

Coffee and the Power of Newness

John Gentile, DC

How good it is to stop and smell the roses. In the fast-paced society in which we all live, where "America runs on Dunkin," it may be more suited to say it is good to stop and smell the coffee. The buying habits of consumers and the importance of coffee both have changed much over the years. Coffee - think about it, a simple cup of coffee that used to be purchased in a diner, a corner store or a delicatessen - is now a staple of the American diet. Coffee is a veritable "food group." People wait in drive-thru lines at various fast-food or coffee "boutiques" just to get a cup. Thanks to Starbucks, Dunkin' Donuts and the like, whatever the weather, both mail and coffee must get through. My guess is that the industry did what it could to position coffee as the go-to drink over other choices.

Coffee is an identity. And is it really the coffee or the container it comes in that everyone is gaga over? Who knows! The point is that the position coffee has been manipulated into is, well, it is genius.

Chiropractic is also in the container, so to speak. But in many homes across America, it is in a container on a shelf in the back of the pantry next to the ground ginger, paprika and caraway seeds. Occasionally, people stumble upon it and, like paprika, find some limited use for it. This seems to sum up chiropractic. And as a general rule, no one is digging the last couple of bucks out of their pockets and going to buy an adjustment. They're buying coffee, to the tune of \$6 billion gallons annually in the U.S.

Clearly, repositioning is needed. Whatever perception the public has of chiropractors has already been decided by news media, television, personal experiences and the ideas they have heard from friends and family. Part of the problem for the public and ostensibly for chiropractors is that the public thinks they're just purchasing adjustments. Why? Because for the most part, chiropractors think they're selling them. Doctors of chiropractic have bought into the belief that "the care of the human frame" is doled out in segments; that the answer somehow lies in the power of the adjustment. This *may* have been a marketing technique that was necessary back in the early years of the chiropractic profession, but I do not think it is viable in the marketplace today. My first suggestion, doctor, is to stop perpetuating the selling of adjustments.

Medicine (allopathic care) has positioned its product(s) well. What chiropractic is intending to see in the marketplace for our products is no different. The average consumer is OK with either taking medication or buying a bottle of pills. The respective differences are that one treats a disease and the other takes pills for symptoms. Medicine has mastered both. Medical doctors have the average consumer "buying pills to treat their symptoms" and "getting on medication" to treat the disease. There is a market for both, yet there is a vast and more lucrative market in treating the disease.

We need to capitalize on avenues that address and teach people about the disease of structural breakdown from a marketplace-viability and patient-psychology standpoint. Look at ways to get people *hooked* on treating the disease of structural breakdown, rather than coming in for a series of adjustments to keep symptoms at bay. While both types of practices can survive - each with different mechanisms in play, each serving different wants, and each serving different niche markets - we must not confuse what each brings to the table.

We also need to emphasize that the one approach is healthier than the other, so that all involved know it. After all, we are the guardians of this ancient healing art form and we are all looking to stay around awhile. Doctor, you are doing this for the good of humanity, for posterity and for a better world. After all, this is the mission of the chiropractic profession. So, while people are coming in for adjustments, try this. Give them options:

- Traditional chiropractic adjustments, to help with the pain. Work diligently with the insurance company so it feels as if it is getting value for its dollar and then deliver: Get the patient out of pain.
- Structural management; chiropractic biomechanics; chiropractic body balance; chiropractic sports biomechanics; chiropractic industrial biomechanics, etc. Sell consumers what they want and need, and then wrap the product in words, ideas and images that lend to "preventing structural breakdown." Work with insurance if you can, but if not, charge cash.
- Wellness care. This can include nutritional counseling and products. It also can include massage therapy, access to a rehab facility and, of course, unlimited adjustments and at least two pair of custom-made orthotics; all for an annual fee. Please note it is important to allow people to have options, but you are the doctor. They really need to go through the corrective program first. Take them stepwise and lead them from pain relief to structural management to wellness.

In the end, the care of the human frame is what chiropractic is all about. Structure matters and everybody is breaking down ahead of schedule. This is no less the same challenge that those in the coffee industry have done with their product. It's about optimally positioning what we do in the marketplace of ideas and service.

You've heard it said that "location, location, location" is everything in business. But the truth is that in the long run, business success hinges upon "marketing, marketing, marketing." That is what makes the difference. So, while people are coming into your office for an adjustment, *market* your other services and products to them. Under the correct circumstances, they will be happy to purchase the items you have to achieve your goals for them.

After all, Thomas Edison stated that "the doctor of the future would give no medicine but would interest his patients in the care of the human frame, in diet and in the cause and prevention of disease." The key element is "the care of the human frame," and it is our job to brand it in peoples' minds that we do it best and that we do it consistently.

AUGUST 2007