

## **“Donor and Recipient Dental Practices”**

Early in my career, I realized my best referral source wasn't the direct response mailers, new resident programs, care-to-share programs, signage, or even location. To my surprise, it was the Orthodontist and two other General Dental practices down the street. In a town of 15,000 people, 35 miles north of Dallas, we were getting 15-20 new patients per month from our competitors. How could that be? Why would so many patients in a town where everyone knew one another, decide to leave their long time dental practice to come to the new kid on the block? Maybe what I had been taught in dental school wasn't true: “Patients will bond to dental practice for life”? In fact, Fortune magazine found that 87% of patients will change their Physician (MD) for a \$5 difference in co-pay. Is it any surprise that they would leave a dentist for money, lack of concern, poor hours, location, lack of competence, or a single bad experience? Welcome to the era of Donor and Recipient Dental Practices. Fail to inspire your patients, and you will see them seek treatment elsewhere. Make every step of the patient experience perfect except for the last one, and they're gone. Patients today, vote with their feet. If you are seeing the back of their heads, you are doing it wrong.

**Dental Truth:** *“There is no way to get better at giving patients what they don't want”.*

The worst thing you could ever do is to push treatment on patients without happily giving them what they want. Let that small fact elude you (Giving patients what they want), and you will find yourself on the fast track to a mediocre unfulfilling career. Fact: If you are not growing, then you are not meeting your patient's needs. If you cannot inspire your patients or if you are not growing, then you become the Donor practice for your area. Take a moment and see if you can name a practice in your area that is a “Donor Practice”. If you can't think of one, then it's you. The Donor practice has no idea that they have this effect on their patients. They are usually clueless. It is always the poor economy, terrible location, poor dental IQ, inability to find quality staff that is blamed for lack of growth. At Summit Management, we expect our client's practices to grow

regardless of the economy, and they do. The “Recipient Practice” quietly grows, inspiring their patients to refer everyone they know.

Here are the symptoms of a Donor practice.

- **Increase in Cancellations and No-Shows** (Goal would be less than 10%. You are not convenient, and did not sound caring and compassionate over the phone. Poor hours, days and fees (Consumerism) create such a hassle to get into your practices that patients make an appointment never intending to keep it.
- **Few or no Direct Referrals** (Goal: 60% minimally). This is the one black or white symptom. Few referrals spell disaster.
- **Patient’s want second opinions.** This is usually the result of being too assertive, instead of a balanced case presentation. If you want the treatment more than the patient, you have crossed the line. There should be no selling in dentistry. Give them what they want and tell them what they need.
- **Marketing Driven:** You spend a greater and greater portion of your income on external marketing in order to maintain your numbers. Good practices (Recipient) don’t need to market and poor practices (Donor) should not market. Spend money and time on marketing when you have few internal referrals spells disaster. You will just have more clients leaving faster telling everyone they know to stay away. Don’t look for an external solution for an internal problem. Close your back door while opening the front.
- **Patients say they cannot afford your treatment plans.** You must keep “comparables”, comparable when it comes to fees. Stay in the 80-90% for your area. Always give the patient what they want first, then, work at giving them what they need. Bundling your fees for your treatment plan incorrectly makes you look like a Dentist turned time share salesman which will push them to the next dentist down the street.
- **High staff turnover.** High turn-over is a symptom of lack of leadership, poor culture and systems. Get it right and the patients and staff will stay. If

your patients see a different face every 6 months, they will wonder why, and they are right.

- **Assisted Hygiene.** Assisted hygiene does work to ramp up the hygiene department, but make sure you have the right assistant in that role. It should be the best assistant in the office. Maybe even the one you can't work without. If done incorrectly, you will see fewer patients following thru with treatment plans because of a lack of trust that was once created by your hygienist spending the time to adequately explain treatment and listen to what the patient came in for. I have seen few offices that do this correctly.
- **Poor financial Arrangements.** The average patient cannot afford a one-time \$500.00 out of pocket expense. In fact most dentists and their staffs can't afford the treatment plans we place before our clients. Learning how to help our patients afford the dentistry they need is the "secret sauce" to financial success.

Take the time to intentionally run from even the mere appearance of being a Donor practice and reap the rewards of continued growth.