

The Formula for Success

Rob Sherman, Esq.

Over the past 12 years (that long?), I've made chiropractic presentations to thousands of business decision-makers who deal with chiropractic treatment issues. It's taken me that long to discover a fundamental truth. You've probably discovered this fundamental truth within a shorter time span. But in case you haven't made this discovery, let me offer it to you here: No one will believe you unless they trust you.

I came to that realization several years ago after presenting chiropractic data on cost effectiveness to a panel of government "decision-makers." I could see in the panel members' glazed eyes that they couldn't have cared less about my "brilliant" presentation. They weren't listening to a word I was saying. Brilliant, yes. But no one cared, except me.

I kept asking myself why decision-makers were unwilling to honestly examine the cost effectiveness data on chiropractic? Is the profession too small to be noticed? Are people just stupid? What's going on here? The answer was simple: Most decision-makers don't trust chiropractors because they don't know them.

I felt the totality of this realization over the past two years when I was involved in developing the new managed care system under workers' compensation in Ohio. Watching DCs Ron Farabaugh and Bob Poteete interact with stakeholders representing labor, employers and the Ohio Bureau taught me a great deal about the power of trust. The stakeholders trusted these two doctors. When they talked, everyone listened because of the mutual respect that each individual had for one another on the design team.

As a result, the issues raised by DCs Farabaugh and Poteete were taken seriously. In fact, concerns raised by all stakeholders were taken seriously. We didn't have to agree. But when you respect an individual, you listen to their concerns and attempt to resolve that issue amicably.

What does this mean to the doctor in the field who is searching for ways to prosper under managed care? The answer lies in following a simple formula for success: Doctors must build trust within the employer/medical community.

Easier said than done? That is certainly true. I've heard the excuses from doctors across the nation when I lecture on managed care: "It's no use. I've been closed out. We are doomed as a profession."

I've also heard from one doctor who was willing to tell me truthfully why he did not want to network with medical doctors and employers within his community. "It scares me," he said. "I don't want to get rejected. It's a lot easier to stay in my office and send out direct mail advertising."

This doctor speaks the truth. It is difficult to step outside of your office (comfort zone) and attempt to develop relationships with adversaries. No doubt you'll receive a few hang ups, harsh words, and other

not so subtle forms of rudeness.

But some employers and medical professionals will cooperate. And those are the ones you should target. Forget the jerks. When they hang up on you, move on to the next. Those doctors who do establish relationships with employers, medical doctors and yes, even claim adjusters, will get referrals from them. But it takes time and it's a lot of work.

Are you ready to get started? Are you ready to move to the next level? Here are some suggestions on networking from doctors who have attended my classes. Perhaps some of these ideas will help you get started or improve upon your current efforts.

- With authorization from the patient, send the patient's family medical physician a brief report. Provide a brief report on every patient with a family doctor, not just those who refer to you. Make sure your stationery is professional and your reports are well written. Poorly written reports on unprofessional stationery will destroy any future referral relationships.
- Invite a family doctor to come to your office. Most MDs don't have a clue what you do.
- Look carefully at your patient base -- who do they know? Your patients are a great source of information. Find out who your patients know at their work or outside of work. All you need is a few luncheon meetings with patients and key decision-makers and the barriers to patient access will begin to crumble.
- Conduct safety lectures for companies. Don't conduct lectures as a guise to get new patients. Employers can see through this charade. Conduct great lectures and you will see an increase in patients. Your patient base will grow "naturally."
- Contact employers and visit the job site. Employers complain that employees do not accurately describe their job duties to their doctors. Find out the truth and take the time to visit a job site. Some employers will love the attention.
- Get letters of recommendation from companies. After you do a great job for a company, ask a key decision-maker for a letter of recommendation. People like to deal with others who have an established track record. Build one.
- Join the Rotary or other volunteer organization. When you participate in a community service club, trust grows within the community. One of the best ways to develop that trust is to work for others through service clubs.
- Join the Chamber of Commerce, volunteer, and attend business after hours. Many doctors have told me that they have failed to renew their chamber membership because of past chamber positions on chiropractic. That's a bad decision. You rarely can change a position from the outside. Doctors must maintain membership in their local chambers. Many key business decision-makers participate at chamber functions. Plus, the chamber has many local functions that the doctor and spouse should attend, such as business after hours.
- Invite claim adjusters to your office; have a party for them. Why not? What do you have to lose? Building relationships with claim adjusters have significantly helped those doctors who take the time to make it happen.

- Use a contact management system to keep track of all your contacts. I prefer Maximizer but ACT! is also popular. These computerized systems allow you to log notes, letters and search your contacts. That business card you received at the fundraiser is lost forever if you do not record the information in a contact management system.

These are just a few ideas to get you started. If you attempt to do everything at once, you won't do one thing correctly. So pick one item and take your time. The process works. There is no quick fix, no easy way.

Get started today. You'll find that few people are willing to move out of their comfort zone and take the steps necessary to truly succeed. That's why there is plenty of room at the top. It's the bottom that's so crowded.

Rob Sherman, Esq.
Columbus, Ohio

FEBRUARY 1997