more “hospitality” into the [patient experience](#) and at every engagement, be it communication relayed via phone, text, email, website, or face-to-face.

Leveraging what the giant, successful brands have refined in travel can support sustainable patients as “brand advocates,” as well as sustainable workforces. You avoid the dreaded “revolving door” of patients, associates, and employees by simply looking at the delivery of care with fresh eyes and through a different, warm and inviting “lens.” The positivity generated by approaching services through this lens trickles down to how you and your employees interact and interact with each other as colleagues. Furthermore, since injecting more “hospitality” into the experience requires taking a good, hard look at how you are presently functioning and operating your practice, the resulting examination promotes the improvement and best practices. These improvements and best practices ultimately support profitability and optimal performance.

The following “secret sauce” behind “customer delight” represents areas to consider or to re-review within your practice. Moreover, they are opportunities to endear your most valued patients and to attract more quality patients!

Handle FAQs with grace.

Think of an (excellent) front desk clerk. Remember the last time you experienced that initial face of the property and were “wowed” by said person’s professionalism and warmth? What did this person do to make you feel welcome? How were any concerns or mistakes addressed? Channel that individual’s approach and “role model” it for your team members. After all, they take their cues from you as the clinician-executive or practice manager.

Your “front-desk clerk” is also exceedingly important as your practice’s initial “face” or point person. This individual needs to know how to handle Frequently Asked Questions appropriately. Everyone on the receiving end of common queries should know how to respond. And it does not hurt to re-review your practices and responses, mainly as relevant changes occur within dentistry and your organization.

For example, when asked if specific insurance is accepted, mention how other patients have the same insurance and that your team is experienced with navigating and maximizing benefit reimbursements. Or, for certain patients concerned about a lack of insurance or paying in general, this is an excellent opportunity for your team to highlight the in-house member savings plan. Does your practice not have such a plan yet? A key component of patient loyalty-driven strategies, such savings plans may be worth considering to go beyond merely “getting patients through the door” and to keep them coming back, delighted and incentivized to benefit from your specific services!

The power of delegating

This is often the most challenging aspect of running any business, regardless of sector or industry. Within travel, you will notice that the best-run organizations seem to operate like a well-oiled machine (because they do). You will see that, no matter how seemingly specialized the job position or responsibilities, each employee or staff person knows and remains within the confines of a specific function, department, or area of a property. There is no question as to what each professional or talent is tasked with doing, and such clarity further supports creating and delivering an efficient, positive guest experience.

As it relates to strategically revisiting and improving your patient experience, delegating certain aspects of this process to trusted team members or those with the specific background and skills that lend well to the task at hand is helpful. For instance, your stellar assistant, treatment coordinator, or front-office coordinator may be made for the job of “training” how to answer common or challenging queries among those employees who frequently interface with patients via live phone calls, chat, text, email, social, or other means. Another team member could then be tasked with role-playing at regular intervals scenarios such as:

- What to do in the event of a cancellation
- How to handle stressed or painful patients with dental emergencies
- What to do about financially-strapped patients
- How to follow up on procedures with care
- Ways to put anxious or phobic patients at ease

This approach furthermore has the added benefit of endearing the assistant or coordinator; staff appreciate being asked to take on this critical responsibility. After all, as much as we want to improve patient engagement, you cannot have a successful practice when your team members are not engaged or, worse yet, when they are “actively disengaged.”

Also, consider how, when you do not “delegate,” there is always the potential for one employee to assume that the other employee is doing the work. In this situation, the work does not get done. This is akin to the crowds/gawkers standing around the roadside accident scene.

Professional emergency responders will tell you that, to get the best result, engage with the “gawkers” specifically. Call them out by physical description, such as “Lady with green bag, dial 911.” It helps in many situations to immediately enlist; otherwise, responsibilities tend to be put on the back burner. Granted, your day-to-day office functions will likely not be life and death situations; however, how your office operates can either support its sustained health or lead to an early demise.

There is one caveat here: Be mindful of schedules. Big brands with limitless resources do not represent most offices. Everyone is likely doing much more than they did two to three years ago. Ensure that the person you ask has the time and “brain space” to take on an additional responsibility well. Otherwise, this “ask” will have unintended negative consequences, building resentment and fatigue rather than endearing supportive and loyal staff to your practice.

Are you really listening?

Brands like Marriott have built a culture and guest experience around listening and responding in a highly personalized and relevant fashion. Of course, we are not dealing with pillows and towels (though those amenities may be an attractive way to relax your patients while they wait or chairside!). It still pays to get to know your patient’s specific preferences. You may even wish to add some questions regarding preferences about amenities in the intake form from the get-go of your engagement with said patient. Something as simple as, “How can we make your treatment more comfortable?” will suffice. Likewise, even a pointed question, “Is there any specific part of treatment that you do not like?” can provide considerable insights into how to minimize or eliminate sources or triggers of dental anxiety.

Remember that top hoteliers go above and beyond the “basics,” a clean and comfortable room. They also provide discounts or tips about area attractions or arrange transportation to and from them. You can do much the same, suggesting places in the immediate area to go to for lunch, offering discounts on teeth whitening products for patients who keep their 6-month recall appointments, or arranging for parking validation with property managers if that is a sticking point. Minding these seemingly minor yet vital logistical matters can go far to “wow” your patients.

After all, your office “guests” should also have almost everything they need under one roof, giving them less opportunity to look elsewhere for greener, more convenient pastures. It would help if you had something for everyone in the family, regardless of age, as your services and amenities can grow and evolve with them.

Also, consider all of this feedback as a living, breathing entity. Brands like Marriott make frequent communication a foundation of the guest or member experience. Their teams constantly ask what should integrate into rewards plans or within properties and what can be done to improve even stellar experiences. They never stop improving. Here, too, it pays to follow up with your patients more than with recall visit reminders. If that is your only communication, you will likely only see most of those customers at their check-ups. They may not consider reaching out to you for advice on their stained teeth or bothersome tooth sensitivity, or they may sit longer on a broken crown or worn-down oral appliance.

About the Author



Naren Arulrajah, President and CEO of Ekwa Marketing, has been a leader in medical marketing for over a decade. Ekwa provides comprehensive marketing solutions for busy dentists, with a team of more than 180 full time professionals, providing web design, hosting, content creation, social media, reputation management, SEO, and more. If you’re looking for ways to boost your marketing results, call 855-598-3320 for a free strategy session with Naren. You may also schedule a session at your convenience with the Senior Director of Marketing – Lila, by clicking

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