



ORTHO2

# Utilizing Your Telephone as a Marketing Tool

by **Carol Eaton**

**I**n today's competitive market, more and more people are shopping before making any important decisions about where to spend their money, energy, and time. Smart and savvy consumers will take the time to research options and be well-informed before making final decisions.

How will you stand out as a practice in being different, better, or offering more value with your services? Consider your telephone as an under-utilized marketing tool that can affordably add immediate value to your practice.

Doctors spend thousands of dollars each year to market their practices including how to get the phone to ring more often with new patient calls. We all know how critical that new patient call is; how it is handled, what information is gathered as well as given, and using this call as an entry to starting treatment in your practice.

Equally as important are the daily calls coming in and going out with existing patients and parents, contact with general dentists and specialists, and opportunities to turn shoppers into a new patient. Whether you are building a new relationship or cementing an existing one, the telephone is a great tool for internal and external marketing when properly coached with the right verbiage. Choose your words wisely. When you speak carelessly or negatively, you damage others as well as yourself and the doctor/practice/team that you represent.

A large part of your practice message comes from your front line team working at the phones or in person with patients, parents, and referral sources that consistently reflect your high service standards. Providing a great first impression, enhanced telephone etiquette, and working together to schedule appointments, answer pertinent questions, offer support to a patient in discomfort, and ease the frustration of busy schedules can make or break a practice.

Parents/patients will typically judge the quality of care based on their perceptions of the communication they

encounter and the patient service they receive.

A person's first impression is formed during the first few seconds of contact over the phone or in person. Unfortunately, when on the phone, you aren't able to show your friendliness or concerns through your facial expression but only through your words, tone, rate of speech and inflection. Human communication consists of:

- 55% body language
- 38% tone, pitch, and inflections
- 7% verbal content

Listen to a team member or record yourself on a phone call and answer these key questions:

1. Do you clearly announce the name of the doctor/practice and yourself?
2. Do you sound friendly and welcoming?
3. Do you ask for the name of the caller and utilize it during the conversation?
4. Do you properly answer questions asked and/or resolve any issues or requests?
5. Do you avoid saying no, we can't, we don't or quoting office policy?
6. Do you smile when taking or making calls?
7. Do you ask if there is anything else you can do for them at this time?
8. Do you let them hang up first after a pleasant closing and thanking them for their call and/or time?
9. Do you avoid placing someone on hold until you have asked permission to do so? Make sure you get the name of the caller and the reason for their call before placing them on hold.

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10. Do you gather all important information prior to taking a message or transferring a call for another person?

To communicate effectively at the front desk, the goal is for understanding and offering help not being right or making the other person wrong. Tell people what you can do for them and why it is a benefit to the patient/parent as far as treatment goals met within the estimated time frame.

The telephone is a great place to start building a relationship and a partnership with your patients, parents, and referral sources. People choose to do business with people they like and they like people who focus on them. Get to know them by name, ask about their family, interests, and events in their lives.

Remember, that good communication requires attentive listening so be prepared to stop multi-tasking and take the time to truly listen to your patients and parents. Visually show that you are interested in them with good eye contact, nodding your head as they talk, or making a brief support statement (not interrupted them by telling them your story).

When choosing your words and sentences, it is best to follow the guidelines of the three P's:

1. Stay positive. Replace your negative speech patterns with positive speech patterns to increase your effective communication.
2. Use pro-active words/phrases. Assume they are all choosing your practice and need your help guiding them to the next step and/or process.
3. Speak in promotional terms. Make sure you are always supporting your profession, doctor, and team.

Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger ☺

## About the Author

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Carol Eaton is best known for her expertise in training treatment coordinators and streamlining the new patient process. She also focuses on enhanced communications, internal/external marketing, team building, and presenting your practice message in a fun and professional format.