

SAY HELLO TO YOUR #1 MARKETING TOOL...THE TELEPHONE

# Say Hello to Your #1 Marketing Tool... The TELEPHONE



The phone is the first step in creating case acceptance. In order NOT to lose patients you've never met, we ask you to make sure the funnel to your practice isn't clogged. Before you read any further, have a third party call your practice and ask:

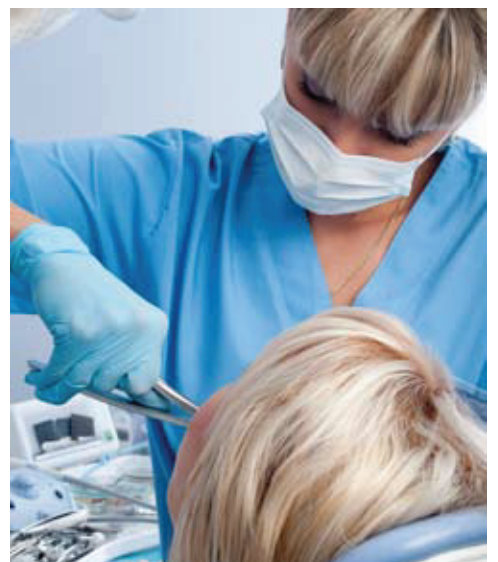
**How Much Do You Charge for a Cleaning?**

Now, compare your team's answers with what we found out.

- 100% of those we called did not ask for the caller's name
- 100% did not thank the caller for phoning
- 92% did not have a planned presentation for getting a YES
- 75% gave prices immediately (encouraging price shopping)
- 65% gave price and nothing else about the practice
- 20% listed long and confusing diagnostic procedures and prices
- 15% said prices were higher for new patients
- 15% said fees would depend on the amount of work
- 10% said they didn't know the price
- 10% put the caller on hold for a minute or more
- 10% answered only after the third ring
- 10% asked if they could set up an appointment
- 10% asked if the caller was a patient of record
- 10% asked how long since the last cleaning
- 5% had a busy signal

## INSIDE

### How to Use the Phone to Build Your Dental Practice



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We hope your team fared better than the folks we called on our national survey. All of the percentages are shocking, but let's discuss some responses that are the least professional and most damaging to your business.

### The Pitfalls of Quoting Prices

75% of the time the receptionist simply blurted out a fee, and there's a sign of trouble. Dentistry is a highly skilled healthcare service that is personally tailored to the individual patient. Don't fall into the trap of treating it as if it were a bargain-basement sale. If all you give is price and nothing else, on what other basis can the caller make a buying decision?

### Make Each Word Count

Let callers understand the degree of care they ought to expect from your practice, however try to avoid long lists of diagnostic procedures that can be confusing. Our advice: Find out more about the caller and have a planned presentation for getting a YES! The highest goal you can set for the phone is for each incoming call to conclude with a scheduled appointment for a full and comprehensive dental examination.



### The Five Questions

Not a single appointment coordinator we called asked for any of the information we think is of the highest priority.

**There is plenty to find out, but start with:**

1. The caller's name
2. Who referred them (or how they got the number)
3. What they are looking for
4. How long has it been since they've seen a dentist
5. What the Doctor and team can do to make their experience in your office particularly great and wonderful.

Now we know Murphy's Law and his special clause for the telephone. It rings mostly at the most inopportune time. Circumstances can be so hectic that even asking one question can seem the limit. But to us, time constraints only underline the need for skillful preparation. When you consider the public's lack of knowledge about dental health care, and the number of people who have had a bad experience at the dentist before, it becomes even more imperative to develop responsive telephone habits.

### The Five Responses

#### 1. Establish a consistent method of information gathering.

Like any clinical examination, the information you gather must follow a procedural guideline. To help your appointment coordinator do this consistently and effortlessly, call us for our easy-to-follow new patient research form. This way, instead of trying to remember all of what you need to ask, you can spend more time listening closely to what the patient is saying while just checking off the answers to the questions already prepared for you. Not only can it help guide the appointment coordinator in covering all necessary steps, but it can also be distributed in the morning huddle the day that the patient is scheduled to arrive for an appointment.

#### 2. Be personal.

Always answer the phone announcing the name of the practice. Ask for the caller's name by giving your name. 100% of the calls we made broke this single most important rule for doing business with someone. Know their name. It's also common courtesy and good business sense to thank the caller for phoning your dental team.

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### 3. Determine how the patient found your practice.

Perhaps the caller has phoned because of a recommendation by a colleague, friend or patient of record. Knowing this helps establish rapport more easily because you now have a common connection. If the caller has no prior connection, but saw your sign, read an ad or passed your office on the way to work, it's then wise to ask, "How long has it been since you last saw a dentist?" If the answer is six months to a year, say, "That's great. Would you happen to have had some X-rays taken at that last dental office?" If it's been over a year, slow the pace of the conversation down and probe a little. "Have you had a bad experience with a dentist in the past?" If the caller has, demonstrate empathy. Reassure the caller that this won't be the case in your office. Always show surprise in your voice when you hear about infection or pain. It helps emphasize the seriousness of the problem. Asking the caller where he or she works is also a good idea. You may have other patients at that company, you can determine if the caller has dental insurance and you will relate better once you know what someone does for a living.

