

SCRIPTING

Patients ask a lot of questions . . . over and over again. Scripting can help you and your team achieve consistency and create a climate of service and excellence in your practice.

by Patrick Wahl, DMD, MBA, and Lorraine Hollett

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ave you ever called a business to ask a question? You call later and someone else answers. You ask the same question again, but get a different answer. How do you feel? You probably think, "They don't know what they're doing!" Scripting — the study, discussion, and internalizing of words and phrases to use, and words and phrases not to use, along with all the reasons why — is the ideal way to ensure five-star, consistent service in your practice.

You may want to eliminate billing or drop participation in a PPO. Or, you might want to make some serious changes in the way you run your practice. Regardless of what you want to implement, a lack of uniform verbal skills can kill your plan.

Patients ask lots of questions. They ask the same questions over and over of different staff members. If one of your team members says anything like, "Mrs. Smith, I don't know why they're doing that. I don't like it either," it destroys a lot of your hard work, and patients will lose their faith and trust in you.

Scripting is not about being a robot. Of course, we all need to listen, be compassionate, and use our own words. But scripting is the most efficient and effective way to instill a culture of service and excellence in the busiest place on the planet — the dental office.

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Scripting is not about snappy or clever retorts. Scripting is about training in proper communication. For example, scripting responses to remarks about your fees trains your staff to instill value rather than apologize for the fees. When people are prepared with the correct things to say, they have the opportunity to put their hearts and souls into it. Scripting also can greatly enhance a speaker's eloquence.

Martin Luther King, Jr., perhaps the greatest orator of our time, didn't come up with "I have a dream" on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. He was able to deliver the speech with such extraordinary passion and eloquence because *he wrote it beforehand*. Moreover, King's message was compelling because he crafted it in terms of the core values of those who would hear it, just as we must address the values of the patient. King's dream was the American dream; the very promise of the Declaration of Independence itself that all men are created equal.

When a patient is disgruntled or complains to a team member, the team member could take it personally and become defensive. He or she might lash back at a patient instead of being prepared with a properly trained response of empathy and understanding. One phrase can make all the difference in the world.

Most dentists would be pleased to know that their phones are not hung up before the caller is asked, "Is there anything else I can do for you today?" How can we make this happen without scripting?

Team members benefit the most from scripting. We've all overheard well-intentioned staff say something like, "Let me tell you the cost of your bridge and what you have to pay." Staff members are relieved to discover phrases like, "Mrs. Smith, I'd like to help you with the fee for your treatment and the payment options we have available. Let's see what's most convenient for you." No patient has ever been offended by these words.

Every script in all of our resources includes a discussion section, where we explain why the words chosen are so important and why other words could easily mislead or offend a patient. The scripts are not chosen at random, but illustrate the everyday processes in dental offices. What better way is there to learn, after all, than by example?

Welcome your new hires with appropriate, easy-to-use training materials designed for instant implementation. Such materials will save you tremendous time and improve everyone's results.

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