



Special Office Manager Section

This year, *Dental Economics* is bringing you articles for sharing with your office manager. This month features articles by Angela Martinez, Bernie Stoltz, Debra Engelhardt-Nash, and Erika Pusillo.

Look for this special section quarterly, with articles by top practice consultants and office managers. Previous features appeared in the March and June issues and may be found at dentaleconomics.com. Search: “office managers.”

It's time to celebrate!

Angela Martinez

THERE'S A LOT TO CELEBRATE in the month of September. September is the number one month for births and birthdays.¹ It's time to go back to school, and in terms of the weather, here in California it's back to cool. And, if you're like me, September begins the countdown to the holiday season. But this September, there's something new to celebrate because it's Dental Office Manager Appreciation Month.

Having been part of a thriving dental practice for 19 years prior to joining CareCredit, I know every person on the team contributes significantly and equally to a practice's success. But there are many reasons to recognize and celebrate dental office managers by themselves. Every day they work hard to help keep patients and their practices healthy. As dentistry, technology, and patient care have evolved over the past decade, so has the role of the dental office manager. From managing the patient experience to managing the practice's online reputation, dental office managers' roles and responsibilities have expanded—along with the opportunities for personal and professional growth. As the skills of the office manager grow, oftentimes the practice's production and patient loyalty will too.

FROM GOOD TO GREAT

Today's professional office managers have resources available from a wide variety of sources that can help empower and equip them to meet the many challenges of running a busy practice. The American Associa-

tion of Dental Office Managers (AADOM) is dedicated to dental office management. It's a place for office managers to learn, grow, and connect with peers who share the same daily ups, downs, cheers, and challenges. AADOM offers its members educational and networking resources online through local chapters and the national meeting.

The publication you're reading, *Dental Economics*, also has resources available to office managers, including this new quarterly office manager section specifically designed to deliver information and inspiration from peers and consultants. And on a monthly basis, office managers can tap into great ideas by signing up for the free *Dental Office Manager Digest* newsletter (dentaleconomics.com/subscribe/email).

Resources and training are also available to office managers and their teams from their state dental associations and national associations. This includes the American Dental Association, where 33 practice management continuing education courses will be available at the annual conference taking place in San Francisco the first week

of September. And finally, office managers can get connected to companies they work with, like CareCredit. In conjunction with leading dental educators, CareCredit has created practical resources to help tackle key issues, such as social media, failed appointments, the financial conversation, and educating patients on the connection between oral health and overall health. These are just a few of the many resources available to office managers who are looking to go from good to great.

CELEBRATE SEPTEMBER

For many practices and teams, the month of September is a month of planning and gearing up for the inevitable year-end rush of patients seeking to use their benefits before they expire. We invite you to also use it as a month to celebrate dental office managers. Who doesn't like to celebrate with cupcakes or a team lunch? How about a "wall of wonder" where patients and the team can use sticky notes to recognize how awesome the office manager is? Plus, we invite office managers in September to post your best practice or tip for delivering great patient care and tag it with #AwesomeOM for the chance to win a scholarship to attend the 2020 AADOM conference in Boca Raton, Florida. Look for more details coming soon. **DE**

REFERENCE

1. Spektor B. September is the most popular birth month in America, and these are 3 fascinating explanations. *Reader's Digest* website. <https://www.rd.com/culture/september-popular-birth-month/>. Accessed August 12, 2019.



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How to turn ‘maybes’ into scheduled appointments

Bernie Stoltz

I’VE FOUND THAT MOST PRACTICES have three types of patients. There are the patients who will say yes to prescribed care no matter what. These are usually long-term patients who trust the practice, value their oral health, and understand there’s an investment required for their dental care. Next, there are the patients who will always say no. They place little priority on their oral health and are often insurance-driven. The third type of patient will say maybe. They won’t immediately commit to care for a variety of reasons. It’s these “maybes” who represent an opportunity to increase treatment acceptance. Here are several things your team can do to turn “maybe” patients into scheduled appointments.

ASK, DON’T TELL. LISTEN, DON’T TALK.

One of the most important ways to turn “maybe” patients into scheduled treatment is to gain understanding by asking and listening. There’s an old saying that emphasizes how important it is to ask, not tell, and listen, not talk: “Salespeople tell, but the great influencers ask.”

