

WHY SHOULD I CHOOSE YOUR PRACTICE?

The phrase "A Thief in the Night" comes to mind when describing the decline of new patients choosing an orthodontic specialist! The orthodontic specialist has always been very careful with making sure they were not stepping on the toes of their primary referrals. In the meantime their primary referrals became weekend warriors learning to practice orthodontics. When the general dentist began to give three names plus to every patient in need of an orthodontic referral the new patient flow to the orthodontic practice changed forever! The second opinions have become fourth opinions and most practices did not have the systems in place to combat the confusion of multiple opinions. Consumers have the choice with how they spend discretionary dollars, they always have! What is the benefit to them in choosing your practice over another? This is a question every orthodontic team should ask.

A recent article I was given by an orthodontic client read "For \$ 154.00 you can add \$100,000 to your general dental practice by learning orthodontic procedures." Does that mean the residents I speak to and work with on a day to day basis could have saved the \$200,000 plus on their education and still practice orthodontics? You can spin this information in many ways, you can spend a lot of money on marketing gimmicks and give-away's but the bottom line is the Orthodontic team needs to stand up and take back the orthodontic market as a specialty. They need to communicate the difference between an Orthodontic specialist and the General Dentist with every system in the practice! Knowing why patients should choose your practice should be a required scripting system that is rehearsed by your team.

Gaining market share is about the consumer knowing they have made the right choice! You do not grow a practice by reducing your fees! The goal in any progressive orthodontic practice is to provide a quality end result at a fair fee without a compromise. Projecting the value of service an orthodontic specialist provides and how they provide it is a very different approach from just defending the dollar! The team should be very clear on how to approach a patient who has been presented a lower fee. The presentation should include the Doctor's education, the experience that will be provided to the patient, the end result anticipated and the team approach to finances, comfort and fun! At this time a connection to another patient or family should be made to reinforce the fact that this patient has made the right choice.

You do not grow an orthodontic practice by just promoting a bracket or philosophy. A bracket system or philosophy is only as good as the orthodontist providing the service. The technology must be promoted in conjunction with the Orthodontist and the skills they have proven with a positive end result. What happens when in the future this bracket system or orthodontic appliance is offered to the General Dentist to build their practice? The results are the consumer does not recognize the difference between the General Dentist practicing orthodontics with said appliance or the Orthodontic specialist. Every piece of written material in your practice should shout orthodontic specialist! When a patient and their family commits to a relationship with the Orthodontist and team there is an emotional bond. That promotion of this bond is

marketing for the practice! The team must promote the Orthodontist's skills and end result in conjunction with a bracket or philosophy.

During the past few years I have heard over and over that the economy is the reason a practice is down in profitability and new patients. I know there are many reasons that practices across the country are down and the economy is just one of those reasons. Let's take the blame off the economy and look at a few systems that must be in place to cultivate and maintain great patients. First think of quality not quantity! What type of new patient are you attracting and do you know where every patient is who is already a part of your network?

A positive marketing strategy begins with the initial phone call.

The initial phone call is the first contact the consumer has with your practice. A telephone slip must be used consistently to promote who you are in orthodontics. Prepare some positive phrases that plant the seed to welcome the consumer to your practice. "First may I welcome Joey to our practice we appreciate having him as part of our orthodontic team", "Have we had the opportunity to serve your friends and family?" "Many families have placed their confidence in our Doctor and our team" "Are there any additional family members that would like to be seen at this time?" "We ask that question to inform you of our Family Care program that provides a \$200.00 fee reduction for each additional family member that begins treatment with our practice." Your team should be prepared to explain the family care program on the spot! Take every opportunity during this conversation to promote and market your practice. There should be no shortcuts on the initial phone call as this is the first impression of the office.

The office tour! Whatever the size of the office an office tour is appropriate prior to the new patient exam. The treatment coordinator will present the basic facility amenities as well as the many reasons to choose your office. The sign-in process should be introduced with the benefit statement of "when you arrive please sign in as we understand your time is valuable and this process will let the treatment team know you have arrived." "Our goal is always to serve our patient on a timely basis." When describing the treatment area always have the treatment coordinator communicate the elevator pitch to include "this is where you will see your friends" "When you begin your treatment this is where you will be seated" "It is an open bay concept to promote open communication between our patients and our team." Every system that is communicated in the practice will brand the relationship with your patient.

Learn to communicate the difference in your practice during a second opinion. During a recent visit to one of my offices for an update I was working with the treatment coordinator to establish scripting for a second opinion. A family was scheduled who had stated this practice would be a second opinion. When the treatment coordinator began her interview process she quickly found out that this was not the second opinion but the fourth opinion. The question to ask the parent/patient is what were their concerns with the first opinion? Many treatment coordinators will ask if that approach is too aggressive. My question back to the treatment coordinator was "Do you

want this patient to be treated by anyone else?” When a team member believes in the Doctor’s approach and end results it is pretty easy to sell the service! Being confident in the fact that the patient should choose your practice and having the scripting to back this up is not aggressive but protective to the profession and to the integrity of the practice goals.

During the new patient exam as the treatment coordinator presents the interview I would recommend that any connection the patient would have with another patient be recognized. An acknowledgement card with a small gift should be sent to every person within the new patient’s network that has chosen your practice. When asking the question “Did Dr. Smith give you a choice for your orthodontic care?” You can count on multiple names being given. How did this patient really chose your practice? This CSI work is critical in determining your top referrals by the number of names they are giving at the time of the referral. This process also gives you the opportunity to acknowledge the true referral and build your network.

Enroll future patients in your office Kids Club. The Kids Club program has proven to be very beneficial over the past few years by connecting the younger siblings to the practice in advance of their 7th birthday. Begin the process by enrolling future patients by creating an emotional bond with the practice. This process takes an enthusiastic team approach! The treatment team has the greatest opportunity to enroll the younger potential patients at the time of the existing patients appointment. A picture is taken of the enrollee and placed on your Kids Club display. The action of the child placing the picture on the display is so powerful! It is all about the connection! Then the child walks out with a “Future Patient Of” t-shirt for the entire world to see. It has been very interesting to see how often the Kids Club kids wear their shirts into the practice to find their pictures on the wall. When the child turns the age of 7, a birthday card is sent and an AAO brochure stating the value of a comprehensive orthodontic exam to monitor growth and development at this age. Building your practice from within is free!

The debond appointment and treatment time. At the debond appointment the patient is ready to experience their life without braces. When you debond a patient and have a celebration to promote their accomplishment. Some key phrases may include; “You have finished your treatment one month early without any broken brackets!” Make this statement a part of your scripting at the debond appointment. Why are airlines promoting on time arrivals? Marketing is the process of promoting the promise made is a promise kept! The debond appointment is the prime point to ask for referrals. Patients do not know that they can play an important part in growing your practice in the future. Ask for referrals! Present a debond survey that is simple for the parent/patient to complete. The debond survey should ask three questions! Would you send your friends and family to our practice? Are you happy with the end results you have achieved? Was the experience provided to you as a patient what you had expected? Then ask for a testimonial for your website, testimonial sheet, and power point presentation. Do not wait until the debond or post consultation to present the changes with the patient’s smile. Utilize the technology during the patient’s treatment time.

These are just five systems in the scheme of over 100 systems that drive your practice! You must work as a team to discuss the benefit statements that reinforce the fact that the patients and their families have made the right choice for their orthodontic care!

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