

Keeping the Appointment Book
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The ability to fill your appointment book depends totally on the skill and knowledge of your front desk person.

Is the person the newest hired? Lowest paid? Youngest? Hopefully not. Begin by hiring or appointing the person who best reflects you and your practice into the front desk position. Consider what this skill is worth to your practice when you set the expectation for the person along with the salary range. Plan to invest in one or two training program either internally or through a professional.

Next develop scripts that prepare the staff for frequently asked questions. Is your doctor a good doctor? Which doctor in the practice is best? Where did the doctor go to school? How long have they been in practice? Should I see on Ophthalmologist or an Optometrist?

Give your staff an information sheet on you and the professional attributes that make you special. Vision therapy? Contact lens specialist? Specialize in children? Give them the tools to present all the skills that set you apart. But don't try to be all things to all people, choose an area to emphasize and adapt it to your community.

Create a sense of pride in the front desk position. This person impacts every patient that arrives in your practice. They must understand how to correctly communicate the quality of your practice and the care provided. If this is done properly the patient arrives with an enthusiasm and an appropriate expectation of care. If your staff is indifferent, impatient or annoyed with patients on the phone that patient will not book an appointment but will phone the next practice listed in their insurance plan booklet or the yellow pages.

Use this twelve point check list as a starting point in training your staff.

1. Prepare before you pick up phone
2. Answer on the first 2 rings if possible
3. SMILE!
4. Introduce your office and state your name
5. Speak distinctly
6. Don't eat, chew or drink

7. Listen to what the caller says
8. Take clear notes
9. Cultivate a courteous and friendly attitude
10. Watch your language
11. Treat your patients the way you want to be treated
12. Thank you for calling

How about quizzing your staff to confirm how well they know the services you provide and the products offered in your practice? Here's a sample quiz of questions frequently asked by patients:

1. How long does an eye exam take?
2. What does the doctor do?
3. Will anything hurt?
4. Does the doctor check for glaucoma?
5. My son's is into sports – do you have glasses for sports?
6. My daughter failed the school eye exam...what does that mean?
7. Will I have to have those drops in my eyes?
8. Does the doctor take XYZ (my) insurance?
9. Will I have to pay anything?
10. Should I just go to Lenscrafters?

Everyone on staff must have the phone as their priority. If you're not actively working with a patient, respond quickly and professionally to the phone. If the patient feels valued by the practice they will remain loyal and refer their friends and family!