Dental teams are not—and should not be—salespeople. From the very first patient interaction, the goal should be to gain understanding and find out what the patient wants and how they want it so the team can fulfill those wants quickly and elegantly. This starts by asking the right type of questions and listening—truly listening—to the patient.

The first question should help you identify what’s most important to the patient in terms of the care and relationship they want to have with the practice. Here’s an example. “Mrs. Jones, what’s most important to you about your oral health and the care you’d like to receive from our office?” Based on the patient’s answer, you should be able to identify his or her highest core values, which most often center around money/affordability, time/convenience, quality/esthetics, comfort/fear of pain, and relationship/trust.

Once the highest core value has been identified, the second question should help uncover specifics. For example, if Mrs. Jones shared that making sure she could afford the treatment was most important to her, the

follow-up question would be, “What would have to happen, Mrs. Jones, for you to feel that we can make treatment comfortably affordable for you?” When you listen to the response, Mrs. Jones is telling you what the word “affordable” means to her.

PROVIDE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

You may be surprised to discover that many patients make decisions—even their oral health decisions—emotionally. Even more importantly, going to a health-care provider, including a dentist, can create what’s called an emotional spike in patients, meaning they are even more emotional because of their fear of the unknown, the high trust nature of the relationship, and even perceived cost. Patients who say maybe are often created when the practice team doesn’t establish good emotional rapport with them before the exam, diagnosis, treatment recommendation, and financial conversation.

When diagnosis and cost are delivered without the emotional rapport, most patients will process it as bad news—and not as the opportunity to achieve oral health. When patients respond with a statement starting with “I can’t” or “I don’t,” such as, “I can’t believe I need that much work,” or “I don’t know why my last dentist didn’t tell me any of this,” realize that the patient is experiencing an emotional spike. Now is not the time to quote fees, because most likely the patient will respond with, “I can’t believe it’s going to cost that much,” or, “I don’t know why my insurance doesn’t cover this.”

USE ‘FEEL, FELT, FOUND’

When a patient is having an emotional spike, the response should also be emotional. One easy way to do this is with the “feel, felt, found” approach. This is a time-tested, proven strategy. So, when Mrs. Jones says, “I can’t believe it’s going to cost that much,”



the team member should look her in the eye and say, “Mrs. Jones, I know how you *feel*. We’ve had lots of other patients who have *felt* the same way as you. And what they *found* is that we have many ways to make care affordable, which you shared is important to you. In fact, you said that for you, ‘affordable’ means not having to use up your available credit or savings.” Patients want to hear is that they are not alone, that they are not the first to have concerns or questions, and that the practice has helped patients with similar or more challenging barriers to get the care they want and need.

PREVENT DECISION PARALYSIS

Patients often delay decisions when they need more information. I often recommend this four-step process to make sure every patient has the comprehensive information he or she needs to make a decision.

- First, identify the clinical need.
- Second, state the consequences of the condition.
- Third, be the solution—one that is specific to the patient’s core values.
- Finally, assume acceptance.

Patients need to see and hear the doctor’s clinical findings, and they need to know what that means to them and their oral health in language they can understand. And they need solutions framed around the core values they shared. For Mrs. Jones, her core value is affordability, which means not having to pay an immediate, large, out-of-pocket bill that would impact her credit card or savings balances. A solution might be offering her the ability to pay monthly with a health-care credit card. And finally, the team should assume the patient is moving forward with care by asking a question such as, “Mrs. Jones, what works best for your next

appointment—mornings or afternoons?”

Of course, no practice will achieve 100% case acceptance. But helping more “maybe” patients schedule care and get healthy can be achieved by asking, listening, and connecting emotionally; using the feel, felt, found technique; and making sure the patient has the information he or she needs to make a great decision by always using the four-step process described above. **DE**



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3 tips to increase acceptance of esthetic dentistry

Debra Engelhardt-Nash

EARLY FALL IS OFTEN A BUSY TIME for dental practices. Kids are heading back to school, and parents are preparing the family for another year by scheduling health-care appointments, including dentistry.

Ideally, your practice is consistently communicating the availability of esthetic dental services to your clients through email, newsletters, direct mail, and on your website. Anytime is a good time to talk to patients about esthetic treatment alternatives. But early fall is often ideal for face-to-face conversations about appearance-enhancing dentistry. The holiday season is right around the corner, and many patients may be motivated to enhance their oral health and personal appearance.

