

## ADVOCATE SERVICE

# Be Refer-able 365 Days a Year

As business-development consultants, we know that it is crucial to study, to make educated decisions, and to continually sharpen our skills, and we make sure our clients do the same. We have also found that it's a pretty good idea every once in a while to check out how other professionals run their practices. One field that we have learned a lot from is Dentistry.

## A Compelling Study of Business Evolution

Have you ever noticed that a lot of dentists maintain fantastic office environments that run with the smoothness of a franchise? We used to think that dentists were blessed with some type of entrepreneurial gene that was unique to them. We realized, however, that the typical dentist's business acumen is not necessarily any sharper than that of any other professional. It's just that, historically speaking; dentists have had longer to evolve and to perfect their operations.

And dentists needed to evolve! How far do you think they would have gotten with their initial business model, in which they saw clients at the barbershop, and "treated" them with a pair of pliers and a bottle of rum for anesthetic? Somewhere along the way, dentists clued into the fact that they were pretty high on the list of professionals that many people despised.

So they got smart and did something about it. Dentists quickly realized that to maintain a regular clientele, they needed to create a comfortable environment for patients and to establish an ongoing relationship with them.

## Control the Things You Can

Dentists started concentrating on the things that they could control. One thing they could control was preparing an environment that was so memorable and relaxing that people felt great even though they were visiting the dentist. The dentists and their assistants established clean, comfortable offices and they made sure that every client was as comfortable as possible as soon as they walked in the door.

The other smart thing that dentists did was to help their patients map out a foundation for good dental health. As a part of this foundation, patients were taught that they would need regular visits to the dentist to ensure that this strategy for good dental health was to succeed. Furthermore, these visits needed to continue for the patient's lifetime.

Dentists then professionally and consistently drove that doctrine into our heads so that we can all now recite it in our sleep. They ensured that we were focused on the long-term goal of dental health and that they explained it in a way that we could clearly see the benefits.



Bumps in the road were just that; patients rarely blame their dentists if they get a cavity. Blips like this have no discernible effect on the ultimate goal of dental health or on the dentist's referability.

With these moves, dentists finally realized that they too could make use of word-of-mouth advertising. For the first time, people were talking about their dentists and yet it wasn't in the context of pain. They were talking to their friends, families and colleagues about the special rapport that they had found with their dentist. People hearing about such things could have remarked to themselves: I must check this out! My dentist uses nothing but pliers and rum!



Dentists realized at some point that the overwhelmingly negative public predisposition toward them was outside of their control. Once they started mastering the office visit and educating their clients about the link between great dental health and a lifelong relationship with their dentist, they have never looked back. We can implement the same kind of atmosphere and professional processes in our own offices.

### Be Referable 365 Days a Year

You face many of the same challenges as a dentist. You want to establish a long-term relationship based on trust with your clients. And you would like your clients to become advocates for you.

Although you don't drill your clients' teeth, you should still consider how much of an effort do you and your staff put into creating a relaxed and attentive atmosphere at your office. It's one of the few things you can master that insulates your business from outside forces such as the markets and that can ensure your referability all year round. Put simply, clients prefer to come to an office which is pleasant to be in.

You can also ensure your clients understand the long-term nature of your relationship by establishing a Client Process. Clients will embrace your efforts if you consistently follow a client process and simplify the complexities of your area of expertise for them. Through a crystal-clear Client Process, clients are taught that you provide not a product, but a process that involves ongoing interaction. Just as patients can learn that they need to see a dentist regularly, clients can learn that they need an ongoing relationship with you.



They will also realize that it would be a disservice not to recommend this five-star service to others they know who are unhappy with their current professional. Like the traveling dentist and his pliers, the professional who complacently refuses to evolve is doomed. On the other hand, advisors who exceed their clients' expectations in the areas that they can control are referable 365 days a year.

### What's Holding You Back? Clients Embrace This Approach!

You can create and control a splendid environment and master a professional approach. Your delivery of all this must be incredibly consistent. The end result is that clients learn to value the process and their relationship with you. In fact, the number one piece of feedback we hear from the clients of professionals who have embraced this approach of perfecting what they can control and improve on is: Finally! This is what we've been waiting for!

### Attract Clients Who Have Bad Experiences in the Past

Another thing that dentists have in common with other professionals is a large number of potential patients/ clients who have had nasty experiences in the past. Many such people will be encouraged to see another professional by a friend or family member. We know one woman who had such bad experiences with her dentist that she did not go to another dentist for ten years! What got her back in the chair? She was experiencing a little pain certainly, but more importantly, a colleague told her to go.

You can learn from this example. You certainly need to have a pleasant office environment and a clear client process if you want to attract new clients. But you also need to turn your current clients into advocates for you and you need to establish a recommendation process.

Your clients have more persuasive impact on their friends, families and colleagues than you could ever dream of. For you to tell a disgruntled prospective client that you do things differently is all fine and dandy, but who's to say that they will even let you get through the protective walls that they have built up? The only thing that can effectively break down that kind of mistrust is an endorsement from one of their trusted friends or family. And if you have provided consistently superior service and built a trusting relationship with your current clients, they will be predisposed to recommend you. In fact, they will become advocates for you and if you give them a clear process to follow when recommending you, you will enjoy a steady stream of qualified introductions. You will be referable 365 days a year.