

Who Answers the Phone in Your Healthcare Practice?

These are the core requirements on every call.

BY SPENCER PELLER

Your callers have many emotional requirements that need to be satisfied:

- They want you to be sympathetic about their pain and suffering.
- They want to feel as though you are truly listening to their problems.
- They want to be assured that you are genuinely concerned about their health.
- They need to be certain they understand everything that is being said to them.
- They want to know their doctor's office is the most professional organization in town.
- They need to feel comfortable that your expertise is the highest available to them.

These are just a few of the emotional requirements your callers have, and you can expect a whole host of others that are more specific to the individual callers. Therefore, your front desk needs to be as much in tune with their emotions while they are on the phone as they are your call scripts.

Let's discuss each of the following core requirements for responding to every call your office receives:

- Your staff must show enthusiasm for what you do.
- Your staff must demonstrate empathy for your callers.
- Your staff must show true concern for the well-being of your patients.
- Your staff must be professional

It's a great day at ABC Foot Clinic. My name is Sheila and my job is to help you achieve optimal health.

at all times.

- Your staff must answer questions quickly and confidently.

Let's take a look at each of these core requirements individually.

Show Enthusiasm

Energy and enthusiasm are contagious. When a person has enthusiasm

immediately feel better as a result of calling your practice. That jolt of energy may be the very reason they choose to book an appointment with your practice right then and there.

Let's focus on what it means to exude enthusiasm on phone calls. The hard part about being enthusiastic at all times is that there are certain times of the day when you don't feel like you have the energy to be enthusiastic. That's when you need to put on the magic hat that enables your level of enthusiasm to grow to its highest level again.

Yes, there are different types of enthusiasm and energy:

- 1) The wrong type of enthusiasm and energy: The staff member is enthu-

Your callers need to feel 100% certain that visiting your practice will change their condition.

for something, it generally causes another person to feed off that energy and become enthusiastic as well. This happens because human beings are apt to borrow the energy from the person they are interacting with.

That's why it is so important that your staff members come across as enthusiastic when they are on the phone with your patients. You want your staff members to project that energy level to your callers so they

siastic about everything and anything, and just wants the caller to know how happy he or she is about life.

- 2) The right type of enthusiasm and energy: The staff member exudes positive energy at all times, but is listening attentively to the caller and demonstrates heightened enthusiasm about what the doctor can do to get the caller feeling better as soon as possible.

Continued on page 102

Phone (from page 101)

Notice the difference here? Being overwhelmingly enthusiastic and making the caller feel alienated as a result can have the reverse effect on your callers. That's why enthusiasm has to be channeled into the conversation in the right doses. Mixed in with the conversation will be empathy, sincerity, security, and other emotions that we will discuss in this article, but the underlying emotion that will flood through the phone line is the enthusiasm for the abilities the doctor has to treat patients.

You see, your callers need to feel 100% certain that visiting your practice will change their condition. If the person answering the phone isn't enthusiastic about the results the doctor can deliver, how can the callers be

confident about your treatment methods, doing so will produce amazing results for your practice.

It is nearly impossible for people to be genuinely enthusiastic about something if they don't have the facts and/or experience to support it. The worst thing you can do is to expect your front desk team to be enthusiastic about your services without their knowing exactly what those services are. You need everyone in your office to be your biggest fans because raving fans attract other raving fans. Spend the time internally to drive true enthusiasm for your treatment methods and you are bound to fill up your waiting room.

Demonstrate Empathy for Callers

Empathy is a key component in securing new patients and keeping

existing patients. It provides an opportunity for your practice to shine.

Let's take a look at a sample call to see how a lack of empathy can decrease the likelihood that a new-patient appointment is secured:

Front desk staff member: "Doctor's office, this is Sheila speaking, how can I help you?"

Patient: "Hi Sheila, my name is Nancy and I have tremendous foot pain right now and I don't know what to do about it. I have a small child at home and I'm very worried about what will happen to her if I can't walk. I saw your ad in the local paper and wanted to find out how you might help me."

Front desk staff member: "I can get you an appointment with the doctor; let me take a look at the calendar to see what we have available. Can you hold on for one second?"

How well did this staff member let the caller know she had a sympathetic ear on the other end of the phone? Not well at all. On top of the generic phone greeting and the lack of a proper flow to the call, the staff member didn't indicate she was listening to the caller's issues and certainly didn't show empathy for the pain the caller was in and her concern about how it might affect her child.

This is how she should have handled the call:

Front desk staff member: "It's a great day at ABC Foot Clinic. My name is Sheila and my job is to help you achieve optimal health. Can I please start with your first name?"

Patient: "My first name is Nancy."

Front desk staff member: "Thank you. And may I please have your last name?"

Patient: "My last name is Stevens."

Front desk staff member: "Thank you Nancy. And can I please have your phone number in case we get disconnected?"

