

Seven Practice Pearls to “Wow” Your New Patients

By Cathy Sundvall



Many orthodontic practices today are searching for the “secret formula” to improve patient enrollment. Winning patients over and improving your conversion rate is easier than you think if you become a “patient-centered practice”, focusing on the patients needs. How do you “Wow” your new patients and what are you doing to become “patient-centered”?

Remember, it is not always what you do for your patients, in as much as what you don’t do. The focus of your attention should be patient satisfaction, making starting treatment in your office easy and a unique experience.

Here are seven key ingredients “patient-centered” orthodontic practices have in common.

#One – Eliminate Patient/Parent Aggravations



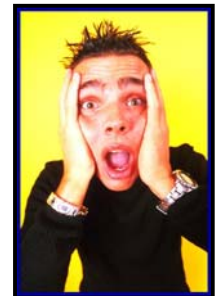
All you have to do is think about the last time you went to a doctor’s appointment. What aggravated you about the visit? What would you change about the experience?

- Someone to answer the phone instead of getting a recording or placed into voicemail.
 - An appointment that is convenient for you
 - An estimate on what I can expect if I decide to start treatment.
- To arrive on time, see the doctor as scheduled and complete my visit within the hour you told me.
 - If you had told me to bring my insurance form, I would have prepared the information for you.

A patient-centered practice will eliminate or solve patient aggravations before they occur. Schedule a team meeting and start a list of issues you have heard from your patients/parents or have experienced in your office. Take each issue and come up with solutions. Once you have a solution, role-play with your team members and practice, practice, practice. Be sure all the staff knows how to handle each situation with a friendly smile.

#2 – Perform as Promised

Don’t make promises to the patient or parents that you can’t keep. You manage the patient’s expectations by what you say on the telephone, in the literature that you mail out or from the information on your web site. What promises are you making? And, do you keep every promise 100% of the time. If not, you are not meeting and exceeding the expectation you have set for your practice. Make it an unforgivable sin to break your promise.



Promise

During the new patient phone call, the receptionist tells the patient a packet will arrive in the mail for them to review.

Unforgivable sin

It never arrives or it shows up a day after their scheduled appointment?

Promise

The receptionist tells the new patient she will be calling their dentist office for a recent x-ray.

Unforgivable sin

The patient arrives for the initial exam and the receptionist forgot to call the dentist office for the x-ray.

Promise

The new patient is a transfer case, the receptionist asked for the previous orthodontist name and address to insure the patients records will be in the office the day of the exam.

Unforgivable sin

The request for transfer records was never made, or it was made too late and the records are not in the office when the patient arrives for their exam.

Promise

Your brochure states, “your time is valuable” or “we strive to be on time for every appointment”.

Unforgivable sin

You make the patient wait

#3 – Manage the New Patient’s Experience

The patient first experience to our office should be personal and enjoyable. Many times it is the little touches and comments that often have nothing to do with the initial exam or orthodontics the patient remembers. Was it a comment from you on their “cool” haircut or long baggy pants? Was it the question you asked the patient on how many goals they made in their soccer game yesterday? Or could it be that you looked them directly in the eyes and said, “I will give you a beautiful smile that you will be proud of”. It is hard to put your finger on what will give the patient a warm feeling about you and the practice. Just put yourself in the patients place, think of them first and you can’t lose.

#4 – Involve the New Patient

The new patient will be extremely curious about the orthodontic experience and will want to know everything that is going on. What do you do to make the patient feel part of the process? Or what are you not doing that you could do to make the new patient feel apart of their treatment? Do you leave the new patient in the consult room for more than 5 minutes, while waiting for the doctor?

- Consider taking the new patient in the operatory to watch a bonding or archwire placement if you know you will have to wait on the doctor.
- Consider writing down the information the doctor will need prior to seeing the new patient and leaving it in a specific area for the doctor to read. This way you can return to the consult room to continue building a relationship with the patient and educating them on their orthodontic treatment.

#5 – Have Fun

We are professionals, but we should not take everything so seriously. We need to learn to laugh at ourselves and with our patients. If we take risks and have some fun, our patients will follow our lead. Patient contest, practice events and seasonal themes have become very popular in our orthodontic practices. The success of these “fun events” will only be as successful as the staffs and doctor’s enthusiasm towards patient participation. Each team member should be responsible for getting patients excited and helping them participate.

#6 – Recover Remarkably

To err is human, to admit the error, apologize and make it right is “patient centered orthodontics”. Don’t try to cover up a mistake, or worse yet blame the patient. Patients today are very aware of what is happening around them. Be sincere, the patient will respect you more for making the effort to improve their service.

What happens when a new patient arrives for an initial exam on the wrong day? Do you tell them you are sorry, but they will have to come back at the appropriate day and time? On the other hand, do you say you are already booked and cannot work them in? If your goal is to “Wow” your new patients 100% of the time, your team should make every effort to see the new patient while they are in your office, regardless of who made the error. You may have an exam in progress, and the operatory is busy, but the bottom line should be to see this exam today. Remember, the patient typically wants to know, do they need treatment, what type of braces will they get, how long it will take and how much it will cost. If you really think about this process, it could be done in 15-20 minutes and if you had to could be done in an operatory chair.

#7 – Do Everything Better

Look at what other orthodontic practices are doing or any business that services customers. Exceptional customer service or lack of service can be seen everywhere. Observe, learn, take notes, capture the good ideas and eliminate the bad ones. Think about how you answer the telephone, how you ask for patient information and enter the data in your computer system, or when you process and send your new patient packets. What can *you do* to be better, more efficient or make the patient feel you are the best practice in town?

To “Wow” your new patients will take a team effort and a lot of hard work. Take the time to teach your team how to be a “*patient-centered orthodontic practice*”, where every aspect of the patients experience should be based on *what is best for the patient*.

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