

Engage and Delight

How to Create a Defining Moment Over the Phone

Recently I called the Loews Atlanta Hotel to change an existing reservation. The gentleman who assisted me, Robert, stunned me with his service within three sentences.

Based on his abilities and phone skills, he made me a loyal fan—and I still haven't yet visited the hotel! Robert created a defining experience in moments. Why is it that a fine hotel or restaurant is able to provide such an experience and we still struggle to do the same in an industry filled with dedicated, professional team members?

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We all know that patients want excellent service, team members want to feel good about what they do and how they relate to patients, and dentists and business owners want to offer the best care possible. Yet, Robert exhibited a higher service level, better tone of voice and verbal skills, and a more personalized, adaptive response to my needs than a good percentage of the practices that I have encountered in 30 years in our industry. And yet, we are taking care of our patients' medical care, financial concerns, and emotional well-being. Isn't that more important than a hotel stay?

Not to Robert. I was so impressed that I kept talking with him for 30 minutes, asking questions and learning from him about how the Loews Hotel is able to provide such great customer service over the phone. According to Robert, he is trained to consider each and every call as the beginning of what may be an important experience for the client. He clearly considers his service an honor—and it shows. Every time a patient or potential patient contacts our organization for services, we should be honored, too.

What Robert and his organization understand is that anyone who answers the phones at that hotel will impact the decision of that client and his or her family and friends to choose Loews over the competition. It takes continual, ongoing training and regular monitoring to create this

defining experience. Without a defining experience, your patient or potential patient doesn't really have a reason to be loyal to you or to your practice.

“Engage and delight” is one of the many concepts Loews teaches its team members to use when talking to callers. How would your practice be different if your administrative team members had the same philosophy, rather than simply answering the phone or making an appointment for a caller? Following a simple script isn't the answer. The phone skills that Loews teaches require training in tone of voice, interactive listening, and questioning skills that few dental practices teach. True customer service training is an ongoing process in any viable organization. Without training and monitoring, it is unreasonable to expect professional skills.

How can you be sure that your administrative team is representing your practice in a manner that matches the quality of care you provide? Listen to or record the calls coming into your office. Monitoring is the only way that you can know what is truly happening on your phone lines. Set a high standard, and when a team member fails to reach that standard, teach that person instead of reprimanding him or her. If you are not a good teacher in service and phone skills, get professional help. When considering performance in an annual review for an administrative team member, phone skills should be an important part of your review. When interviewing or hiring, look for the hospitality gene. You can teach tasks, but it's very difficult to teach someone how to have a service-oriented mind-set when that's not part of his or her personality.

Your phone line is the gateway to your services. Treat it with the respect and investment that it deserves. In a time of volatile markets, this is an investment that will benefit you and your patients. ♦



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