### 4. Build rapport.

Listen actively to what the patient tells you. The caller should do 80% of the talking. Ask questions in a friendly, authoritative yet non-judgmental manner. The truth is most folks don't know enough about their own dental health to know what they really need! When do people generally call a dentist? When they've lost a filling or think they need a cleaning. They may resent having to call in the first place or be reluctant to tell you exactly what's going on. You can't allow the patient's lack of knowledge to interfere with their health care. In almost every case, what the patient actually needs is a full comprehensive exam. By the time the team discovers that the patient sitting for a cleaning has advanced gum disease, it's too late to change the appointment.

### 5. Never end without asking the caller for an appointment.

Most people will not buy if you don't ask them to buy. Nine out of the ten calls we made failed to do this! Phrasing the question is important as well. Since we all have trouble making decisions, why say, "When would you like to come in and see us?" People find it easier to make choices. Say, "Would Monday or Tuesday of next week be better for you? 9:30 or 11:00?" Now you're helping patients get what they called for, a personal, caring reception to their needs which ends with the only thing that will make their worries go away...a scheduled appointment with the dentist.

## Practice Makes Perfect The Five Daily Reminders

**1. Keep a mirror by the phone.** Watch yourself in the mirror, making sure you remember to smile and look pleasant. Act as if you are talking to someone who is looking at you. Whenever possible, stand up when talking on the phone. This will help give your voice energy and conviction.

**2. Your voice IS the practice.** The person who answers the phone reflects the image of the entire team. Make it clear from the cheerfulness in your tone that you enjoy working there. It already says volumes about the doctor.

**3. The price of courtesy.** Since you can never know if the person on the other end of the line is not a million-dollar patient, treat every caller as if he or she is the best patient you'll ever have.

**4. Attitude is everything.** What you seek to deliver to the caller is concern, compassion and conscientiousness. Warmth and sincerity help convey, particularly to new patients or those who are in pain, the likelihood of their being treated warmly and sincerely when they come into the office.

**5. Be there.** Respond before the third ring. If you have to put the caller on hold, be brief (no more than twenty seconds).

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**"From the moment the appointment coordinator first greets patients on the phone, each team member should have a planned and definite part in gathering information."**

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### Charting the Patient's Personal Information

Let's imagine for a moment that the information not only was recorded properly and shared at the morning huddle, but that it continues to grow as each team member comes into contact with the patient and adds pertinent material along the way.

Just as you have a charting system for the clinical side of the patient's needs, you need a charting system for their personal side if you expect to be successful at mapping out what they want for their oral health and smile. Before you face your next new patient, ask yourself: How much do I really know about this person? If the answer is not much, you have a significant disadvantage.

By contrast, imagine this: the Doctor walks in, pronounces the patient's name correctly, shakes hands, and says something like, "I'm delighted to meet you, Mr. Zovanovich. I understand you work with Ms. Geraldine Jones over at Widgets Unlimited on Main Street. Pam, our office manager, tells me you've just relocated from New York. How are you finding the Twin Cities?"

What is this new patient going to think? This dental team and Doctor know what they're doing, and I am important to them. Such a warm and well-informed introduction is the beginning of a lifetime relationship. It certainly sets the stage for patients' interest in all of what you can do for them.

### Thank Referrals

In addition to having a planned presentation for incoming calls, it's incumbent to success to make a few outgoing calls as well. The absolute best thing a dental practice can do when it discovers that a colleague, friend or patient of record has referred a new patient is to get on the phone. The dental team member closest to the referring party should make the call.

A sincere thank you is in order and a call expresses this much more personally than flowers. Furthermore, the referring person knows more about the new patient than you do. Encouraging the referring party to tell you about his or her friend is not an intrusion of privacy but a demonstration of the team's concern and interest in your new patient. On the same new patient research form that we discussed earlier, the new patient's needs, wants and fears can be recorded so the entire team is informed as to how to best serve the new patient before he or she arrives.

### Patient Research is a Total Team Job

Getting your team involved in researching patients is as necessary a part of the equation as the clinical procedures themselves. From the moment the appointment coordinator first greets patients on the phone, each team member should have a planned and definite part to play in gathering information. The job of case presentation is actually achieved together in steps. A great team and a great practice take time to build. When you've researched what they want and know why they want it, getting that YES to treatment is simply the next logical step.

The largest increase in your business will come from the folks who look, act, behave and spend like that top 20% of your patient base. Call them your ideal patient profile and call our 877- 63 COACH hotline for assessing who they are in your practice. Then when the phone rings, all your dental team has to do is ask the right questions.



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