

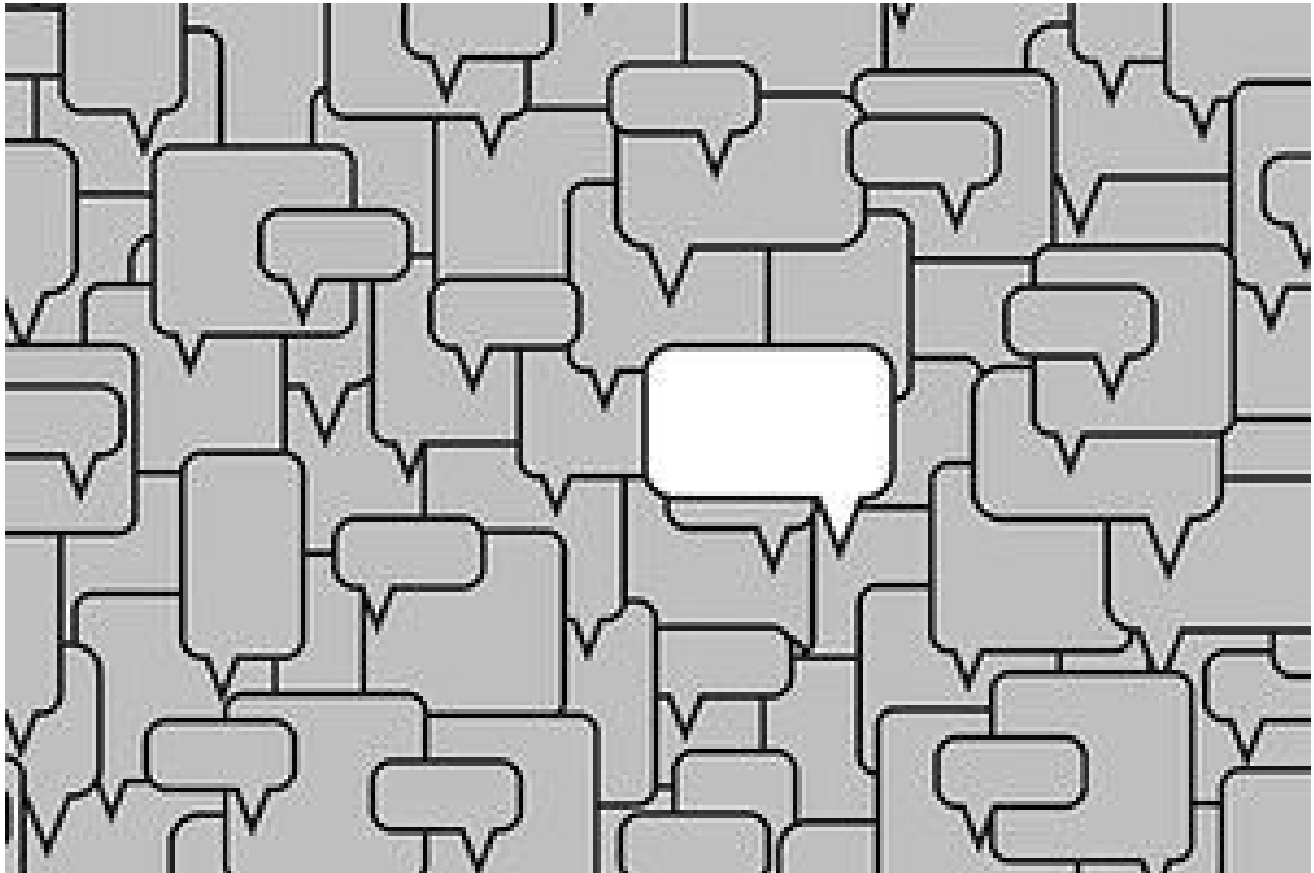
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Preventing Mixed Messages

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The Carnegie Foundation's assertion still holds true: Eight-five percent of one's success in life is directly related to communication skills. It's especially important in your practice because it enables you to maximize patient compliance, retention, volume, collections and referrals while minimizing stress.

