



Smile!, or, How to Change the Unenthusiastic Aura

Each one of us must help create a desirable environment.

BY LYNN HOMISAK, PRT

To Our Readers: *There are no foolish questions. Chances are if you have a question or concern in your practice, others are experiencing a similar situation. We're here to help. PM [doctor and staff] readers are encouraged to submit questions to lynn@soshms.com which will be printed and answered in this column anonymously.*

Topic: Don't Forget to Smile!

Dear Lynn,

This may not be a real "practice management" problem, but I've got to get something off my chest. You are always saying how important it is to SMILE at work. But, blah, blah, blah...it's really hard when everyone around you—patients and staff—walk around with frowns.

Work can sometimes bring out the worst in people—especially if they don't enjoy doing what they do.

Having a genuine interest in people, engaging in stimulating conversations, loving what you do, feeling respected and having purpose in your work, helping patients feel better and feeling comfortable in one's skin are some reasons why people smile. Smiling is an authentic, physical expression of happiness.

If smiling does not come naturally to some employees, it could be the result of real-life, outside problems that they can't let go of. They unintentionally carry these troubles into

their workplace. It is important to remember that employees DO have lives outside of the practice; some not so pleasant.

Someone in charge needs to have a "discovery" conversation with them. Why? Because if not, their unenthusiastic aura could hinder practice efficiency, portray negativity to your patients, and directly affect

frowning, you know what they say? You might be the reason (but let's not go there.) More likely, it is a practice management problem that needs attention and should be addressed before it gets out of hand.

While patients may never tell you, it is important for them (yes, even the ones that refrain from smiling) that they are on the receiving

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other employees in the practice. It already has affected YOU!

A negative employee is a type of "Staff Infection." They are highly contagious, the infection spreads quickly and no one is immune.

Having this necessary conversation will determine if, in fact, their internal issues revolve around any potential job dissatisfaction and if so, what? A lack of communication? Feeling overworked and underpaid? Boredom? A co-worker relationship gone bad? Perhaps, they just feel that their work contributions are taken for granted and insignificant. How would you know, unless you asked?

Secondarily, an honest, straightforward, one-on-one conversation would also determine if this individual would be happier working elsewhere.

Now, if everyone around you is

end of a genuine smile. A smile warmly conveys acceptance, welcoming, and trust in their medical team. A smile may be just thing that assures them, "it's going to be okay."

Unless patients have an inherent RAF (resting angry face), there are legitimate reasons why they don't smile. Maybe it's fear (unknown treatment or diagnosis expectations), complications or health issues at home, and yes, brace yourself, even anger from waiting too long to see the doctor.

Generally speaking, smiles are friendly gestures, offered willingly under the right circumstances. It becomes a real-life challenge for each one of us to be the changing force and help create a desirable environment. Whether it is your staffer or your patients who neglect to smile,

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keep in mind that “Nobody needs a smile so much as the one who has none to give.”

Pardon the cliché, but sometimes, it can be as simple as giving someone without a smile one of yours. Have you ever heard of “The Smile Challenge”? The suggestion is simple because smiles, like yawns, are contagious. The exercise goal is to get 10 people smiling at a particular place in your life. Then, you are the one making a difference!

Topic: Early Bird Patients

Dear Lynn,

I have a small solo practice with one nurse as my only employee. We schedule very carefully so that I usually run on time or maybe only five



there are a number of reasons why this occurs. For one, elderly patients who rely on transportation may be bound by their driver, or a shuttle schedule. Two, those that do drive may leave their homes early to avoid unexpected traffic delays for fear of being late for their appointment. Three, maybe they think more paperwork is needed before they can

out that they are early for their scheduled time. Some may realize it and to some, this may come as a surprise. “I thought my appointment was for 9 AM!,” which explains their untimely arrival.

Suggest they make themselves comfortable and inform them that if it is at all possible, you will try to get them in sooner. In fact, there are times where getting an unexpected early start on their visit can be helpful. Handling these patients with

exceptional customer service goes a long way.

I recently visited an office that posted a sign next to the check-in desk that said...“Patients are seen according to appointment time, not according to the arrival time.” And as for signs—the sign was generally disregarded—it was often still necessary to explain to some that they will be seen in order of appointment times. However, soon enough the repeated message kicked in; the verbal explanations were unnecessary. To their delight, those early birds started arriving much closer to their scheduled time.

Finally, my “go to” comment for any scheduled event: “If you can’t be on time, be early!”

Topic: 8 Quick Tips to Organize and Improve Front Desk Efficiency

Dear Lynn,

My performance review is coming up and I want to show my doctor that I can better manage my time, front desk activities, and overall efficiency. What can I start doing that will demonstrate my intentions?

Sharing actual successful achievements is a great way to validate your activities! Below are several recommendations that will generate excellent results:

- Keep a daily “1-3-5 to do” list: Stop keeping lists in your head—you will not remember all of them, and important things will either be forgotten or lost in the shuffle. A written list serves as a guide and checking

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What you never want to do is scold patients for arriving early; or complain, “Why are you here so early? Your appointment isn’t for another 45 minutes!”

minutes behind. We have about half a dozen patients who are consistently 30-45 minutes early for their appointments. We always tell them politely that they are early, but is there anything else we can/should say to discourage this? Sometimes they will respond that it is better to be early than late, but often they don’t respond at all. Should I just be grateful they are coming in and not say anything?

I must applaud you and appreciate the fact that you keep to an on-time schedule. (RARE, these days!) I found it extremely interesting that you had such a significant number of early patient arrivals. Many offices would love to have this problem. I believe, for the most part, you are handling the issue with politeness and rational explanation. This is admirable. I would have suggested a similar approach.

We must take into account that

be seen and don’t want that to delay their appointment time. And finally, for some who deal with daily stress issues, the chair in your reception area is a place of peace and quiet where they can just sit and relax for 30 minutes or catch up on their social media uninterrupted. They will confess, I know I’m early. I’m happy to just sit and wait.

Admittedly, it IS frustrating to a patient who may have arrived early and sees one patient after another taken in ahead of them. If no one addresses their early arrival, they assume they are being overlooked or ignored.

What you never want to do is scold patients for arriving early; or complain, “Why are you here so early? Your appointment isn’t for another 45 minutes!”

You also don’t want their arrival to go unacknowledged. Thank them for coming and gently point

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or crossing off items shows progress. You can use a standard “Things to do” list or try this one on for size:

Collect all your co-payments, preferably prior to rendering the service.

- Collect all your co-payments, preferably prior to rendering the service. Keep track of your success in doing so. (i.e., your productive daily percentages)

- Avoid multitasking: It’s unrealistic to think that anyone can do their BEST work when also trying to juggle two or three other things at the same time. Make your project the only work in front of you. Multitasking is just another word for “poor planning.”

- Don’t procrastinate: It is only

a barrier to your productivity. Get it done! Sooner than later.

- Keep a clean desk: DECLUTTER! Dump your junk! Commit to straightening your desk/work area at

the end of each day so you can start the next day fresh and ready to go!

- Keep a message pad handy to jot down actions that need follow-up before the end of the day.

- Assign a “mailbox” (nothing fancy) to each staff person: Don’t stop every time you need to relay a message to your co-workers. Mailboxes allow an easy, non-verbal distribution of necessary tasks and communication.

- Use technology when possible: Just for example, automated appointment reminders can effectively save

hours of time that can be beneficial elsewhere.

Present your achievements (your 5-10 best activities from your to-do lists) to the doctor that document the improved efficiency and actual daily activities. Often, the routine daily work goes unnoticed. The notes may reveal your active efforts and should be a great conversation starter for your performance review. **PM**



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