

# Getting Back to Basics

These fundamentals are the keys to success.

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*Tips from the Trenches features practice management issues, and is written exclusively for PM by members of the Institute for Podiatric Excellence and Development (IPED). IPED's mission is to motivate, inspire, and synergistically bridge the gap between students, residents, new practitioners, and seasoned veterans in the field of podiatric medicine. They are committed to the idea that mentors with passion to share and mentees eager to learn make a powerful combination that allows IPED to bring and renew a full life to podiatric physicians, their practices, and their well-being throughout the U.S. and beyond. Visit [www.podiatricexcellence.org](http://www.podiatricexcellence.org).*

**S**o many articles these days focus on the topics of practice flow, patient experience, and the use of technology and digital communication. This certainly can keep you one step ahead in your marketing while impressing the “tech-savvy” patient. Yet, what about the personal relationships that are critical in building and maintaining patient satisfaction? That said, there is a simple solution—go back to the basics. These fundamental acts provide the foundation upon which you build and strengthen the relationships with your

patients and office staff.

## 1. Lead with a Compliment

The art of conversation is a necessary skill in life, and is undoubtedly vital when dealing with patients. Compliments are a powerful way to begin a conversation with a patient. Not only do they provide a good open-

any land is a smile. It's amazing how barriers are broken down when you enter the treatment room with a simple smile followed by a “connecting comment” such as “How are you today? It's nice to have you in our office. I am Dr. Smith.” This is much more powerful than the canned, “Hi, I am Dr. Smith, what can I do for you today?”

When you are with a patient, you

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ing statement, they also make patients feel good about themselves. Starting the office visit on a positive note immediately establishes your likeability. Patients typically expect the doctor to be professional and succinct without a lot of impersonal small talk, so the initial friendly compliment helps create a strong connection. The more specific your compliment, the better. For example, commenting that a patient's shoes are trendy is a great conversation starter. It's concise, specific and personal.

## 2. Miles of Smiles

The universal language spoken in

are on stage. Everything about you is being evaluated in hyper-speed, leading to a bottom-line conclusion about your personality. You will be evaluated on your body language, personal hygiene, and caring. This is your opportunity to let your personality shine and break the stereotype of the “cold doctor.” Remember, when you smile, others do too.

## 3. God Gave Us Two Ears and One Mouth for a Reason.

Most opinions are formed within the first sixty seconds of your encounter with the patient, so it is critical that you

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listen to him/her. Listening is one of the most important skills you need as a physician. Good listening results in winning your patients' trust and confidence. When you listen to others, they will listen to you. Let the patient finish speaking before you begin to speak. This delivers the message that you are sincerely listening. Effective listening involves acknowledging the person speaking. Show that you are actively listening with a small nod of your head, an occasional "yes" or "uh-um" and occasionally repeating what your patient just told you in short form. Also, listen with your eyes by focusing on the patient. Eye contact is very powerful.

### 4. Be Nice

This should be quite obvious as it is such a simple concept. However, during the course of a busy day, it is so easy to dismiss. Second only to your staff, the patient is number one. Your level of friendliness can make or break your relationship with a patient. Walk into the treatment room with a big smile and open body language, and keep yourself open, receptive,

and smiling politely for as much of the conversation as you can. Try not to cross your arms, appear distracted, or let your eyes wander. Maintain eye contact when you can and go out of your way to show your patient that you are invested in their care by focusing on their explanation of the condition or issue. Another small but effective task is for all in the office to wear smile pins. (These can be ordered at [www.orientaltrading.com](http://www.orientaltrading.com)). Furthermore, studies have shown that having your hands on the patient's feet for a portion of the visit, especially when talking to them, can increase satisfaction.

### 5. Deal with Multiple Conditions

Often you will experience a situ-

ation when a patient who is scheduled for a specific condition starts asking about multiple other problems, which can result in upsetting your schedule. Yet you can be faulted for not giving due diligence in addressing each problem. In this case, it's best to take control of the situation directly without creating the impression that you do not care, by explaining to patients that they are scheduled for a certain amount of time for their existing condition and out of respect for the next patient who also has an appointed time, it's best to make another appointment so that you can give your full attention to those other problems.

### 6. Say Thanks

Completing the office visit is as important as the opening. When finished, do not race to the door and leave. It is imperative to conclude the

getting a low-cost, data plan phone from a local department store.

Calling each new patient on the evening of their visit is a huge patient satisfier. It is an opportunity to again thank them for coming into the office and answer any additional questions.

## Making a patient feel valued is key to patient satisfaction.

This takes less time than you think; costs nothing, and is high on the list of marketing opportunities.

### 7. Your Number One Asset

While focusing on getting back to basics with your patients, don't forget the needs of your number one asset, your staff. Studies show that when the staff feels valued and appreciated, the return on that investment is high. Recognition for a job well done is as important as the wages received. Start each day with a simple hello for each staff person. Throughout the year, have a pizza party for lunch or a lunch of their choice. At the end of the day, make it part of your routine to say goodbye to each staff person and thank them. Simple rewards like scratch tickets, manicures, and coffee gift cards go a long way. Even something like a post-it note with a simple message of thanks goes a long way.

With such a high-tech world, people desire the personal touch now, more than ever. By going back to the basics of smiling, listening, and saying "please" and "thank-you" will distinguish you as a caring professional with a successful practice. **PM**

## Your level of friendliness can make or break your relationship with a patient.

visit by asking what other questions the patient may have. As this is more of an open-ended question, it is very effective and the patient can never complain that all his/her questions were not answered.

Making a patient feel valued is key to patient satisfaction. Conclude each visit with a statement of appreciation for coming to the office. A simple "Thank you for coming into our office," after every visit goes a long way. Another effective tool would be to consider providing your cellular number to patients. It's becoming more common for physicians to put their cellular number on their business card, which can be given to the patient at the end of a visit. If you're not comfortable with this, look into



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