

You Don't Get a Second Chance to Make a First Impression

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We all know how it works when it comes to picking a new physician. First, you open the booklet your insurance company provides; then you go down the list of doctors in your area and start calling.

The first office you call is the first one listed. The phone rings half a dozen times, and you're about to hang up when it is finally answered by a crabby, grouchy voice lacking enthusiasm or energy. You're immediately put on hold for five minutes, and when that same cranky person gets back on the phone, you attempt to ask some simple questions about the doctor and receive abrupt, one-word responses. You know immediately that this is not the doctor for you.

When you call the next office, you are greeted by a friendly, warm voice that says, "Good morning, Dr. Levine's office. This is Jenny; I can help you!" From the tone of her voice, it is perfectly clear to you that Jenny is smiling on the other end of the phone. She gives off radiant energy and is more than happy to answer your questions accurately and thoroughly. Based on your initial conversation with Jenny, you come to the conclusion that her attitude is a reflection of the office and the doctor, and decide that you will make an appointment to see Dr. Levine.

As a CA, it is essential to always bear in mind that how you answer the phone in your office may determine whether the person on the other end becomes a patient or not! So, here are a few key points to remember in order to make a great first impression.

It's not just what you say, but how you say it! Do you sound like a robot when you answer the phone, or does your voice fluctuate with what you're saying? Try saying this sentence in a monotone voice: "Good morning, Dr. Hoffman's office. This is Suzy; I can help you." Now, try saying it again, but emphasize the words "good," "Hoffman," "Suzy" and "I." See what a difference it makes? People can learn a lot about you from the tone in your voice. If you sound dull and drab when you speak, people will perceive you to be that way. If you place emphasis on words and smile when you speak, you will reflect a positive image of yourself and your office. Let the person on the other end of the phone hear your energy and enthusiasm!

Action step 1: Put a sticky note on your phone with a big "smiley" face on it - so you always remember to smile!

Be confident! Take the phrase "I can't" out of your vocabulary. Especially when you are speaking with someone for the first time, it is extremely important for you to be optimistic, passionate and enthusiastic, but you must be sincere, because callers will know if you're not. A positive attitude lets others know that you're confident. When you're confident, you're in tune with how you present yourself to others (i.e., how you dress, body language, posture). Imagine that Brad Pitt or Jennifer Aniston is coming in tomorrow as a new patient. Perhaps you would spend some extra time doing your hair in the morning or putting on a little more make-up in order to appear especially confident. Why not do that every day? We try our best not to judge a book by its cover, but who can honestly say that they live by that rule all the time? When you're confident, you're outgoing, you've

got pep in your step, you're sure of yourself and of your abilities. A major part of making a first impression is how you appear physically, so show people just how confident you are!

Action step 2: For one week, every day on your way to work, turn off the radio and say the following out loud three times:

"I am happy, healthy, and enthusiastic - and today will be a great day!"

Take the time to talk and listen! Good communication is the foundation for any successful relationship - personal or professional. Being able to effectively communicate with potential patients is key to beginning a healthy, mutually beneficial relationship with them. It is important to be able to talk to patients, not only about next appointments and insurance, but also about what makes them who they are. Each patient is a unique individual, and should be treated as such. Even a small amount of time can make a big difference to a new patient. They all have stories to tell, and most of them would gladly share these with someone who is truly willing to listen. Maintaining good eye contact is a way to ensure to your patients that not only are you listening to what they're saying, also that you're interested. You are a critical part of your team, and your patients know it! So, take the time to get to know them - you'll be glad you did!

Action step 3: Instead of making small talk with patients about the weather or last night's ballgame, try to connect with them on an emotional level by talking about the passions of chiropractic.

Answer questions thoughtfully and truthfully! From insurance, to your doctor's credentials, to chiropractic in general, new patients have tons of questions that require carefully thought-out answers. Some may even be nervous about coming into your office, especially if they've never been to a chiropractor before. They depend on you to have the answers and make them feel at ease. Take the time to address patients' concerns, because although some questions may seem small to you, they are important if a patient feels the need to ask.

Keep it simple. It's important to remember that patients aren't nearly as familiar with chiropractic as you are. Don't start talking about subluxations with a new patient without explaining what a subluxation is. It is equally important to own what you say. When you're passionate about a subject, it's easier to talk about it. Also keep in mind that not knowing an answer is OK; say so, then take the initiative to find out. You'll learn something new, and the patient will respect you for your honesty. And always think before you speak!

Action Step 4: Role-play with a co-worker. Have him or her pretend to be a new patient and try to stump you with questions, and then switch. This will help you to be prepared for anything.

Treat others how you want to be treated! You've heard this statement hundreds - if not thousands - of times in your life. That is because it is perhaps one of the most important lessons one could learn. I cannot stress this point enough. It is imperative that you acknowledge all patients with respect, sincerity and warmth, both on the phone and in the office. Put yourself in their shoes and remember what it feels like to be a new patient. Stop doing your paperwork for a second to greet a patient when he or she walks in the door; appreciate your patients. By focusing on their needs, you get everything that you want: a booming office, a happy doctor, a bigger paycheck, and healthy patients. And always remember - it's not what comes to you, it's what comes from you.

Action step 5: Come out from behind the front desk to shake hands with new patients, thus making them feel welcome in your office.

I'm sure some of these points seem like common sense to you, because in all reality, they are! But I

have found that it helps to hear them again every once in a while to reaffirm why we, as CAs, play such an important role in a chiropractic office. You must always bear in mind that every time you meet someone, you are making an impression that will probably last throughout your relationship. The impression you leave on a patient is entirely your choice, but always remember that the choice you make could determine the future of your office. Never underestimate the power of your actions. You don't get a second chance to make a first impression.

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