

Building a Successful Practice through Disciples

Become a great salesperson and your patients will help your practice grow.

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What comes to mind with the image of salespeople? Is it that of a detail representative walking into your office with a new product that has the benefit of improving your practice, or the services you provide to your patient? All of us, in our practices, are or will find ourselves performing the role of salespeople. The science and skills of a salesperson are beneficial to you the physician. When you apply these skills to building your practice, you will reap the benefits of success measured beyond your income.

Dr. Jones is starting a new practice in a new town. He is a knowledgeable, well-trained physician. He has opened a well-equipped, state-of-the-art office with courteous and qualified staff in a nice location with plenty of parking. The first day he has no patients! In fact, the first week he only sees two patients. He has a lot of dead time on his hands. He is a bright young man so he decides he has to go out and sell himself to others to get the referrals he needs to build a successful practice.

Introducing Yourself

Dr. Jones began by attending medical rounds at the hospital and local medical meetings. He informed his colleagues of his training, and even provided them with a

curriculum vita. Sure enough, patients began arriving at his office; but this doctor didn't stop there. Dr. Jones joined the local Rotary Club and met many of the influential members of the business community. He also visited the local churches and synagogues and spoke with the ministers, rabbis, and priests. He not only sold himself to them, but he took the next step and asked for the names of some of the most prominent members of those houses of worship. He made contact with these individuals through invitations for lunches, golf outings, dinners, etc. He sold himself to them and made them his disciples. At this point, his practice really took off; however, he didn't stop there.

Show Concern

When he treated his patients, he showed true concern. He got to know them and their families. He continued "the sale" by making his patients his disciples. They, in turn, sent him more patients; but he didn't stop there. He listened to his patients. They told him they wished he carried the products they needed in his office so they wouldn't have to go all over town looking for them. He added those common products to his offerings in the office. By doing so, he not only provided a needed service to his patients, he created another profit center to his practice. They told him they loved his care and professionalism; however, they found the hour-and-a-half wait annoying. He also was worn out from such long hours. Hence, he began a search for a new partner who could relieve him of some of his patients, shorten his day, and still provide the care to which his patients have become accustomed. Now there is a salesman! He understood the skills needed to convey his message in a manner that his clients would understand. He learned to probe, listen to their responses, and react to them to improve his practice.

Ingredients for Success

There are five basic ingredients or steps to a successful sale; however, remember that the most important ingredient to success is your attitude. Winning people have winning attitudes. There is not one obstacle that cannot be overcome. One must set a goal and then go about attaining it with the attitude of a winner. In other words, your attitude can help to create disciples and these disciples will create other disciples. At each level of the disciple trail, sales are made, and that is when your dream will become reality and you will reap the personal rewards of success. Before we look into the basics of selling yourself and building a practice, remember, you must have a winning attitude, and a clear and concise goal to attain before starting the process in earnest. Remember always to be completely honest with your patients. With that in mind, let's continue to look at the sales process.

The five steps of the sale are:

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Interest**
- 3. Need**
- 4. Presentation**
- 5. Close**

Now I know most of you are now saying to yourselves, how can this possibly relate to developing my practice? Please read on.

Introduction

When meeting a prospective referral source for the first time, make sure he/she knows your name. A good salesperson will try to have some information about this initial meeting before it takes place. Get this information from your sources, for example, a priest or rabbi, or a member of the Rotary. In other words, probe your sources of information to gain knowledge of the referral sources you are trying to tap. If you find yourself in the office of a prospective referral source, look around. An office is a personalized den which will contain a wealth of information about the individual, his/her family and interests. Use this information to develop a rapport and relationship with the person. This will naturally lead the individual to the next step - developing an interest as to why you are there.

Interest

The biggest mistake one can make at this stage in the selling process is spouting off about oneself before knowing exactly what is important to this referral source. The most successful salespeople use a process known as probing the customer. Good salespeople ask questions and listen to the answers intently more than they talk. My father once told me, "Son, we were given two ears and one mouth and we should use them in that order." Why? Given the opportunity, a referral source will tell you what his/her needs are, when he/she needs it and what is important in making the decision to refer someone to you. Once you have this information, you can tailor your presentation to this individual in a concise manner. It will then give you the opportunity to outline your educational background, expound on the state-of-the-art, high-tech medical devices you have in your office to treat your patients, or perhaps the comfortable chairs in your waiting room and the large selection of magazines you offer. It may be your experienced, well-trained staff that is important to this individual, or the follow-up phone calls to your post-operative patients. Whatever it is, you can find out this information by probing your referral source and listening to the responses.

I once worked for a man who was a great salesperson. He used a famous line that worked in any situation. It was, "That's why I am here." The phrase is so simple yet it is the most effective phrase I have ever used. You can use it with a referral source after they have given you the information you need, or after a patient has told you of a problem. For example, "The patients I refer to Dr. Jones complain that he doesn't carry the products he prescribes in his office and they have to run all over town to find them." That is when you respond, "That's why I am here." When it is used in this situation, it creates the question in the customer's mind of, "How did he/she know I needed this?" Or "How did he/she know I have this problem?" This catch phrase then puts you in a position to clarify further the need with the customer.

