

Sandy Roth's

# Communique!

Unique and Challenging Concepts from ProSynergy Dental Communications

#86: Unzippin' Their Heads

*Keywords: Expectations, dissatisfaction, assuming, guessing, questionnaire, form, benefits, costs*

## Unzippin' Their Heads

What goes through your patients' heads? Wouldn't you like to know? If you were able to understand what they expect, what matters to them, how they make decisions and other aspects of how they think, wouldn't you be in a better position to help them? Of course.

I often hear our workshop and consultation clients wondering out loud about a patient's thought process. In our Trilogy of workshops, we help clients learn how to unzip their patients' heads, so to speak, look inside and learn what is there.

At our recent Australian **Co-Discovery** program, a participant presented her analysis of a patient relationship and how it had gone astray. In summary, she said, "I think we moved too fast for him; we gave him more information than he wanted and overwhelmed him. The shame is that had we known he wasn't interested in a lot of details we could

have changed our approach." Perhaps the tool on the last page may help you avoid such outcomes.

❖ **Patients enter your practice, each with a unique set of expectations.** These expectations are not tattooed on their arms; they're internal. They're formed over a lifetime of experience with various dentists and secondhand experiences of others. How do you learn what they are? The obvious but not so easy answer is: *you ask*.

❖ **Those expectations will determine whether a patient remains in your practice or recycles to another dentist.** Wouldn't you want to meet a patient's expectations if you could? Wouldn't you rather tell him you can't meet his expectations than have him find out through disappointment? Why risk the latter outcome if you can avoid it? People leave a practice when they don't get what they want. They rarely leave when they are happy and feeling well served. You want most patients to both stay in your practice and take advantage

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of your services; so understanding their expectations becomes an important patient-retention tool.

❖ **People will tell you their expectations if they believe you will be responsive.** If you present yourself as being seriously interested in knowing and understanding your patients, they are more likely to give you information and feedback which will help you do so. “We want to understand how you hope we can help you and what matters to you, Mrs. Jones — particularly because you have just left a practice which failed to do so. We don’t want that to happen again.”

❖ **Guessing, supposing or making it up are ineffective strategies.** When faced with important questions about patient behavior, many people simply fail to ask. They too often presume, assume or simply make it up. These strategies rarely work as well as asking patients reasonable questions like the ones contained on the questionnaire above. The mere fact that you take the time to ask, then listen intently to their answers, positions you miles ahead of most other dental practices. How might one use such a questionnaire?

There are several options. New patients might be sent the form along with a letter which welcomes them to the practice and confirms the plans for the initial appointment. That let-

ter would invite the patient to complete the questions on the form.

Alternately, a new patient might be given the questionnaire upon entering the practice for an initial appointment. Although we don’t recommend handing people a medical history form (we encourage facilitators to review those questions orally), this expectations questionnaire might require a few moments of private, thoughtful contemplation.

Existing patients might receive the questionnaire at their annual examination. You might preface it like this: “Joan, because you have been coming to our practice for six years, we think we know a lot about you and understand you pretty well. But, we want to make certain and not make any assumptions.”

If you and your team can take every opportunity to unzip your patients’ heads and peer inside, you would know how to meet (and, yes, exceed) their expectations. Since brain surgery is messy, tools like the one included in this issue should be in your kit. This communications tool, like many others we offer, will always result in greater openness to patients letting you help them. The key is a sincere sense of commitment to understanding your patients, what they want, and how they can best be served.



# Tell Us About You...

The better we understand you, the better we can serve you. We don't like to make assumptions or guess about what makes you tick. Please make a mark along each scale below to indicate your opinion or preference.

I know a great deal about my dental condition	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	I know very little about my dental condition
I like to be presented with fewer options	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	I like to be presented with more options
I tend to look at the details	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	I tend to look at the big picture
I prefer long-lasting solutions which may cost more	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	I prefer more temporary solutions at lower cost
I prefer to talk in technical terms with my dentist	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	I prefer to talk in non-technical terms
My insurance largely determines the extent of my care	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	I largely determine the extent of my care
I prefer to wait until I must act	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	I usually see no reason to delay care
I rely more on self-maintenance	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	I rely more on professional maintenance
I like newer and more modern techniques	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	I prefer tried and true methods
I favor a treatment-oriented approach to disease	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	I favor a cause-oriented approach to disease
I am open to considering optional or elective things	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	I am only interested in the minimum necessary

In order of importance, I generally consider the following **benefits** (please rank 1 through 7 or 8):

___ Comfort	___ Appearance	___ Peace of Mind
___ Function	___ Precision	___ Other _____
___ Durability	___ Health	_____

In order of importance I generally weigh the following **costs** (please rank 1 through 5 or 6):

___ Money	___ Time	___ Personal Effort
___ Physical Discomfort	___ Fear / Anxiety	___ Other _____