

Relational vs. Transactional Communication

Are you checking boxes or building trust?

What's the Difference?

Transactional Communication

Efficient and to-the-point

Focused on Parts, Processes and Procedures

Often script-based or reactive

Ends when the task is done

What we DO

Robotic

'Professional'

Telling, Explaining and Educating

Relational Communication

Connects on a human level

Focused on Patients desired end-results

Curious, empathetic, intentional

Focused on feelings & relationships

How we are

Empathetic

Kind

Listening

Think of it like this:

Transactional = I talk so you understand

Relational = I connect so you feel heard and valued

Relational communication: Why It Matters

- Builds trust and loyalty
- Makes patients feel seen—not sold to
- Reduces fear & skepticism
- Increases case acceptance
- Makes every interaction feel like care, not just a transaction



Common Examples – Reframed

Transactional Phrase	Relational Reframe
"You're due for x-rays."	"Based on what you want to accomplish today, x-rays make sense. Are you okay with that?"
"You need a crown."	"You mentioned that longevity is important to you. A crown will be the longest lasting option. How can we make it easy for you to proceed?"
"That's not covered by your insurance."	"Let's look at all your options—insurance is just one piece of the puzzle."
"We only do surgery in the morning."	"It sounds like you have a lot going on - we want to do everything we can to honor your time. By scheduling at 8 am, you'll have dr's undivided attention, without interruptions."
"Let me see where I can squeeze you in"	"We have time reserved especially for patients that have dental emergencies - How about today or tomorrow at 2 pm?"
"The cost is \$3,600."	"You've made a great decision! The investment to accomplish what you've shared with us will be \$3600"
"We're running behind"	"We appreciate your patience more than you know. I promise to keep you posted"
"Where is the tooth that's bothering you?"	"Oh no - I hate that you're experiencing pain. Tell me about it... You're in the right place. We promise to take great care of you"
"Dental Insurance stinks"	"The great news is that you have \$1000 to go toward any treatment you choose this year! Let's figure out together how we can work out the rest of your investment"
"We aren't in network with Delta Dental"	"I'm so glad you called! We work with a lot of dental plans. Do you mind me asking who I'm speaking with? It sounds like you're looking for a dentist... "
"We don't quote fees over the phone"	"That's a great question - do you mind me asking who I'm speaking with? Tell me more about what's going on"

***Talking in a human way and leaving the robotic jargon behind
can work wonders!***

What are some systems in our practice that are currently more transactional than we'd like them to be?

1.

2.

3.

What action can we take to become more relational in these areas?

1.

2.

3.

 Your Challenge

Choose one phrase that you personally use often. Rewrite it in a more relational way—and try it in a patient interaction.

 Keep it short. Keep it human.