

Recession Proof Your Practice! *Customer Service*

By Cathy Jameson

In his book, *Broken Windows, Broken Business*, author, Michael Levine, says “The smallest remedies reap the biggest rewards” It’s the little things that make the big difference. Levine notes that perception is everything. If there is a “glitch” in a system—or a “crack” in the window, speaking metaphorically, one must stop the crack before it breaks. This concept works two ways: on the one hand, the smallest of customer service courtesies, like listening, make the biggest of differences. ON the other hand, not paying attention to the details and not focusing on the customer service protocols that make a patient’s visit with you comfortable can make a negative difference. Levine speaks about the unmistakable power of observation, attention to detail and a focus on customer service so you can fix any potential weaknesses in your organization before it’s too late.

In today’s challenging economic times, it is imperative that your patients see a reason to invest their money in the dental care you are recommending. People are being cautious about spending—and for obvious reasons. You have to do everything you are already doing a bit better than ever before. No matter how well you are doing things now, taking thing up a notch will encourage people to come, to stay, and to invest. Perception is reality. People often make a decision about the quality of the dental care by everything but the dentistry itself. What is your patient experience like? What is your ideal patient visit? Is this happening every time? Not just at the new patient experience, but every time? Can people trust that their experience with you will be extraordinary? That you will listen? That you do notice them as individuals? That you do the little things—consistently—that make the big difference?

A successful business pays attention to details and exudes a passion for the service being provided. Everyone on your team must exude that passion and must believe that if a patient walks out the door not receiving treatment that everyone loses. The practice loses because you do not get to do the kind of dentistry you believe in doing. The patient loses because they could have been healthier, more attractive—or both—if they had chosen to proceed. Complacency becomes a disastrous emotion any time—but particularly disastrous when difficult economic times are being faced.

A leader is not afraid to face challenges and turn challenges into opportunities. A leader does not think everything is perfect and cannot be improved. A leader is willing to step up to the plate and make appropriate refinements and alterations in his/her business to make sure that he/she is doing all that is expected and more—with each and every patient in each and every circumstance.

Do you have any broken windows?

What are you doing to stop the cracks before the window breaks?

Yes, the world is experiencing economic challenges greater than have been seen in decades. But, the economy always comes back and, history has shown that it will come back stronger than ever

Therefore, do not be complacent. Be proactive. Do not be egotistical and think that you do not need to be ever-alert and ever-committed to improving your practice. Know your numbers. Review your monitors on a regular basis and notice—immediately—when the number indicate that a system is not working as well as it should be working. Then, quickly step up to the plate and do something about it.

Hold your practice steadfast now. Improve all 25 of your major management systems—now. Evaluate your systems and continue to do the things that are going well and identify areas where improvement could be accomplished and work on developing a strategic plan for that improvement. If you have time due to an opening in your schedule, use the time to brainstorm and work on the development plan for the practice.

Here are five quick ideas you can turn into an exercise or group activity to work on improving your practice:

1. Walk in silence from the patient parking area into your practice just as a patient would for an appointment. Then write down the words that come to your mind to describe that experience. Discuss that as a team. You might discuss the following.
 - o Does this experience emulate your practice vision?
 - o Would it make you want to come back again?
 - o How would you describe it to a friend or colleague looking for the practice?
 - o What could be enhanced, who's responsible for making that happen, how they'd make it happen and by when?

2. Have a business team member walk a clinical team member through “a day in their life,” including a detailed accounting for every aspect of their position. Have the clinical team member take notes and then share the experience with the rest of the team. This report might include the following.
 - What surprised me most was/misconceptions I had were...
 - The basic responsibilities are...and this is how it works...
 - The top three or five enhancements I think we can make in the practice now that I understand this person’s role better are...
3. Do the same thing as number 2 with different team members and different roles. The key is to get as detailed as possible. For example, don’t just tell me you schedule. Go into the scheduling system and show them how it’s done, explain some of the issues that come up and how that’s handled. Hygienists won’t just say tell them teeth are cleaned. They’ll talk about what it’s like, what position they sit in, what issues can make it interesting, what questions they’ll get from patients, how they document what they find, etc. This level of detail allows for the exercise to be meaningful and for insights to bring about real, positive change.
4. Talk about your own marketing and advertising. What could be better? What message is coming across? What can be done to enhance the marketing and/or advertising of your practice? Ask everyone to pay attention to:
 - Different dental related materials and come back with something interesting to share or teach each other. Did you know there’s a course on xyz? Did you know about this new material? Or technique? Etc.
 - Mainstream media and come back with their three most memorable ads and why.
 - Other dental practices. What’s their signage like? What are their Web sites like? How do you measure up?
5. Read and post the articles from this “Recession Proofing Your Practice” series. Discuss each together. Make these discussions a team effort. Use the articles as a springboard for comprehensive discussions on each subject.

The economy will come back. It always does. Take advantage of this opportunity to fine-tune your practice—to make everything you are doing a little bit better. You will remain healthy throughout this recession and

when it is over, you will be even stronger and much more productive. On the other side of every adversity is amazing growth.



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