

Communicate Your Way to Success

COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO BUILD YOUR PRACTICE

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It takes years of practice to develop the necessary skills to become a doctor of chiropractic. Countless hours are spent on history, technique, anatomy, physiology and science. Every year you attend seminars and continuing-education workshops to become a better doctor. That's all well and good, but I am here to tell you there is another skill set that can make all the difference in your level of success. What is it? Communication. It's the little-known secret to success. Making simple improvements to your communication skills can have a significant impact on your business and personal life. In short, small efforts can deliver big results.

Ultimately, you are in the human relationship business. Getting along with and understanding other people is paramount to your practice survival. Therefore, it is crucial for you to continuously improve your relationship-building skills. What you say and how you say it matter! So, where do you begin? To help get you started, here are some quick and easy communication skills you can begin using today.

Essential Communication Skills

- *Be clear and avoid ambiguity.* Keep in mind that someone's ability to understand what you say is dependent upon several factors, including your language, tone, context and reference points. Say what you mean and mean what you say.
- *Avoid exaggeration; tell it like it is.* Don't make outlandish claims about what is possible with treatment. While exaggeration can make for great promises, it can also destroy credibility. Best to err on the side of caution when talking to patients about expected treatment outcomes.
- *Don't conceal or misrepresent the truth.* Purposefully confusing people will only bring into question your intentions and your ability to be trusted. Be straightforward and honest with every interaction in your life. Character, honor and integrity are everything.
- *Admit what you don't know.* Don't be afraid to say what you do and do not know about a particular issue. Individuals will believe in you more when you admit you don't know everything.
- *Appearance counts, so look the part.* Physical appearance, dress, posture, poise and grooming can either enhance credibility or damage it. Your appearance should work to support or augment your communication style.
- *Be interested, not just interesting!* Put aside your own self-interests and pay attention to others. Keep in mind how flattering it can be when someone shows interest in your views, opinions and experiences. People are always more interested in talking about themselves, so keep this in mind when striking up a new conversation.
- *Avoid a patronizing tone.* Exhibiting a superior manner when communicating with others can

make you sound as if you're doing them a favor by enlightening them on the subject. This is especially true when delivering a report of findings. Keep it simple and emotional (appealing to one's sense of taking action).

- *Hear silence.* Be aware that a person's silence can have several meanings. Try ascertaining it by reading body language and listening for subsequent comments. Use silence in your own conversation style. A brief pause between sentences gives you moments of clarity and the ability to formulate your thoughts.
- *Believe body language over words.* As a rule, body language provides a picture that is more powerful than words. All factors considered, body language can cancel words, but words cannot override body language. For the most part, people absorb far more of what they see than what they hear.
- *Eliminate contradictory body language and words.* Don't let your mouth say one thing (yes) and your body language another (grimacing, shrugging). Say and act out what you mean. Hand gestures and body positioning are critical elements of effective communication.
- *Substitute "and" statements for "but" statements.* Keep in mind that a "but" statement generally negates the first part of your sentence. As a result, listeners may ignore the first part of what you are saying and focus only on what comes after the "but." As soon as people hear the "but" word, a wall of resistance goes up that is very difficult to overcome.
- *Be firm, but not inflexible.* Consider the opinions and feelings of others. Use the appropriate level of temperament and timing to help display the proper combination of firmness and flexibility in your efforts to communicate.
- *Accentuate the positive, and communicate your message in a positive light.* Say what you're for, not what you're against; what you're going to do, not what you're not going to do; what you can do, not what you can't do.
- *Use positive, rather than negative words.* Keep in mind that people hear and remember positive wording better than negative wording. This fact is particularly true when communication involves providing instructions. A positive message sinks in further, faster and easier. It's the power of positive persuasion.
- *Avoid interrupting people when they're speaking.* Don't talk over people with intent to dominate the conversation. This is a clear sign of disrespect and can cause people to withdraw from openly sharing their thoughts and convictions, and only engage in superficial conversation.
- *Avoid acting as a tour guide through your own conversation.* Don't make hand-holding comments such as, "Am I not right?" "Correct?" or "Do you follow me?" These interjections can give the impression of false patience with a slow learner.
- *Use a simple word when a simple word will do.* Express your idea in a straightforward manner, using appropriately simple words. In Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, 190 of the 268 words have one syllable.
- *Use precise words and choose them carefully.* Reject the notion that just any word will do. Laser target your objective and focus in on delivering your message with clarity.
- *Avoid all-inclusive words.* That means words like "never," "none," "all," "totally" and other

similar words. Listeners will typically focus on the exceptions rather than the basic point you meant to discuss, thereby diverting attention from the real issue.

- *Follow the one-minute gag rule.* Limit your nonstop talking to 60 seconds or less. If you speak for longer than that without giving someone the opportunity to respond, chances are high that you're long-winded and probably will lose the person's attention.
- *Speak with an appropriate level of formality or informality.* Assess your audience carefully and then speak accordingly. Avoid being stiff or too casual. Be yourself and let your personality shine through.
- *Say no to name-dropping.* Dropping names in a misguided effort to heighten your own stature by association is self-belittling. People don't care whom or what you know until they know how much you care.
- *Avoid ending too many statements with a question.* Be aware that tag questions at the end of statements can make you sound unsure of your opinions and facts.
- *Pay attention to the level of stress placed on words.* Learn to recognize the stress in your words and those spoken by others. How a word is inflected can convey the real importance of a point or, in some situations, can actually change the intended message.
- *Be specific and avoid abstractions.* People are not mind readers; the more specific you are, the greater the likelihood your intended message will be clearly understood. Don't assume they know what you mean to say.
- *Use powerful verbs.* Don't compromise the potential impact of your message by using verbs that impede your thoughts. Verbs carry the weight of your thoughts. For example, "I doubt" is a more powerful statement than, "I don't know if."
- *Be sincere and genuine,* and don't pretend to be something you're not. Keep in mind that sincerity is easy to fake and hard to make. The best approach is to say what you believe.
- *Accept responsibility for your actions.* Be accountable for your decisions and your behavior. Individuals who shirk responsibility for their actions will suffer a credibility gap. If you make a mistake, own up to it.
- *Maintain steady eye contact.* It shows value and respect for the other person. Avoid gazing for too long as it can make someone feel uncomfortable.

Reading Is Fundamental

Seeing these skills in action can be an eye-opening experience. Small changes in your communication style can bring big dividends, both personally and financially. One of the simplest ways to become a proficient communicator is by reading. Pick up a book and begin studying the art of communication. After all, you can become an expert at almost anything with enough time and effort invested in reading about the subject. The trick is to actually implement what you study. Learn by reading, then by doing. And keep in mind that the act of reading itself also will help you become more aware of proper grammar and sentence structure, which will improve your communication skills.

So, instead of spending thousands of dollars of travel to attend the latest seminar/workshop, why not visit your local library and check out a few books? It will help you become a better person and a

better chiropractor. Have fun!

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