Gain power at your laser clinics!

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_Introduction

During this issue we are going to explore the first element of marketing mix which is the package in our case the service that we deliver in our offices. Dental treatment is an intangible service therefore a very important role is played by the quality.

Do you know how quality is perceived in the mind of our patients? First by the past experiences our patients have had from us or from other colleagues. Second from the word of mouth, which is our most powerful marketing tool, what others are saying about us and finally, from the personal needs that our patients have. As an example we can start with their need of experiencing minimal pain during a treatment. Many get afraid or annoyed by the sound of the drill; in this case they will prefer to choose a laser dentist. The above are factors that we have to meet during the services that we offer. We should understand that we do not only deliver services but a culture; the culture and mentality of our clinic through the experience that our patients receive. They do not only expect from us to be just good doctors. If we think like this we are wrong! They expect from us to be the best, period. Our patients will not just compare us with other dentists but with all the service experiences that they have like as in a hotel or in a restaurant.

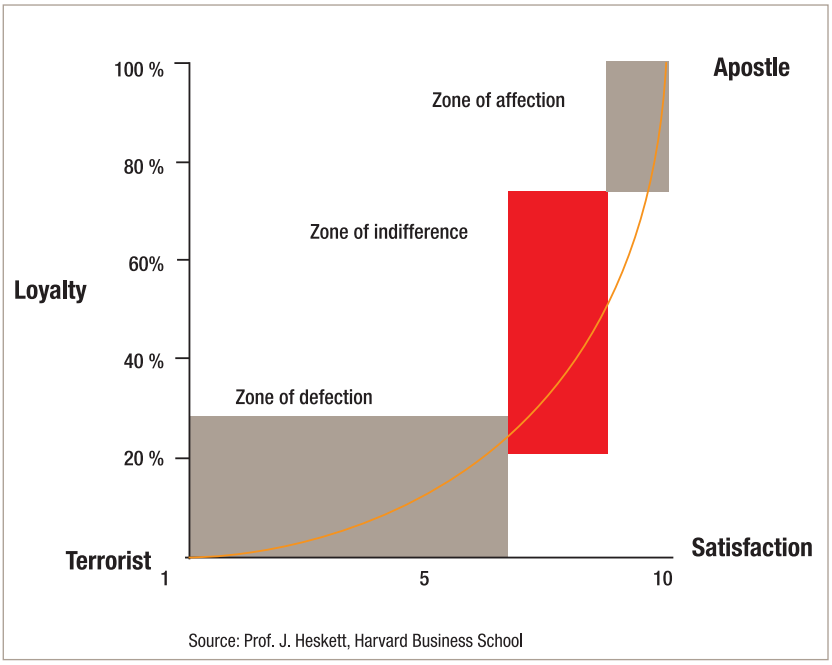
Our competitors are everyone when it comes to our patients; the manager in a restaurant, the receptionist in a hotel. Our patients hold in mind a mental picture of how they think they should be treated and this picture becomes their standard by which their experiences are judged.

_Law of memorable event: determines dissatisfaction and loyalty

When nothing makes either a good or a bad impression on you, your feelings are neutral. It takes something memorable to turn ordinary satisfactory experience into something special. Dissatisfaction comes from something bad that you experienced and you remember. Furthermore, loyalty is generated by memorable things that happen, that we weren't expecting. And if our patients do not remember us, why should they choose to continue to come to us?

As we can see from Figure 1, we have three zones when we interrelate satisfaction and loyalty:

1. The zone of defection, which includes the terrorists—all the dissatisfied patients that discourage others from visiting us. This zone gets narrower as the relationship between dentist and patient matures and goodwill is added in the emotional bank account.
2. The zone of indifference, where the patients are satisfied but they might visit other colleagues as well for their treatment or they will not refer us to others.
3. Finally the zone of affection containing the apostles—the very satisfied patients, the loyal patients that talk favourably about our services and their experiences and they will spread through the word of mouth how thrilled they are with us, encouraging friends and relatives coming to us for their dental treatments.



Source: Prof. J. Heskett, Harvard Business School

Fig. 1_Relation between satisfaction and loyalty. Source: Professor J. Heskett, Harvard Business School.

A question that might arise is: how can we minimize the zone of defection?

Exit interviews or measuring regularly our patient's satisfaction with surveys can have an extreme impact on our profits since through them we can learn in which areas we lack in so to improve.

And here comes another question to consider: How many of us administrate patient satisfaction surveys, how often and when do we imply them? As mentioned before, dental treatment is an intangible service (= we cannot measure it like a product). Therefore, the quality plays a very important role.

How do patients measure the quality of our practice?

Patients cannot judge how well we can fill a root canal or how nicely we polish a composite filling—instead, quality is effectively perceived from our patients by the below factors:

1. Appearance: the way our office and our staff look.
2. Security of our clinic: In which way do we increase our patient's confidence that they belong in a safe place and can relax and trust us for the best? Some examples are the existence of safety signs and flash lamps outside the doors, laser safety diploma, safety glasses that we provided to them during laser treatments, accreditations we have gained like ISO 9001 (for quality) or OSHAS 18000 (for health and safety). These are just some of the options that we have that constantly remind our patients of our best interest in the quality.
3. Reliability: Our ability to keep a consistent level of a laser treatment. Is our treatment plan performed as told from the beginning? If we promise our patients that they will have a painless treatment, will this we be able to keep our word? Our patients must know the truth from the beginning. No promises must be given that cannot be kept in order for our patient to trust and rely on us.
4. Responsiveness: Do we respond quickly to their problems? Or their phone calls? Are our staff members willing to answer their questions with care and seriousness expressing simultaneously their knowledge and skills?
5. Competence: Our patients ought to understand that we are not only skillful and that we do not only have the equipment but we also posses the knowledge to provide laser treatments.
6. Courtesy: We have to be polite not only with our patients, but also show our friendliness towards our employees as well: "Treat your employees as your patients and your patients as employees".
7. Credibility: We ought to be honest and have a good reputation
8. Access: People value nice people since this make them happy. We cannot describe to them how nice we or our staff is, they have to see for themselves—we have to walk the walk through internal and external acts of niceness. We should be approachable and ease to contact. If, for example, we have a secretary that is at all time distracted and cannot be reached from our patients, this will create a bad impression for our entire clinic.
9. Communication: We must know what, when and how to say something. We must master verbal, non verbal communication skills so as to show them that we understand them with sympathy and compassion; understand not only their needs, but also their fears.

Let's look at the following example: If we are explaining the treatment to Mr Smith like this: "Mr Smith, today we are going to make a cavity preparation using VSP, 20 Hz with water and air using our Er:Yag laser. Are you ok with that?" What do you believe that we are going to achieve through this? Loose him instantly as a listener!

Let's close the referral to the first element of marketing mix by remembering the Gucci family motto: "Quality is remembered long after the price is forgotten". In the next issue, we are going to talk about the second element of marketing mix, which is the PRICE.

A fruit for thought: Let's not forget who our patients are. All of the people that we meet daily, the receptionist at a hotel, the bank cashier, our hairdresser, all the people that we come into contact with can spread the word of how wonderful or miserable we are... In which of the two groups do you want to belong to? I leave this decision up to you.

Last as a closure allow me to proudly announce the launch of DBA mastership course in Europe under the umbrella of AALZ—RWTH Aachen University Campus. A mini MBA designed only for dentists scheduled to begin on the 1st of May 2014. It is a course for the dentists that want to gain their power back! For those that have the desire to master the skills of management and administration for their own clinics, where many of the above and many more matters will be taught in more detail. Looking forward to your questions and requests for further information at: dba@yiannikosdental.com_

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