

Maximizing the Potential in Every Patient

Mary E. Schmidt

President

EyeSystems Consulting

How full is your appointment book? Is your staff taking extra time with each patient to make them feel valued to the practice? Have you altered your schedule to accommodate patient's who no longer feel comfortable taking time off work for an eye exam? Are your patient's purchasing at the same level they did two years ago?

Now is the perfect time to re evaluate what you're doing and why. This is not the time to "do it the way we've always done it."

If your appointment schedule is not completely full that present a perfect opportunity for you and staff to spend a few extra minutes with each patient, making them feel special and very well cared for. Seize the opportunity. The goal will be for that patient to return to family, friends and co-workers and rave about the experience in you office and the high quality of care. Patient referrals are the most effective method of growth in tough economic situations.

Next evaluate your schedule. Are you adapting to your patients needs or sticking to your old ideas? IS today's economy patients may not feel comfortable taking time off for health care. Do you have enough Saturday hours to accommodate them? Are they going elsewhere to receive care? Consider taking a day off during the week and seeing more patients on Saturday or having more doctors working on Saturday. Another option is to schedule your first patient at 7:00 AM allowing them to have their exam before they head to work; dentists have done it for decades.

What product option do you offer your patients? Look over your current product mix. Do you have enough middle to high end products? Now is not the time to offer lower quality product to your patients. Don't fall into that trap. Remember "poor people" need to buy the best they can possibly afford. Buying a poor quality frame, which may break or won't maintain its adjustment, is no deal for your patient and it will have a long term negative effect on your practice. Patients won't remember they saved money but they will remember the frame didn't last. IF you don't feel comfortable and confident in the product don't; offer it to your patient. Evaluate your current vendors and discuss all their product lines, they may have something to offer that you haven't considered in the past. It may be better to offer a high quality close out frame rather than a cheap low quality frame.

Is the staff pulling together and in the same direction? How you communicate and train your staff is critical at this time. Your interaction with staff will directly impact the purchasing decision of your patients. Work closely with the technicians and opticians on methods to communicate the importance of quality products and decision by the patient. Establish an ongoing internal training program, brainstorm solutions, and get everyone involved. Have experienced successful staff demonstrate their techniques when working with patients, I know very few people enjoy role playing but now may be the time to have your most qualified staff actually role model behavior. You can also schedule a sales representative to provide a product specific training, once a week have frame vendors or lens reps in for a half hour meeting. The goal is to create enthusiasm and excitement in the staff. There are many outside programs for you and staff to attend, even if you think you knowledgeable on a topic – attend a program to learn new methods and techniques. Then it is critical that you appoint a person or team of people to ensure that the new behaviors actually are implemented.

Now is the time to be open to new ideas and be adaptable and focus on what's going well. Instead of focusing on the negative celebrate every success!