Here are a few tips that may help you increase treatment acceptance of esthetic dentistry and help your patients get a picture-perfect smile for the holidays.

ASK QUESTIONS THAT ENGAGE

Avoid assumptions that patients are not interested or ideal candidates for esthetic treatments. All patients should know about the treatment alternatives offered in your practice. During wellness exams and hygiene appointments, be sure to take a minute and talk about esthetic treatment possibilities. The conversation may start like this:

“It’s great to see you, Mrs. Jones. I can’t believe how fast time flies. It’s almost time for the holidays. Are you making any special plans?”

Mrs. Jones replies, “Yes—it’s going to be busy. That’s why I wanted to get in and take care of our appointments now. My sister will

be here for Thanksgiving, and then we’ll be spending Christmas out of town with my husband’s family.”

Or Mrs. Jones may say, “I have time off during the holidays and plan on staying home and catching up on projects. I have more free time than usual.”

GET PERMISSION TO DISCUSS WHAT’S POSSIBLE

In continuing the conversation with Mrs. Jones, it’s important to get her permission to talk about smile-enhancing services by giving her a reason why the team feels she may be interested in pursuing this type of dental care. This means the team has already created a relationship with her and has an understanding of how elective dentistry might benefit her. The conversation may continue like this:

“Mrs. Jones, it sounds like you have a lot of things to look forward to, including a lot of chances for family photos and memory-making. You’re here today to be certain you’re dentally healthy, and we are going to take care of that. This seems like the right time to talk about what we can do to improve your smile and make it camera-ready for all of your family events. May I tell you about what treatment may be possible and right for you?”

Or, your team member might say, “Mrs. Jones, it sounds like you have some extra time over the holidays to get caught up on the dentistry that we have discussed in the past that hasn’t been completed. This treatment can also enhance your smile and dental appearance. May I tell you what treatment may be possible and right for you?”

She may say yes and open the door to a great conversation about her smile. Or she may say, “No, not right now.” But at the very least, you’ve given her what she deserves—the opportunity to find out what’s possible. And you have set your practice apart by giving her more than a standard, expedited cleaning appointment. You show that you

have taken an interest in her as a patient and as a person.

SHARE SIMILAR SITUATIONS

Patients want to feel as though other people like them have changed their dental appearance and enhanced their smiles with the treatment you are suggesting. Be prepared to discuss similar situations or show before-and-after photos pertinent to the patient’s dental appearance.

HELP MAKE IT EASIER FOR PATIENTS TO SAY YES TO WHAT’S POSSIBLE

It’s important to give patients all the information they need to determine if enhancing their smile is right for them. They need to know what the procedure will require in terms of time and, of course, money. Treatment coordinators need to be comfortable talking to patients about outside financing because it may be easier for patients to choose elective treatment when they know they can pay monthly with special financing and fit this type of care into their budget without affecting family plans.

In talking to Mrs. Jones, you may say, “Mrs. Jones, many of our patients who have this type of treatment appreciate that we have a way to pay over time with special financing. If we could fit payments into your budget without impacting your other financial commitments, would that be helpful?”

Remember that even if she does not choose to move forward with esthetic dentistry now, you’ve planted a seed through your compassionate face-to-face conversation that may result in increased productivity after the holiday season ends and the new year commences. She might not do it now, but she is more likely to do it someday—and with your practice. **DE**



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Achieve greatness by helping your team be great

Erika Pusillo

I ALWAYS WANTED TO DO SOMETHING GREAT. When I was younger, I thought that in order to achieve greatness and make a difference you needed a title or position. What I’ve learned over time is that greatness isn’t achieved by having your name on the outside of a building. It’s achieved by the positive impact we have on one another each and every day. Today, I’m the practice optimizer at Spodak Dental, a 13,000-square foot facility with 18 operatories, nine doctors, seven dental hygienists, and more than 40 team members. Here are a few ways I’ve learned to achieve greatness.

TREAT PATIENTS LIKE FAMILY

When you think of patients as members of your practice’s family, you’re more in tune with what their needs are before they ask. That consideration can make patients feel special. We try to be aware and attentive to

our patients’ needs and improve their experience throughout their treatment journey. If we sense a patient is a little nervous, we try and make him or her more comfortable. The patient might not say anything, but you can pick up on subtle cues, such as the look

in the patient’s eyes or tone of voice.