It is incredibly important to have pat responses for all those questions that come up with a prospective new patient on the phone; and for overcoming scheduling obstacles as the front desk, as well as scripting for welcome and financial consultations. However, *what* you say comprises only a small percentage of how people gauge you. A much larger percentage is determined by *how* you say it (inflection; tone, etc.), and an even larger percentage on your nonverbal cues (vibes, energy, passion, enthusiasm): what you emanate. That's why your mindset and certainty about chiropractic are so critical to your success.



Do you realize that in a single interaction, approximately 1,000 nonverbal factors help convey your message? Evaluate if you're sending a different nonverbal message than you want to be sending.

Think about your body language. If you happen to be talking to a patient and you're shifting, twitching, nervously dropping papers, and scrambling hastily to pick them up - what message does that send? Probably not the one you intend, so practice these five steps to better body language.

1. Limit the Fidget

Whether it's rubbing your arm, re-crossing your legs, pulling on your ear, scratching your nose, wiggling, squirming, you name it. Even though you're telling your patients the truth verbally, the more you fidget, the more you're perceived as lying; especially when you put your hand by your mouth.

So, regardless of how much something itches, just ignore it! Plus, if you constantly nod, it comes across as, "Hurry up. I don't have time for this." Limit the fidget.

2. Perfect Your Posture

Constantly exhibit good posture (not just because you're a billboard for chiropractic care, but also because it helps your patients feel comfortable and confident with you). Point your feet toward the person you're speaking to, rather than out the door. This demonstrates that you're interested in what they're saying versus, "I wish I was somewhere else!"

Turn your entire body toward the patient. You're constantly giving off signals; it's those signals that telegraph whether you're "open" or "closed" to what someone is saying. Think about the difference

between:

- Looking at someone with narrowed eyes vs. wide eyes
- Leaning back vs. leaning forward /toward someone
- Holding your hands in a fist vs. holding your palms up
- Arms crossed vs. open at your sides

Closed body language indicates a closed mind, so be conscious about exhibiting open and balanced posture.

3. The Power of Eye Contact

Communication should occur from above down, in alignment with ADIO chiropractic philosophy. It's eyes first, then ears, then mouth.

In a University of Missouri study, female researchers made eye contact with strange men at a bar. Sometimes these women smiled after glancing over; other times they didn't. When the women just made eye contact, the stranger approached them 20 percent of the time. However, when they smiled afterward, the approach rate was 60 percent: three times higher! So, in addition to the eye contact, make sure to put out the welcome mat by smiling.

4. Facial Expressions Matter

A facial expression can completely change the meaning of your message. If someone rolls their eyes while saying something, there's a huge difference, right? When you smile, there's a difference between a pursed-lipped smile and one that shows teeth. We want to use a warm, open smile and embrace the 10/4 rule: make eye contact when your patient is 10 feet away, and add a smile when they're four feet away.

5. Build a Space Relationship

When you're standing or sitting too far away, it suggests you find the other person offensive; too close and you're violating their personal space. So, find a happy medium.

When it comes to speech, start by considering the pace of speech: too slow can send the message you don't believe they're smart enough to understand you; too quick can send the message you're too busy to care. Again, find a happy medium.

Then consider the tone of your speech. Obviously, sarcasm can completely change the meaning of your message. When it comes to reactivation phone calls, I find it really helpful to keep the tone light and friendly in order to help patients realize they're welcome back. Save the nagging or scolding tone for their mom.

Finally, consider your actions. Think about the message it sends if you excuse yourself from the dialogue numerous times, making the patient wait. If you're doing that while explaining your role as their advocate and trying to communicate how much you care, obviously there's going to be a conflict between what you're saying and your nonverbal cues.

Good Communication Is Good for Your Practice

Communication is a quality and service issue. People appreciate, pay for and refer more based on exceptional quality and service. That being said, clear communication is a skill that takes time, consciousness and effort, but the good news is the more you excel at clear communication, the more your practice will enjoy higher volume, higher collections and less stress.

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