Continued on page 103

A lack of empathy on the phone must be avoided at all costs. Empathy is a key component in your drive for phone success.

certain they will get the results they are looking for?

Within a two- to three-minute phone call, it is almost impossible to support specific claims about treatment methods with the necessary facts to support those claims; therefore, it is important that your staff members sell your services to patients with enthusiasm. A great way to ensure your staff members are genuinely enthusiastic about what the doctor does to treat patients is to make sure all staff members are believers by treating them also—if that is at all possible. If it's not possible to do so, at a minimum, staff members should be highly educated about the treatments the practice provides so they are confident in how they can help the patient.

Hold training classes with your team, give them reading material, assign homework. Do whatever it takes to educate and empower your staff members to be enthusiastic about your services. Although it may seem like a lot of effort to educate each person in your of-

fice about your treatment methods, doing so will produce amazing results for your practice. However, your front desk staff members deal with hundreds of patient calls every month, and most of those calls center on a patient who needs a problem fixed. Whether it's a health-related problem, a financial problem, or a personal problem outside of what your practice deals with, these problems are serious to your callers. Due to the sheer volume of calls your front desk receives, over time your team may become desensitized to the problems they hear about, which can decrease their ability to empathize with your patients.

A lack of empathy on the phone must be avoided at all costs. Empathy is a key component in your drive for phone success. In short, your patients expect you to be empathetic to their problems and you owe it to them. It's such a simple concept to grasp, yet it's amazing how many of today's healthcare practices have lost sight of the importance of empathy. This emotional gap that exists between staff members and callers pro-

STAFF MANAGEMENT

Phone (from page 102)

Patient: “My phone number is 212-555-1212.”

Front desk staff member: “Thanks, I have that down as 212-555-1212. Is that correct?”

Patient: “Yes it is.”

Front desk staff member: “Great. And when was the last time you visited our practice?”

Patient: “I’ve actually never visited your practice.”

Front desk staff member: “Well let me be the first to welcome you to the ABC Foot Clinic. You’ve made a great decision by contacting us. What’s the motivation for your call today?”

Patient: “I’m calling you because I have tremendous foot pain right now

and I don’t know what to do about it. I have a small child at home and I’m very worried about what will happen to her if I can’t walk. I saw your ad in the local paper and wanted to find out how you might help me.”

as quickly as possible. Let me look at the calendar to see if I can squeeze you in to see the doctor today. How does 3:15 or 4:30 today work for you?

Notice the difference here? And

You have a very good chance of standing out from the crowd in your town if you commit to doing things the right way on your inbound calls.

Front desk staff member: “Gosh, I’m so sorry to hear that you are in pain Nancy, and I can assure you that the team here at ABC Clinic will do everything we can to get you feeling better as quickly as possible so you and your daughter will have nothing to worry about. We know how one person’s foot pain can cause stress on an entire family, so our staff will work hard to get you out of pain

how much more likely do you think Nancy is to book an appointment in the second scenario versus the first? Now think back to the last time you called a doctor’s office because you were in pain. Do you recall the person who answered the phone going through the proper process like we demonstrated in the second scenario? Probably not.

That is why I say that you have a

Continued on page 104

Phone (from page 103)

very good chance of standing out from the crowd in your town if you commit to doing things the right way on your inbound calls. It really starts with your

want to hang your hat on if you are to build a booming practice.

The real growth in your practice occurs when you begin securing the patients who will visit you from a few extra miles away, who will spend a

to keep them focused on how they handle the incoming calls to better relate to your patients. It's about being human and letting callers know that everyone in your practice genuinely cares about each patient. Empathy plays a huge role in that process. **PM**

You want your callers to make some sort of emotional connection with your staff.

empathy level towards your patients.

You want your callers to make some sort of emotional connection with your staff because that gives you the best chance of securing the patient. In the absence of emotion, the decision about which doctor to visit will come down to price, convenience, and appointment time availability. While you may win the price and convenience battle on occasion, that's not what you

few extra dollars with you because of the connection they feel. Furthermore, when your patients walk in the door for the first time, you want them to seek out the staff member who answered the phone on that first call to say hello and let them know that they made it in to see the doctor. That's the kind of emotional connection that will change your practice forever. It is attainable if you work with your team

Excerpted from: Peller, Own the Phone: Proven Ways of Handling Calls, Securing Appointments, and Growing Your Healthcare Practice (Greenbranch Publishing, 2015); www.greenbranch.com/ownthephone; 800-933-3711.



Mr. Peller is CEO and Co-Founder, YesTrak, and author of *Own the Phone: Proven Ways of Handling Calls, Securing Appointments, and Growing Your Healthcare Practice* (Greenbranch Publishing, 2015), e-mail: spencer@yestrak.com

yestrak.com; website: www.YesTrak.com.