You can also use this phrase in a negative situation with a ranting and raving customer. When the individual stops the tirade, you say, "That's why I am here." Once again, it will stop your patient or referral source in the tracks. This puts the person off guard, giving you the advantage. This phrase allows you to address the situation in a calm and effective manner while the person still is off guard and listening. In any event, what we have done by asking questions in the interest phase is create or learn of a need.

Need

If you have done your job properly, the probing in the interest phase has led to a need, which you can fulfill in order for the process to conclude in a positive manner. In other words, you are successful in selling this person and it closes with an order. At this stage, your

referral source has given you the necessary information you need to sell him/her on your attributes and philosophy of your practice. Now it is time to present this information in a clear and concise manner.

Presentation

Throughout the probing process, we narrowed down what services, education, etc. are important to the referral source, or the services and products that are important to our patients. Be knowledgeable. Your patient or referral source is expecting you to be an expert. If, however, you find yourself with a difficult diagnosis, don't be afraid to say to a patient, "Wait here. I want to refer to one of my medical books." Remember, honesty is the best policy. Never be afraid to offer information from another referral source that could help the one you are dealing with. Make yourself valuable. Become an expert and create value in yourself. Leverage this value into relationships because relationships sell.

Gain commitments from the referral source that result in benefits to your practice and will satisfy their needs. If your presentation and resulting commitments appear to be going well, you can try a trial close. One must be careful, however, to ensure that the referral source is fully aware of all the benefits he or his patients will enjoy by using your practice. At the very least, by the end of your presentation or discussion, your referral source should appear to be happy and leave the door open for you to close.

Closing

It never ceases to amaze me how many people walk away from a potential sale and never ask for the order. There are many ways to close a sale but it comes down to one question. How many do you want to buy? Translated, "Will I be able to count on you to send me your patients who are in need of my expertise?" The answer should be yes and you have received the commitment you came for.

Remember, all of us appreciate it when we receive a thank- you note of gratitude for something we do. This includes your referral sources, so when a referral source does send you a patient, be sure to send a follow-up letter of gratitude separate from a follow-up on that patient's progress. This will go a long way toward creating a disciple.

The next step is an essential one that ensures success beyond closing the deal. That step involves follow-up, training, and assisting in any way to help promote your service to others. I call this the Disciple stage. I refer to it as such to remind all of us that it will involve multiple actions to achieve that goal. We want to make the patient a disciple of our services to convey our message to others. You must make your patients comfortable with all of your services to carry that message to others in the same manner you carried it to them. In doing so, we will have created a full circle in the sales process. The result will be an increase in the patient load. Hence the sixth and last phase of the sale, and I believe the most important, is the disciple stage.

Disciple

Webster's Dictionary defines disciple as one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another as a convinced adherent of a school or individual. A disciple becomes a follower. Imagine cloning yourself and putting fifty of you in your market selling your practice. Wow! You would be a rich person. Well, a good salesman does just that with his disciples. He clones himself by responding to their needs in a professional manner. S/he

becomes involved in their personal lives. By doing so with enthusiasm and a bright attitude, s/he creates an extension of him or herself. Your followers go out and create more disciples, and so on and so forth. This is when your success will grow beyond your wildest imagination. Make your patients and your referral sources your friends and disciples.

Follow-up

Remember to follow up not only with the referral source, but also with your patients. Have a staff member call them at home after a procedure to ensure they are doing okay. Send a thank-you note to the referral source as a reminder that the patient is doing fine. Go to extra lengths to ensure everyone is happy with your services; give them the personal touch we all enjoy.

Friends

Make your referral sources and patients your friends. This is probably the most important aspect of your work. If it is missing, go looking for another career. When you get up in the morning and walk out the door, are you going to work, or are you going to visit your friends? Think about that. Is it fun to get up in the morning, get dressed and walk out the door for your day's activities? It should be.

You have two choices. You can love your profession and make everyone your friend, or you can go to work. I prefer enjoying my profession and so I make everyone with whom I come in contact my friend. We go out together, we share information, we look out for each other and we help each other. Friends are not as sensitive to fees charged. They are more concerned with quality, service, dependability and reliability. How likely is it that your competitor will come in and take your business away? Do you think your friend will give it away? Get to know your customers and their families and have some fun. Make them your disciples. Everyone likes success and wants to be a part of it. Your friends will help you get there and at the same time, share the ride to the top.

In conclusion, we are all salesmen, whether you are a mother trying to convince children to eat a good breakfast, a doctor, lawyer, or banker building a practice, or a salesman developing a territory. We all have to use the power of persuasion at some point during our day. By following the rules of disciples, we can make our lives easier and rewarding.

Be professional. Learn all you can about your patient. Invite your patient into conversation and ask questions; get to know one's likes, dislikes, problems and successes. Take notes. Show genuine interest in patients' lives and make them your friend.

Create interest, create a disciple, sell your practice, and as a result, your patients will always remember you.

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