**Secrets of Great Customer Service**

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“People come where they are wanted and stay where they are appreciated”

What is it that sets your practice apart? What makes you unique? Although I certainly don’t think that we are in a position to feel like we have competition in chiropractic (actually, we don’t have enough chiro’s to take care of the people), we have to realize that unless you are the only chiropractic office in a 50 mile radius, people have a choice of who they will use to provide their chiropractic care. Creating a “customer culture” or a “patient culture” is a culture built on a service ethic. Providing the environment for great service to patients before, during and after they purchase our services will set your practice apart and create a service culture in your office. Growing your practice and growing your revenue is no longer just about finding new patients and marketing. It’s about retaining your existing patient base (lifetime care). Where there is exceptional service, there is also a high level of referrals.

Think about the places you have been, the establishments that you have chosen to spend your money in. I think we can all relate to bad experiences we have had. . . shopping and not being able to find someone to ask questions, feeling ignored by clerks or waiters, waiting forever in line, etc. And how about the good experiences? We are definitely going to continue to use their services, aren’t we? Probably for life, unless we move or something.

Recently I had an appointment with a new Dental office. When I entered the office, the first thing I saw was a closed reception window, no personal acknowledgement, and so I sat down, hoping that someone would know I was there. I waited. And waited some more. After 20 minutes, I left. My thought was, if they don’t care, why am I here?

On the other hand, I visited a local grocery store on my lunch break. I was looking for a pre made salad, and saw that there were none in the case. An employee came right away asking to help. She told me she would make me one. Expecting to go back and retrieve it, I went to another part of the store to pick up something else I needed. I was surprised to see that I was on the other side of the store and she delivered it to me! Now THAT was a great experience! I will definitely be shopping there again.

So let’s identify some Secrets of Great Customer/Patient Service.

1. Location – Hours – Flow. People will continue to purchase services where it is convenient to do so. Does your location lend itself to ease of getting in and out? I went to visit a doctor once who had a location on a very busy, heavy traffic 4 lane street, and there was no left turn lane. If was dangerous to get in and out. Interestingly, this doctor had a retention issue. Do you have ample, close parking? Do your adjusting hours reflect times that are conducive to people’s schedules? Having adjusting primetimes designed to enable your patients to come in, get their adjustment and be out within 10-15 minutes shows them that you respect their time. It is also easier for them to commit when they know they will be able to come in and get a great quality adjustment several times per week if necessary, without adding more stress to their lives/schedules.

**As CA’s, your scheduling system becomes a great value added service for your patients. Keeping the flow going in the office by directing people keeps their waiting time short.**

1. Another great value added service is built into your financial system. Having convenient pre-pay and monthly payment options give patients flexibility in financing their care. Using Credit/Debit/HSA cards to run their payments automatically is a service that lends ease to the consumer/patient.
2. Having Family and Wellness plans available for your patients is another secret of great patient service. Again, making it easy for people to practice what we are teaching them is a value added service that sets you apart.
3. Let’s talk about First impressions. The first thing a NP should see upon entering is a smiling face! Making that new patient feel important and welcome when they enter. Stand up, Smile, and address them by name. Hi, you must be Mary. I’m so glad to meet you! My name is Sandra, we spoke on the phone yesterday”. Handshake.
4. Having their name posted on a welcome board
5. Having the doctor call after the first visit to welcome the patient to the practice.
6. Having a well trained team that can answer questions effectively and efficiently for patients. This requires excellent communication within your team. It’s o.k. to not have the answer at your fingertips all the time, however, letting the patient know that you will get the answer to them by a certain time/date.
7. Patient education is a huge value added service. Giving your patients information to make informed decisions about their health and their families health is a service that sets you apart. We all know that an educated consumer is your best customer. An educated patient is your best patient. Feed their brains. People will continue to use your services when you provide them with interesting, helpful information. Newsletters, messages or Health Tip of the week on your whiteboard.
8. New Patient gifting – goody bags, gift bags with healthy items, promotional items, supplement samples, etc. People love to get gifts!
9. Referral gifts – ALWAYS ALWAYS ALWAYS acknowledge referrals!
10. Recognition gifts – Patient Of The Month, committing to another year of Wellness Adjusting Plan, getting their family checked, etc.
11. Calling referrals – when someone gives you a referral, ask, “Do you think that Mary would like Dr. Langley to give her a call and discuss whether she thinks chiropractic can help her?” Ask the pt. to tell the prospect first that the Dr. is going to call, wait a day or so, then call. People are VERY thankful!
12. Cross-refer to your patients. Refer your patients to eachother. “Dr. Langley suggested that I call you”. Great value added service.
13. Hold Focus Group Surveys. Invite a sampling of your pts. to a dinner and have them do a survey of your service. Invite young np’s, older np’s (a few months into care) as well as young established pts. and older established pts., couples, families, singles. Ask them questions pertaining to your hours, efficiency of service, knowledge of why they are getting checked for subluxations, ease of availability, flexibility in payment plans, etc. Will also generate more referrals.
14. The power of THANK YOU.
15. The power of “Your Welcome” or “My Pleasure”. I’m not sure when the phrase “no problem” replaced Your Welcome, but don’t use it. It insinuates that serving patients is a problem.

With the advent of managed care, the very concept of patient centered culture and service has been suffering in the allopathic field. There has been a large chasm developed because of this between the doctor and the patient. Medicine is realizing this now. We are seeing trends of “Concierge Medicine” where doctors are “bringing back” full service medicine. One of our greatest assets of service is the fact that as chiropractic offices, we have always been relationship building, hands-on care. When you continue to manage your practice with a patient-centered culture, people will stay with you, refer their family and friends to you, and you will become their Family Doctor for life.

