

Developing the Mindset

Your commitment to go beyond traditional bedside manner becomes a mindset that can have a profound effect on your practice. It will change the way you approach your work each day. This mindset will influence how you interact with patients and how you empower your staff to do the same so the entire practice becomes increasingly patient-driven in all the non-clinical aspects of care.

Having worked with hundreds of doctors across multiple specialties, the benefits they've realized include happier patients, stronger practice culture, and improved economics. The biggest change, however, takes place by expanding your role as a professional physician to include essential business and social concepts that weren't covered in those many years of training. What results from employing the common-sense tactics described in this book is practice growth and a rekindled sense

of joy. For some, it's a renewal of why they chose medicine in the first place.

The thought that the patient is a customer may not come naturally to every doctor. When it comes to patient health, medical and consumer issues don't seem to get equal footing. The business of medicine seems to go against the goal of most patient encounters. While doctors - having completed nearly a decade of medical training before going into practice - are highly skilled at diagnosing a problem with a patient, they are often at a loss when it comes to diagnosing areas in the practice that are unhealthy in terms of how they impact patient experience.

Improving the health of the patient experience begins with eliminating archaic, counterproductive trademarks often associated with a medical practice: Telephone answering that begins with "Doctor's office, please hold"; the waiting room; the sliding window. And that's just the beginning of what it means to start moving beyond bedside manner. The focus of the practice gradually expands its dedication beyond quality patient care to also include excellent customer satisfaction.

For most of the past generation, healthcare in the US resembled an environment where the patient was like a non-paying customer, essentially "shopping with someone else's credit card," as described by former Whole Foods CEO John Mackey. Imagine how your buying behavior would change if you knew that somebody else was paying the bill. That's been the tradition in the past among patients and the doctors who provided them services. Earlier in my career, doctors routinely lamented that patients would complain when they told them certain services would have to be paid for out-of-pocket.

In recent years, however, the healthcare environment has changed dramatically, placing an increased responsibility

for financing on the shoulders of the patient through higher premiums, deductibles and copayments. The rise in elective self-pay offerings across multiple specialties is evidence of this shift, as is the growth in concierge style practices among primary care physicians where a monthly subscription fee is assessed for access to the doctor. This naturally turns the patient into a customer who is seeking to understand the benefits of what they are receiving in return for their investment. Whether you choose to think of them as patients, customers, clients, guests or another title, make no mistake — that patient is becoming an increasingly savvy consumer when it comes to how they choose their healthcare.

There is now a distinct difference between a doctor's role as healer and the business realities of being a service provider. Both are required for the modern doctor and their medical practice. You can overcome whatever biases or preconceived notions you have about what it means to treat patients and serve customers. Below is an exercise that should prove helpful.

Imagine that you have two different pairs of glasses resting on the table in front of you. Your instinct is always to reach for the sturdy pair of black glasses on your right, which helps you as a doctor to see your patient. Using these glasses you can spot ailments from a mile away, noticing the subtlest of symptoms and finding the most accurate diagnoses. But what would happen if you tried on the glasses to your left? These glasses help turn you into a businessperson by looking through the eyes of a customer. With these lenses, you suddenly notice how cold and unwelcoming the front lobby is, or how some staff members get short with patients when stressed. These glasses could become a priceless tool in your toolbelt if you could get used to looking through them. Seeing from a customer's perspective is the first step towards creating a well-rounded, business-savvy

practice that looks attractive no matter what glasses you're looking through.

Adjusting to this new frame of mind takes practice and an active desire to improve. Here are three rules of thumb to keep in mind as you consider making patient experience a priority in your practice:

First, you operate in a society where much power is now in the hands of consumers. As overall quality of goods and services has improved across all industries, competition has required businesses to shift their differentiation from what is delivered to how it is received. In essence, power has shifted to the consumer, enabled in part by the immediacy and visibility afforded by the internet. This also helps explain why more and more attention at companies is being given to customer experience.

Second, you are a customer and know how you expect to be treated. You know how it feels when you receive great service as well as how you feel when you get poor service. And you tend to easily recall your most memorable experiences.

Third, every patient is also a customer and, like you, has their own set of expectations. The line has been blurred between patient and customer, and it is your role to serve the needs of both while recognizing that without customers you do not have a practice where you can treat patients.

The next section contains insights that reinforce these three points, putting you on the path of developing a practice that is as exceptional in its customer care as it is in its patient care. This is what it means to be perfecting the patient experience.

As you embrace the concept of people coming to you as both patients and customers, everything you do in your practice going forward flows from the question, "Is this good for the customer?" Inspiration for your practice can come from outside of healthcare, drawing upon retail, hospitality, dining,

and entertainment – all industries that are highly focused on meeting the needs and wants of their customers.

By learning from companies that have long worked to perfect their customer experience, you will be ahead of the game when it comes to your practice. And you will discover what they already know: Memorable customer experience creates the virtuous cycle that will build and sustain the business.

THE CYCLE OF GREAT CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

