



ORTHO2

The Boomerang Effect

by **Debbie Best**

My family loves to give me a bad time because every time I see someone with braces I feel compelled to ask them who their orthodontist is and what their experience has been. Other than the time a teenager told me that she loved her doctor because he was “drop dead gorgeous”, the responses I get remind me of Yelp reviews.

The response is enthusiastic if their experience was extremely positive (or exceptionally negative), lukewarm or non-existent if the experience has been nothing more or less than what they expected. Looking at this from a mathematical perspective, 20% of patients fall into the two extremes (hopefully more in the positive group), with the remaining 80% in the take it or leave it group. They have not been inducted into the raving fan club, nor are they bad mouthing the doctor and/or team. The nonchalance of 80% of your patients is quasi – they can take it or leave it. Let’s look at some simple steps you can take to change the individuals you are treating into patient ambassadors for your orthodontic practice.

The mood of an interaction is established with the first word or facial expression. Orthodontic team members are not fully dressed for work until they put on their smile – the most important part of their uniform. A genuine smile must never cease to shine from the moment they walk through the door in the morning up until the last patient is dismissed. Turn up the corners of your mouth and remember that your smile is a tool that is free, easy, and always available. Smiling is a catalyst for joy, from an improved mood to better relationships.

Every time you smile you are offering a gift to your patient, a beautiful thing. Seeing another person smile stimulates the heart and brain even more than eating chocolates or receiving money. Statistics have proven that it is actually hard to frown when someone is smiling at you. Just think how handy this information will be when you are trying to schedule a difficult appointment. People who smile more are generally found to be more trustworthy, sincere,

sociable, and competent. In Mother Teresa’s words “Every time you smile at someone...it is a gift to that person, a beautiful thing.” If you want to bring joy to someone’s day smiling is an effective strategy for achieving a multiple of goals. A smile is just a frown turned upside down. Stand on your head if you need to. Smile!

Always refer to your patients and parents by name; use their name often in your conversation. Do not call your patient’s parents mom or dad, they are not your parents! I will never forget the time one of my clients addressed an adult as mom and proceeded to update the parent about the wrong child. Using their name ensures that you are speaking to the right person.

Don’t be afraid to step out from behind the front desk to greet patients face to face, introduce yourself, and shake their hand (this is especially important if this is their initial visit). Guide them through the computer check-in process and offer them a beverage to drink. Use the Nordstrom’s touch when patients leave the office, walk around the desk to hand the patient appointment slip and school excuse. An added benefit is that it gives you the opportunity to ensure that everyone seated in the reception area has checked in (especially when you have seats that are not visible from the desk).

Have the doctor personally confirm the new patient appointment two days prior to initial consultation. This gives the patient the message that the doctor is personally looking forward to meeting them and will provide the best care available for him/her. It is the most valuable five minutes the doctor will spend.

Educate your patients; take away the question and fear of the unknown. In addition to explaining clearly what is

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involved before you start the procedure, update the patient and parent at the completion of the visit:

- What was done today
- What the patient should expect (closing of space, tenderness, etc.)
- How the patient is doing overall (progress of treatment, oral hygiene, cooperation)
- When does the doctor want to see the patient again
- What will the next appointment involve

Finish off by asking the patient and parent about their experience when you hand them their appointment slip. If there is a problem solve it quickly and turn complainers into advocates.

Utilize the back side of patient forms (fee estimate, truth-in-lending, patient handouts) to promote your practice. As well as promoting patient contests and events, it is a great opportunity to promote your kid's club and advocate adult treatment (clear brackets, Invisalign, lingual treatment, etc.).

Some patients feel that it is the end of the world when they are told to avoid hard and sticky food. Create a cookbook with brace friendly recipes along with alternatives for "brace contraband". Place several copies of each recipe in a plastic sleeve so patients can take a copy of their favorite recipes home with them. Encourage patients to share recipes, giving them credit for their contribution (From the Kitchen of Madison). Add at least one new recipe each month.

Develop your patient schedule based on school hours- take advantage of late starts, early dismissal, teacher in-service days, school closed and lunch hours. Before school hours have gained popularity over after school and evening appointments. Take a survey of your patients to see if your current hours suit their needs; if not, look at alternative hours. When scheduling appointments, tell patients what you have available, not what is not available.

Identify and anticipate your patient's and parent's needs. Patients don't buy braces; they buy good feelings and solutions to problems. Most patient needs are emotional rather than logical. The more you know your patients, the better you become at anticipating their needs. What can you give your patients that they cannot get elsewhere? Listen carefully to what they say and check back regularly to see how things are going. ☺

About the Author



With more than 35 years of experience, Debbie Best evaluates staffing needs and systems to develop a strategic plan for practice productivity. She is presenting a class at the 2016 Users Group Meeting in Las Vegas.