Instead of focusing on the patient *process*—the process of getting the patient out of the waiting room, bringing the patient back to the treatment room, treating the patient, having the patient pay, and getting the patient out—focus on the *experience* and connecting on a human level. That’s what creates loyalty and longevity. There is so much competition nowadays that anybody can go anywhere for dentistry. Why should a patient come back and choose you? It’s because you create a stronger relationship with that patient through rapport and

the experience you deliver. That's the key to patient retention.

ADDRESS COST CONCERNS

When it comes to finances, it's not one size fits all. As consumers, we each have different preferences in the way that we want to pay for things, what we can afford, or beliefs around what we "think" we can afford. What patients are looking for today are options and flexibility, including the opportunity to pay over time. It just makes sense when you think about it—everything we do in our lives is broken up into monthly payments. Your car payment, mortgage, cable bill, and electric bill all come to you monthly. Everything is in terms of a monthly payment. Why should it be different when it comes to dentistry?

Most people don't budget for dental work. No one says, "You know, in case I happen to break a tooth this year, let me set aside \$1,000 dollars." For that reason, we make it a point to educate patients about available payment options. We provide options for them to choose what fits best with their lifestyles. They can choose to pay in-full upfront with a 5% courtesy discount. They can choose our in-house membership plan or financing with a CareCredit credit card. It's all about options—figuring out what works best—and educating patients on what's possible.

ENCOURAGE TEAM COMMUNICATION

All too often our days become overly busy. It's easy to miscommunicate and not want to invest time in team meetings. But communication—especially team communication—is the foundation of a strong practice. Time spent communicating is time well invested.

When we onboard a new team member, I set up a meeting with Dr. Spodak, the practice owner, within the first couple of weeks. He shares his vision, gives the reason why he created the practice, and communicates what he wants to create for his patients and his team. That meeting allows the new team member to start a working relationship and create rapport with him.

We have several leaders within the practice, each representing a different department. If it's a business team member that we've hired, we'll have that new team member meet with that business team lead at least once a



quarter. The purpose is to dedicate quality one-on-one time between the team lead and new team member. This is the case even if the meeting is as simple as, "I just want to check in and see how it's going. Is there anything you see that we can do better?"

We strive to encourage open communication. That's really important. Everyone has a voice here and it's one reason why we are so successful. Everyone gets to speak freely about what's working well and what's not working well. Just because one person is the office manager doesn't mean that someone else in the organization doesn't have great ideas. In a lot of cases, the people who are actually on the front lines doing the work day in and day out can see the areas of possible improvement more readily than the office manager can see them.

LEAD YOUR TEAM TO GREATNESS

Two important lessons I've learned are never stop learning and be an example for your team. As leaders of the practice, we set the bar. If you're expecting your team to be or act a certain way, you are the first and prime example of what that behavior should be.

We have an opportunity to show the team that it's OK to change, it's OK to grow, and it's OK to be human. Don't fall into the trap

of thinking you have to have all the answers. It's OK to not have all the answers. In fact, it's been my experience that you can actually build more trust with your team when you can say, "Hey, you know what? I don't have an answer for that, but I'll either find it for you or I can point you in the right direction." Nobody is perfect, so don't believe you have to be.

The more we invest in other people having the knowledge and skills to perform their best at work, the better off we all are. I find the best leaders are the ones who invest back into their teams. When we are all great, we can do so much more. You don't have to look far to find purpose within your career. Bringing people up versus holding them back provides a whole new perspective on how leadership can change a team in the most positive way. **DE**



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a fellow of the American Association of Dental Office Management and a board member for her local chapter of the American Association of Dental Office Management.

It's the simple things that can be super powerful.



September is Office Manager Appreciation Month. At work. At play. A lot goes into your day. Sometimes so much, it takes all your super strength. But remember, it's the simple things that make a big impact. Like teaching your kids the sky's the limit. Or enabling patients to get care by offering the CareCredit credit card.



CareCredit enrolled dental practice office managers can enter for a chance to win attendance to the 2020 AADOM conference. To enter, take a photo of the CareCredit logo from a piece of CareCredit collateral in your office and submit your "best practices" Awesome OM tip as a caption on Instagram, including **#AwesomeOM** and **#Sweepstakes**.

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