



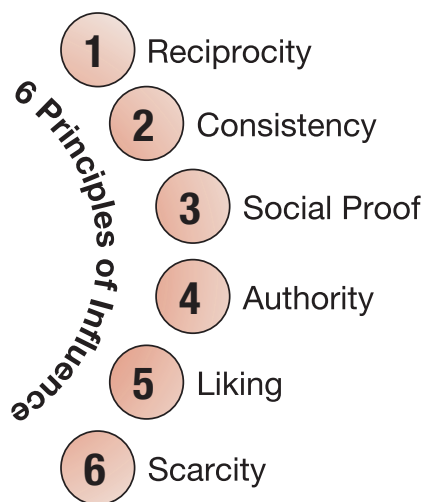
Achieving patient engagement through the 6 elements of influence

By Julie Parker

Achieving patient engagement is one of the fundamental elements of succeeding in your dental practice. If you do not engage your dental patients, you will struggle to build the relationships that are required to effectively manage and treat your patients and also struggle to build the foundations that will see your practice grow in production and referrals.

Robert Cialdini is an American Psychologist who, after many years of research, identified the six principles that influence consumers:

- **Reciprocity:** when we feel the need to return a favour when someone gives us something for nothing or does something generous in our eyes;
- **Consistency:** we make decisions that are consistent with our own personal values or statements we have expressed;



- **Social Proofing:** we will be inclined to do that which many others are doing;
- **Authority:** we tend to obey those in an authoritative position;
- **Likeability:** we choose to do more business with people whom we like; and
- **Scarcity:** if something is in short supply or difficult to attain, our demand for it goes up.

Applying Cialdini's six principles to the practise of dentistry provides a highly effective and proven process and system for building and maintaining patient engagement.

These "6 Elements of Engagement" can be easily and successfully applied in dental practice.

Reciprocity

When you hand out toothbrushes and toothpaste at recall visits, you are generating desires for reciprocity. You are giving something to the patient for nothing. The patient leaves feeling a little indebted to you for your generosity. Reciprocity can also be developed with the itemised account of services. List every service you provide on the invoice. Remove the fee for the items you would normally not charge for, for example oral hygiene instruction or cusp capping when the filling price may be all included in the filling item number. Even list on the invoice the toothbrush and toothpaste that you hand out yet have no cost against it. Take these opportunities to show your patients that they are receiving things of value from you at no charge. Their natural response will be of appreciation and a desire to reciprocate.

Consistency

The element of consistency in dental practices is when you and your team provide, at all times, your great customer service and quality treatments in the manner that is consistent with your core values and marketing. It is when you can be relied upon to be consistent that you build trust, rapport and engagement.

Social proofing

Referrals is a great example of social proofing. Someone comes to you because others they trust already attend your clinic. Social proofing is also effective in the encouragement of patients keeping to their six monthly recall visits. Indicate the benefits that all of your regular patients experience by coming and maintaining their oral health. Patients will be naturally inclined to move and do what most people accept is a good thing to do.

Authority

You communicate that you, as a dentist in your practice, are in a position of authority by displaying your certifications on the walls, discussing your latest seminars with your patients and quoting other people of authority when describing how to achieve successful treatment outcomes.

Likeability

Be friendly. Have a laugh with your patients. Ensure your patients see you being positive and friendly with all of

your staff. If issues arise with your patient, manage them in a caring and effective way. Likeability is the foundation of great customer service. All staff should be displaying great “likeability”. Your patients are less likely to leave you if they like you!

Scarcity

Scarcity comes from your appointment book. Indicate to patients that it is difficult to find an ideal time, while still giving them exactly what they want. For example, even if there are plenty of vacant times, offer only one or two. If these do not suit, ask the patient what their preference is. Then “search” some more. Say to your patient, “You know, I think I can help you with that time. I’ll just make this little adjustment in the book so you can have it”. The patient will:

1. Grasp the perception of scarcity and how fortunate they are to be your patient;
2. Appreciate your great customer service in going the extra mile to please them; and

3. Have a higher sense of importance over their appointment, contributing to their commitment to it.

So, you can see how Robert Cialdini’s 6 principles can be applied to dental practices in the achievement of highly successful patient engagement with your

services. We encourage you to adopt these 6 Elements of Engagement into your practice. Coach your team in the understanding and use of them. And like a golf swing improvement process, be willing to do the repetitious work to ensure you gain the benefits.

About the author

Julie Parker’s whole career has been devoted to the dental industry, starting in 1987 as a dental nurse. In 2003, Julie became the first non-dentist to buy a dental practice in Australia. She owned and managed her practice in Brighton, Victoria for 10 years. During this time, she more than trebled the turnover and her staff base grew from 3 to 12 members. Julie successfully cultivated a winning team and a winning business. Her business programs on how to accomplish a dream dental business are gleaned from her wealth of experience, intensive education and an inquisitive business mind. Julie is a Certified Practitioner of Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Time Line Therapy and Hypnotherapy.

Julie Parker Dental Management offers a subscription based program that educates all dental staff in the building and managing of their practices. Members receive monthly audio CD’s and workbooks that lead them along the path to personal and team success. All team members, including the dentists, receive Certificates of Completion each month for submission for non-clinical CPD points and inclusion on resumes. Memberships are available for \$395 per month. For more info, see www.julieparkerdentalmanagement.com.au or enquiries@julieparkerdentalmanagement.com.au.