

MARKETING

Selling to your patients



BACKGROUND

Selling is often the basis for a company remaining in business. Most people who don't sell for a living have a fairly negative opinion of the prospect of selling and tend to want to have nothing to do with it. They actually view selling activities as unethical in many cases. However, the businesses they work for want to sell more because that's what keeps them profitable. Overcoming this negative attitude and becoming a successful sales agent for your dental practice can be accomplished by a change in perspective.

FOCUS ON THE RIGHT AGENDA

"Used car salesman" can spring to mind when the term salesperson is mentioned. It's the pushy or sleazy aspect of sales that tend to stick with you. The salesman wants to move a certain car and will do whatever it takes to get you to buy that car. However, if you went to a tech store with the intention of possibly buying something that was fairly costly, you might find a salesperson very helpful. Suppose you know basically what you want but haven't finalized your decision. A salesperson lets you know about a feature you haven't considered, and you realize that it would be beneficial. Alternatively, you come in thinking you definitely need some feature and, after talking to the salesperson, you now realize that you don't need that feature at all. The interaction concludes with you buying a product that is better than you had first thought and costs about the same.

When you consider these scenarios, selling can be seen as helpful and not at all pushy or sleazy, depending on whose agenda is the focus. The bad salesperson focused on his or her agenda, which is getting you in the car that he or she wanted to sell. Alternatively, the good salesperson focused on your agenda and gave you information that furthered your purpose. So as a dental professional, the first thing you need to remember is to push the patient's agenda, which is optimal dental health. And there's nothing pushy or sleazy about that.

FOCUS ON THE OUTCOME

In dentistry, it's easy to focus on the technical and scientific elements because there are so many of them. The problem is that dental patients often don't understand the technology and actually don't care about what is done. Instead, they want to know

what the outcome will be. Resolving a toothache is the goal—not understanding how to resolve it.

Patients may be given a basic understanding of the process that will be used, but you can tie it into the outcome by adding "this means" to your explanation. These words link the technical aspects of a product or service to the benefit, which is what the patient can focus on. This presents the patient with the outcome that he or she will see.

RESULTS

Having the right agenda and relating the services or products being offered to the outcome the patient is seeking has the potential to achieve great sales for the dental office. It's important to put yourself in the place of the patient and treat the patient as you would like to be treated. This means describing to the individual how your dental practice can help him or her. Then you can offer the service or product that will give the patient something he or she will value, will gladly pay for (or will use resources to obtain), and will be grateful for the opportunity to choose to have or not have the service or product being offered.

Clinical Significance

Having negative experiences with salespeople shouldn't color all our attitudes toward selling to our patients. Instead, we should remember when a salesperson was helpful and led us to something that was better than what we thought we needed. We need to keep the focus on how the salesperson pursued our agenda rather than his or her own. The presentation itself should be both simple and focused on what the patient wants to know—what will the outcome be for him or her? These things are what good salespeople do and what you can do to give your patients the best dental health care possible.

Pryor A: Winning at selling. *Dentaltown*, Oct 2018, pp 90-92

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