



ORTHO2

# Could Someone Please Answer the Phone?

by **Pat Rosenzweig**

**W**hen you're trying to reach someone, it gets downright frustrating if every time you call your call goes to voice mail. Because of that, it is concerning that we here at Mosaic have been noticing staff members who seem to think ignoring the phones is just fine. Every time the phone rings during business hours, it should be answered by a real, live person. We've heard all the reasons why it just can't be done, so let's review what we've heard before I get into what we should change.

First, let's look at the duality we see in staff and doctors regarding the phones. I'm discussing both large, extremely busy practices where there never seems to be enough time to get everything done, and smaller practices that run on short staff. We've seen a number of changes in how these practices are run over the years and most of them are really excellent, constructive changes. We are however, starting to see some less than constructive changes as both large and smaller dental practices start to mimic large medical practices and insurance companies – and this is where the duality comes in.

If we were to sit in the lunch room of these dental offices for a few days and listen to the conversations, I can guarantee we would hear someone complaining about how it's impossible to reach a live person at their doctor's office or at the insurance companies. Everyone, including the doctor, laments the fact that they cannot reach a live person to ask a simple question. It makes everyone absolutely crazy how impersonal and uncaring these offices and companies have become! After hearing this, we switch out of the lunch room and into the office's monthly staff meeting. Here we listen to the doctor and staff discussing, with great anticipation, the new phone service the office has just purchased to route calls to various staff members and take the phone answering load off everyone's shoulders. WHAT? Didn't we just hear in the staff lounge how much we all loath being on the receiving end of that type of fully automated system? Yet now we

want to serve up that exact same system to our patients. This is the dual personality I mentioned earlier. It's awful if we have to deal with it, but just fine if our patients have to deal with it. We've come so far with automation in our daily lives that now we want to use it to keep our patients from "bothering us." Not only is this not good patient care, but it's also a signal to your patients that you've become too busy for them and they need to look for another orthodontic office.

Let's look at the specific reasons why we need to answer the phone every time it rings:

First and foremost, we could be losing a new patient as that phone goes to voice mail. People frequently choose a new orthodontist when they move into an area by checking their insurance website. If you don't answer, they will call the next name on the list rather than leave a voice mail. This is an opportunity lost that can't be regained.

Next, as a patient, if I hear the phone ringing and see you ignoring it, my assumption is that's exactly what will happen the next time I'm trying to reach you. Even when you're dealing with a patient right in front of you, you can excuse yourself for a second, take the call and ask if you might put the caller on hold or call back in a few minutes. And always ASK to put someone on hold. Saying "Please hold" is never a way to answer the phone. If a call is obviously going to be lengthy and you absolutely must deal with something else, ask for a good call back number and explain you'll get back to them before end of the day.

A similar scenario works if you're on hold on another line when the phone rings. And yes, I know how difficult it is to reach technical support and insurance companies, but your patients are more important. Patients calling and phones

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ringing are what keep offices open and payroll flowing. You have absolutely nothing MORE important to do than answer them. And when you don't answer them, the new office down the street will be happy to take some of those annoying patients off your hands. ☺

## About the Author

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Pat Rosenzweig, Mosaic's resident "ortho geek", provides consulting services for all general and specialty offices all over the country, as well as being a strong orthodontic specialist. Pat has also worked with dual trained ortho/pedo specialties and has unique experience in that niche.