

LET'S PLAY TELEPHONE



Telephone etiquette matters ... a lot. How does your staff stack up?

BY NAREN ARULRAJAH

If your phones are ringing all day long, your marketing team is doing something right, but if those calls aren't generating new appointments, it's your front office team who may be to blame.

How can you tell what's going right or wrong?

SECRET SHOP YOUR OWN PRACTICE

Many cosmetic doctors don't actually know how well their employees handle phone calls. If you aren't sure, try the secret shopper approach. Have a few trusted friends call your office, posing as potential patients. Ask them to rate the receptionist's friendliness, customer service, efficiency, and ability to accurately answer questions. Use the information gathered to identify problem areas.

If the feedback is negative or needs some improvement, invest in training.

There is a myth that customer service simply "comes naturally." While it is true that some personalities are better suited for these positions, inherent talent cannot take the place of training.

- The options for building your team's phone skills are virtually endless. In addition to in-house training, there are independent business coaches, educational videos, online or in person classes, seminars, and more. (*See page 52 for more tips on what patients want to hear when they call your office.*)

These programs can help improve:

- *Customer service.*
- *Sales.* You might not think of receptionist as a sales position. However, this person needs to know how to sell your services and convert leads.
- *Software use.* In modern medical offices, virtually anyone on the phone is also on a computer. Accessing information quickly, and scheduling, canceling, or rescheduling appointments efficiently is essential. Because there is usually a steep learning curve with practice management software, plenty of training is essential.
- *Practice policies.* When callers ask simple questions, such as insurances accepted, cancellation policy, or brands of fillers, they expect fast and accurate answers. If employees can't answer these questions, they will

seem incompetent. Worse yet, incorrect information will give the impression of deceptive business practices.

FLIP THE SCRIPT

Phone scripts can help staff get things right. They can, however, be a point of contention in many offices. Employees might take offense at the suggestion, thinking these are meant for the unskilled. Staff members also tend to feel uncomfortable speaking someone else's words, and it can make the flow of conversation unnatural.

Explain to staff members that these are not meant to be a literal scripts, but guides. When an employee is unsure of how to respond, the script can be read verbatim to avoid awkward silences and long hesitations. However, employees should feel free to deviate from the script as needed or present the information in their own words.

Creating the document should be a team effort. When choosing wording, it is important to have the input of all of the people who will use it.

Start with the initial greeting. It is one exception to the rule of flexibility, as it needs to be consistent and professional. Include your practice name and the employee's name. Some practices also include their taglines or other information. The greeting always ends with a question, such as "How can I help you?"

Next, address the initial inquiry. Ask your staff what questions they receive most frequently and what topics they discuss. Why do people call your office? Once these topics are scripted, move on to secondary questions and comments. It can be helpful to have employees act out conversations. Despite your best efforts, your first draft will probably miss a few common questions. Ask employees to make note of any inquiries that are not scripted, and update the document regularly. ■

NAREN ARULRAJAH

■ Naren Arulrajah is President and CEO of Ekwa Marketing, a complete internet marketing company that focuses on SEO, social media, marketing education, and the online reputations of dermatologists and plastic surgeons. With a team of 180+ full time marketers, www.ekwa.com helps doctors who know where they want to go, get there by dominating their market and growing their business significantly year after year. If you have questions about marketing your practice online, call 855-598-3320 to speak one-on-one with Naren.