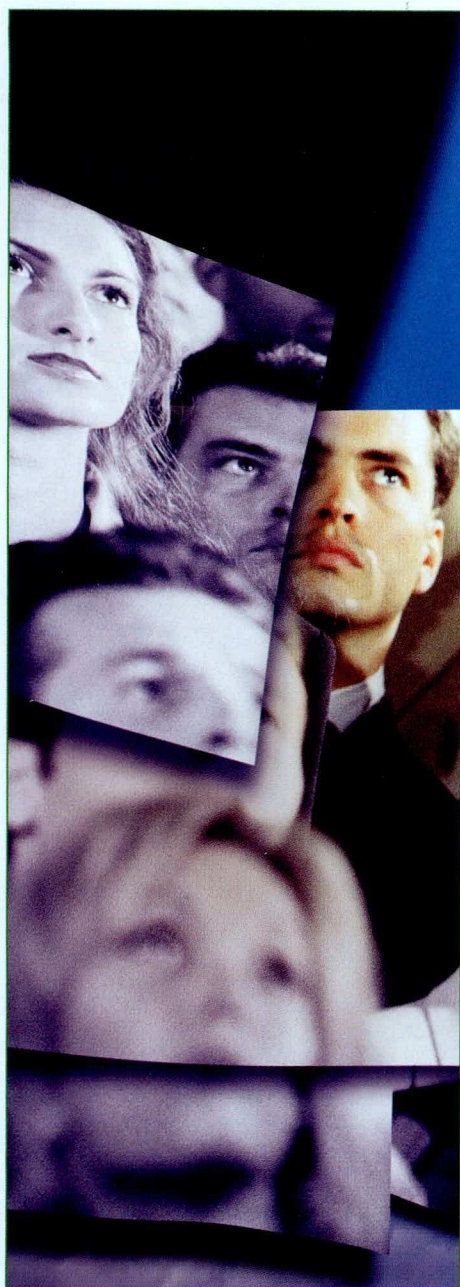


Why Good Customer Service is Not Enough



Lately I have been reading many interesting books and articles on customer service. I've come to realize that I need to re-evaluate what was once taken for granted about the subject. There is likely a real disparity between what you, as a provider, believe is good customer service and what your patients believe.

The customer service experience can be broken down into three main components. The first level involves the processing of patients. It is the day-to-day systems that are in place to get the patient from check-in to check-out. The second level is what optometrists typically refer to as customer service. Here, we provide support to patients that go beyond the processing of level one service. It includes activities such as helping a patient fill out insurance forms or putting their spectacles back into adjustment - things that have some value to our patients. The third level of customer service is creating a truly valuable patient experience within your practice, making an emotional connection with each patient.

Problems arise when there is a difference in perception of what is good customer service by the patient compared to the perception of the practice. Many of us provide levels 1 and 2 thinking that we have done an exceptional job of processing the patient efficiently and taking care of what we think are their basic needs related to vision care. We feel our job has been completed and now the patient should sing our praises from the rooftops. Levels 1 and 2 customer service, however, have become the



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minimum requirements by the patient. They assume that if you don't meet these easily attainable requirements then they won't remain patients of yours anyway. This is now the minimum cost of entry into the customer service game, it is no longer the end-point.

For many practices getting to level 1 and 2 is good enough. At these levels you are getting the job done but it does little to build a strong relationship with your patients. If you consistently perform well at these levels, your the practice will do fine, so why push it to the next level? For the practices that do take on the challenge of pushing to the next level come many inherent benefits.

Level 3 in customer service encompasses the total experience that a patient has with your practice. Above and beyond the "nuts and bolts" of processing and beyond meeting your patient's minimum requirement of typical customer service is the extraordinary customer experience of level 3.


At this third level you have to make an emotional connection with your patients, which can be a compelling experience. You need to show genuine concern and empathy for your patients, resulting in a stronger relationship with them. You must care more for their well-being than the financial benefit to your practice, treat them as if you were going to see them every day, take your time with them, get to know them personally

and understand their wants and needs.

It is not enough that you take on this challenge, your staff also have make these connections and relationships. The message to the patient must come from all aspects of your practice. We train our staff on office techniques and procedures but how often do we train on how to make lasting relationships with patients?

This is one area where you should "sweat the small stuff". Lack of attention to details could derail any attempts to provide this level of service. Levels 1 and 2 cannot be ignored for they are necessary to keep you in the game. If you don't provide these, then the patient is likely to walk away from your practice. To get to the highest level of customer service you must pass through the lower ones first.

The ultimate benefit of consistently providing the highest level of customer service and forging that strong relationship is turning the customer into a highly loyal patient. The spin-offs of this include improved quality and frequency of referrals, increased margins and sales (along with less price objections as these patients see the value of your practice and will pay for it) and it provides a barrier from other providers taking your patient away.

To ensure practice profitability in the long run you need to create patient experiences that are so compelling that their loyalty is nearly guaranteed. 



Top Row (left to right): Drs Gord Young, Roland Des Groseilliers, Margaret Hansen DesGroseilliers & Pat Hamilton. Bottom Row (left to right): Dr Joyce Barbour, Mrs Charna Mittelman, Drs Joseph Mittelman, Aggie Cudowska & Serge Fauchon.

OTTAWA SOCIETY OF OPTOMETRISTS: SHAPING TOMORROW

The highly successful CAO Congress in July, 2005 was planned in partnership between CAO and the Ottawa Society of Optometrists. This included a financial agreement to provide the OSO with a portion of any Congress surpluses. Ultimately, the finances were confirmed and a cheque for \$30,000 was issued to the OSO. Dr. Joseph Mittelman, Chair, Congress Planning Committee is pleased to announce that the OSO will use the Congress proceeds to establish a scholarship that will award an annual grant to an Optometry student from Eastern Ontario. The decision was ratified at an OSO meeting on November 21, 2005. CAO wishes to congratulate the OSO on its decision to support Optometric education.