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Generating Revenue by Elevating the Customer Experience

BY NATHAN RISLEY

When we talk about revenue in relation to our practices, we are generally referring to reimbursement and payment models. But there is another side to generating lasting revenue, and it starts with how you treat your patients.

Customer service is something our practice takes very seriously. That feels silly to announce, but it is never a waste of time to review what customer service might mean to your team and your clinic, especially in terms of your financial success. If you hope to succeed financially, you must pay attention to the customer service side of your practice. Patients leaving due to a negative customer service experience equates to lost revenue for your business.

We are proud of our relationships with our clients and the genuine connections we are able to make with them. There have been plenty of anecdotes of the terrible service a client experienced in the past that gave them pause, or even had them abandon treatment at another facility. I always imagine these horror stories to resemble the sitting area at the DMV, or that waiting room scene from the 1988 film Beetlejuice—miserable people corralled in a small area with flickering fluorescent lights blinking overhead. We know that the relationships we form with our clients have a positive impact on our future financial outlook because they are loyal and speak highly of us to their friends and family.

Customer services begins far before the client enters our care. The tone of a clinic is established with the initial phone call, e-mail, or walk-in from the client. With each of those interactions, we want to project our mission and values and invite the client to be a part of them. Patients have a choice, and the financial success of our practice is dependent upon patients choosing us as their therapy provider. From the first contact, we recognize that the client is reaching out to improve their situation, and we communicate that we are grateful for the opportunity to help them reach their goals.

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Building trust with our clients is the core of an excellent customer experience. In every interaction we have with someone who is new to our facility, we want to establish a bond that they can count on. Part of building trust includes keeping clients well-informed about each step of the process and recognizing that they are making an investment into their care. That investment begins with the intake process. We always offer to verify a client's insurance benefits while also asking them to call their carrier to gain a better understanding of the process, their benefits, and how those benefits may affect their care. The most successful clients are the ones that embrace the collaborative effort it takes to get them to their goals as effectively as possible. Obviously this pertains to their treatment, but also to the financial side of healthcare that can sometimes feel like the most complicated part of their care. The more a patient understands, the more likely it is that collecting the payment for their care will go smoothly.

Sincere interest in the lives of each client builds trust and has the added benefit of curating a pleasant environment to work in. Many clients are anxious when sitting in your office for any number of reasons, and creating a safe, comfortable place for them will help to quell those fears. Having inviting and personal conversations with clients creates rapport and ideally adds to the positivity of the clinic's atmosphere. Not all clients will have the same needs when it comes to those personal interactions. Some are willing to share their life stories the first time you speak to them, while others will have a more reserved demeanor and may not appreciate a deep dive into their personal experiences. Part of elevating the customer experience is respecting your client's unique wishes and tailoring your approach to best serve them. Each client may appreciate different levels of socializing, and recognizing these nuances goes a long way when establishing trust. When patients feel comfortable, and trust you to care for their needs, they will return to your practice. Every loyal patient is a building block for your financial future.

Engagement is another staple to keeping clients satisfied. There are certainly many initiatives to retain such engagement, like gifting each new patient a free t-shirt, but make sure there is reason and meaning behind those initiatives. What good is a free t-shirt if it ends up in a donation bin? Think about the programs your clinic has in place and evaluate their effectiveness from a financial standpoint. Is there a good return on your investment? Is the initiative accomplishing what you hoped it would? Sometimes we spend significant amounts of money on things that may not be effective and consequently are not wise financial choices. Instead of a free t-shirt for every patient, consider gifting a t-shirt as a badge of honor when someone finishes a plan of care and meets their goals. This may have a greater lasting effect since it celebrates the patient's success and creates a raving fan who is invested in what you do.

A positive customer experience will translate into an investment in our financial future. When we consider managing our revenue, we need to look beyond a spreadsheet and evaluate how our patient experience is affecting the health and viability of our clinic. Elevating the quality of those experiences will elevate the quality of your clinic's financial outlook. Great customer service experiences are rarely accidental, and maintaining those experiences takes foresight, reflection, and adaptation.

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