



Where is your level of customer service?

By Julie Parker

When it comes to customer service, dental practices have always been way ahead of medical (in my opinion). How often do you enter a medical practice and either:

- a. Stand in a queue and wait to be served;
- b. Be the first in line but the two or three receptionists behind the desk take their time to acknowledge you; or
- c. Find everyone too busy to address you so you take a seat, only to then notice the signs displayed everywhere instructing you to “report to reception before taking a seat!”.

Patients certainly receive a more immediate and friendly welcome when they visit their dentist!

This has certainly been the case in my experience over my 35 years in the industry. However, with the introduction of social media, specialised marketing and increased competition for dental practices, it is probably a good time to take a fresh look at the customer service we offer to our dental patients.

I suggest to my clients that there are four levels of customer service; identifying the level of service that you want to deliver to your patients is crucial if you want to move together as a team to create a unique experience for your patients.

Level 1: Unacceptable

The first level of customer service is unacceptable. We have all, unfortunately, experienced unacceptable customer service. We know how it makes us feel. Unacceptable customer service is when you are treated so shabbily that you leave, promising to jump online and leave the company a bad *Google* review.

Or, you call the manager or owner and make a complaint. You certainly advise anyone who will listen to avoid the company and promise never to use their products or services again.

In terms of a dental practice, witnessing unacceptable customer service delivery by a team member will have the owner or

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manager set up a meeting with that team member to swiftly manage this underperforming employee.

Level 2: Basic

The second level of customer service is basic. Basic customer service is when the employee exhibits little-to-no interest in the customer and just scrapes by in achieving a task or responsibility to serve them. Customers get the assistance they required - just - and leave wondering how this person manages to keep their job.

Level 3: Anticipated

The third level of customer service is anticipated. Anticipated is just that; this is the level of customer service that we expect and are satisfied with. We receive the assistance we require from a friendly and professional employee. Customers of practices that deliver anticipated customer service can become regulars and develop good relationships with team members. If it is requested of them, customers will leave a positive *Google* review but are unlikely to spontaneously do so themselves.

Level 4: Unanticipated

The fourth level of customer service is unanticipated. Unanticipated customer service is something special. This level of service is delivered by employees who are willing - eager, in fact - to go above and beyond to make a customer happy. They are upbeat, energetic, happy, passionate and obviously love their job. Customers who experience unanticipated customer service are so surprised and delighted that they will voluntarily leave a great *Google* review or provide feedback to the manager or owner on how impressed they are with the service of the practice. They will share such a terrific experience with family and friends, urging them “you HAVE to go there!”

Figure 1. shows some examples of how the levels of customer service are displayed in a dental practice so you can easily identify the differences. Despite MANY practices professing to deliver “optimum”, “ideal”, “premium” and “first-class” customer service, most are providing anticipated customer service. There is nothing wrong with that. Anticipated customer service is professional, courteous and helpful and contributes to a good reputation for your dental practice.

	UNACCEPTABLE <i>Employee is annoyed</i>	BASIC <i>No interest in patient</i>	ANTICIPATED <i>Interest in patient</i>	UNANTICIPATED <i>High interest and high energy</i>
RECEPTION OPERATIONS				
Answer the telephone	"Hello"	"Dental surgery"	"Good morning, Dental Practice, Julie speaking. How can I help you? (Tone is flat and sounds automatic)	"Good morning, Dental Practice, Julie speaking. How can I help you? (Tone and modulation is excited!)
Scheduling appointment	Often make mistakes in booking appointment due to lack of mindfulness and concern	Books correct time	Books correct time, ensures patient has a card or entered into smartphone	Books correct time, gives card, clarifies with patient what will be done on the day, the cost, if the patient has to prepare in any way and provides quote
Patient complaint	"That's not my job/It was not our fault/You misunderstood/ We don't offer that here"	"I'll get the manager"	"I will speak to the manager about what has happened and get back to you"	"I apologise that there is a concern. Let's sit down together and talk so I can listen to what has happened and get a solution for you"
Patient inquiry	"I don't know"	Answers the query. Does not ensure patient is satisfied or understands whether there are further questions	Answers the query and asks "Is there anything else I can help you with?"	Answers the query in a conversational manner so there is back and fourth with the patient. Draws diagrams, uses display models, offers brochures, etc - whatever is needed so the patient gains a complete understanding
CLINICAL OPERATIONS				
Taking patient to surgery	"We are ready now" (no acknowledgement of name and bolt up the hall)	"Are you Bill? Come through." (Wait for patient then walk)	"Bill? You can come through now. How are you?" (Politely walk with patient)	"Bill. How delightful to see you! Come on through. Tell me, how was your Christmas?"
Administration of LA	Fail to announce what is happening, fast and painful injection, no concern for patient	Announce LA is coming but no comfort for patient	Announce LA, administer gently, DA comforts patient	Dentapen™ to administer/warmed LA, gentle, comforting. Speaking softly and reassuring
Treatment explanation to patient	"You need a crown. Just book in for one when you're ready"	"You need a crown. Here is a brochure explaining what a crown is. Reception can book you in"	"You have 3 options" (Options explained) (Book for chosen option)	"This is your condition and treatment options to resolve it". (Explanation with aids, printed quotation, time for patient questions, payment options, use doc folder)
Patient requires more time for treatments and is very anxious	"You are not letting us work. We can't do the treatment" (Send patient away)	Pushing patient through to set time regardless of anxiety	Lengthen appointment, treat patient with more care	"We know you're anxious and we are here to help. This is what we are going to do" (Meds, lights down, meditation, hypnotherapy, etc)

Everyone is satisfied with anticipated customer service - customers and practice-owners alike.

However, it is through the delivery of unanticipated customer service that your practice can grow rapidly via existing patients actively recommending your services to their personal networks and anyone who will listen. Your patients are so impressed and delighted with their experience at your practice that they would never go anywhere else and remain loyal for the long term. Your dental practice becomes known as THE BEST practice in the area. Your patients feel lucky to have found you.

If you would like our downloadable lesson and guide to assist your team improve the level of customer service delivered in your dental practice, simply email Julie at julie@julieparkerpracticesuccess.com.au and we will be delighted to forward it directly to you.

About the author

Julie Parker Practice Success provides dental teams with coaching and training so they can work together and achieve successful outcomes for their dental practice. For more information, please contact Julie on 0407-657-729 or julie@julieparkerpracticesuccess.com.au