



Selling and the Art of Listening

Joel Harris, CEO of ADA Intelligent Dental Marketing, explains the importance of knowing when to listen and the positive results it has on case acceptance.

In my opinion, “Case presentation” is just a fancy way to say sales pitch. Hopefully this bold statement won’t cause you to think I’m underestimating what goes on in your office. I know that as dentists you don’t like the word “sales” to show up very often, but I’ll apologize now before you read too far into this article.

The world’s economy is driven by the ability of individuals to sell products and services at a profit to other individuals—then reinvesting the profits back into the market as they become buyers of some other product or service. Sales, not money, makes the world go around.

In his massive Handbook on marketing, Dr. Paul H. Nystrom draws a distinction between “selling” and “salesmanship.” “Salesmanship is the skill or art of presentation of goods so as to convert neutral or even negative attitudes towards them into positive wants or demand. Salesmanship,” he continues, “is the plus factor in selling that induces more transactions and produces more sales than would otherwise occur.”

In addition to knowing the features and benefits of his or her product, the salesperson of goods or services is faced with the problem of learning how to sell in a way that the prospect will want to buy.



The moral qualities needed in selling dentistry or any other product are the qualities of any good citizen. These qualities are simply and completely covered by the Golden Rule. A dentist that understands sales knows that he or she will be very unhappy, if treatment is sold that the patient doesn’t really need or may not be happy with. Such a dentist knows that peace of mind and long-term reputation, require strong, positive, personal qualities.

Honesty is a must. It gives case presentation a sincere quality, and creates a bond of sympathy between patient and dentist and usually it changes a patient’s lack of interest. Patients will always prefer to be treated by a dentist who is sincerely enthusiastic about his or her services and craft, and the dentist’s sincerity gives the patient confidence in both the service and the practice.

A very important component of sincere but effective case presentation is listening for what the pa-

tient is really saying. A basketball player might say, "Yeah, I can hit that foul shot," but he might say it with his eyes cast down and with uncomfortable body language. What that player might really be expressing is absolute lack of confidence or even fear in his lack of ability. Great dental salespeople have to have a tremendous capacity for focusing on what's really bothering the patient.

Dentists who do all the talking during a case presentation not only bore the patient, but also generally lose the sale. You should be listening at least 50 percent of the time. You can improve your listening skills by observing your patient's body language, not jumping to conclusions, and concentrating on what your patient is really saying. One trick many sales people use to focus their listening skills is to take notes when the patient is communicating. It makes quite an impression on the patient and makes it easier for the presenter to keep his or her mouth shut.

Remember: body language makes up 55% of all communication. The tone and pace of a patient's communication makes up 38% of their communication and finally, words make up only 7% of a patient's communication.

If a patient tells you, "I'm just trying to do what's most affordable right now," do you immediately tell him how your diagnosis is the most affordable way to take care of his dental problem? A smart treatment presenter won't. He or she will ask more questions and keep probing for the real issue. For example: "I understand why that is important. Can you tell me more about your concern"? Ask for as much information as possible so you can better position your treatment plan and show that you understand your patient's needs.

A story is told on this point by Robert E. Moore in his book published last year: *The Human Side of Selling*. A salesman was trying to sell a stove to an

elderly lady. He described the construction features at great length, talked about B.T.U.s, thermostats and automatic damper control. Then the customer interrupted him with this wonderfully human question: "Tell me, mister, will it keep an old lady warm?"

This simple but profound story perfectly illustrates the point of this article. Learn to really listen and you'll be surprised at what an improvement it makes in your case presentation and selling success.

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*Joel Harris is a co-founder and President of ADA Intelligent Dental Marketing located in Salt Lake City, Utah. His company provides powerful marketing tools to help dentists grow their patient base, increase the profit and improve their image. Joel is also the author of the book, *Breakthrough Dental Marketing*.*