

QUESTIONS, PHRASES AND WORDS WE SAY THAT KILL CASE ACCEPTANCE

'PROBLEM FOCUSED' QUESTIONS

'What are your concerns?'

'Anything hurting?'

'Do you have any sensitive areas?'

We've all been trained to ask these questions, whether we answer the phone, or work with patients in a clinical setting. It's hard to imagine starting off a conversation any other way with a brand new patient.

So what's the big deal??

Well, what if you patient responds, *'Nothing hurts, just here for a cleaning'* as you look in their mouth and see a train wreck? Then what? I asked the same question of a hygienist recently. Her answer was, *'Well, then you educate them'*. I asked her how successful *'education'* was with a patient whose perception happens to be *'I must be fine because she asked me about concerns and pain, and nothing hurts!'* Her response? Not very many were receptive.

So... what should we ask instead? Shift your thinking to prevention and future-focus...

- What do you want to accomplish today?
- What do you like about your teeth?
- How can we help you maintain what you like?
- Looking down the road, say, 10 years from now, what will you value most about your teeth?
- How proactive do you like to be when it comes to your teeth?
- How do you see us helping you with what's important to you?
- If we see some things that aren't necessarily 'broken', but could make it tougher to achieve your long term goals, what would you like to do?

QUESTIONS THAT MAKE YOUR PATIENTS FEEL BAD!

'When was your last cleaning/dental visit?'

When you ask this question, you're setting patients up to lie and/or feel guilty. Will their answer change your treatment? Have you ever looked in a patients' mouth after asking this question and found that their answer isn't congruent with what you see?

Try this instead... 'We are so glad you're here! What would you like for us to know about your dental history?

"Have you had any bad dental experiences?"

'Do you really want to rehash their worst dental memories?

Try this instead... 'What can we do to ensure that you're as comfortable as possible when you're in our practice?

"Do you floss?"

Another way to make them feel guilty. It's kind of like going for your annual check-up at the doctor and being asked 'do you exercise' as the doctor is scanning your chart and notices your weight. I've yet to meet a hygienist that says she can't tell whether or not a patient is a flosser by looking in their mouth.

Try this instead... 'Tell me about your normal routine' Then you can ask, 'Would it be helpful if I gave you some additional information that will ensure you accomplish what you want long-term for your teeth?'

ANTI CUSTOMER-SERVICE STATEMENTS

"It's our policy..."

It doesn't matter what you say after starting a sentence in this manner - the patient just knows it doesn't sound very friendly. Depending on the 'policy' you're referencing, you might need to get rid of it altogether, or re-frame it in a way that communicates patient benefits.

Try this instead...

When it comes to prepayment - 'Our patients love getting a check in the mail from their insurance rather than a bill'

Scheduling - 'Dr. wants to be sure she makes the best use of of your time. We know how busy you are. She has reserved 8 am so that you'll be her only patient during that time and she'll have one on one, uninterrupted time with you'

No Shows/Cancelations: 'It seems like this isn't working out real well for you. In fairness to our other patients, we ask that you reserve future appointments with a credit card'

'We don't have any openings on that day'.... or 'We're closed on Fridays'.. or 'we can't see you that week, we're on vacation'.

Focus on when you CAN see them. The main way you can avoid this by telling patients what you CAN do right out of the chute rather than asking 'what's good for you?'

Unfortunately, no, can't, don't, won't, no longer....

Just eliminate all 'negatives' from your vocabulary. Again, focus on what you CAN do for them. (See more- 'The Answer is NEVER No')

"You *NEED* a crown"

Patients don't NEED dentistry. We don't like to admit this, but dentistry is really a discretionary service. Just ask all of the patients that make up your 'unscheduled treatment' list, or the ones that forego treatment because they are headed to Disney World.

Furthermore, patients don't want to buy crowns. Or root canals. Or scaling and root-planing. They DO want the benefits of your treatment, and that's where we ought to focus.

Try this instead... Earn the right to offer solutions by developing a foundation built with the goals and objectives of your patient BEFORE looking in their mouth. By finding out the patients' desired end results, they will be able to connect the dots from their end-goal to the treatment.

"We usually take x-rays and photos on all new patients"

Patients don't care what you do with everyone else. They want to know that you've listened to them, and that any solution you offer matches their motivation.

Try this instead... 'Based on the things you've shared with me today, it sounds like x-rays and photos would be extremely helpful. Is it okay if we go ahead and do that today so that we are sure to help you accomplish what's important to you?'

"I'm worried/concerned about..."

It really doesn't matter what you are worried about when it comes to your patients' teeth. When you tell patients that you are concerned about something without basing it upon their fundamental motivation and goals, you're stealing ownership.

Try this instead... Ask questions to establish their desired end-result FIRST.. 'How important is it to you to keep your teeth/avoid pain/be able to chew foods you enjoy?'

Once the foundation is established... 'I know you want to avoid pain... if we see anything that could potentially be an issue, how soon do you want to address it?'