



THE *human* SIDE OF DENTISTRY!

| BY JUDY KAY MAUSOLF

I'm blessed to have had the privilege of working in the dental industry since the early 1980s! Like most of us know, being in the dental industry can become "just a job". But we must never, even for a moment, disregard that we are human beings caring for the health of others.

Dentistry is not just about "fixing teeth". There are human beings attached to those teeth! It's important that we focus on the human side of dentistry and become advocates for our patients' health. I would love to see every medical and dental team instilled with an advocate mindset. However, many of us have experienced a caregiver objectifying a patient by treating them like an object rather than a human being. For example, they make decisions for the patient instead of educating and asking questions in an effort to understand what matters to them. They have conversations about them, in front of them, and act as if they aren't present.

I had a not-so-great objectifying experience during a recent visit to a radiology department. It started out great, with the x-ray techs introducing themselves as they ushered me into the room and explaining the process. However, all manners and niceties stopped when the person who was going to be taking the x-rays entered the room. He did not slow down enough to take a moment to introduce himself or ask me if I had any questions before he started. He proceeded to rapid-fire commands at me and then walked out of the room without further discussion. There was no compassion or connection. I felt objectified. As if I were just a task that he was in a hurry to complete.

I understand that this may be a daily routine for him, but it was not for me.

It's vital that we remember - when we are caring for our patients - that they're more than just a task to complete before we finish up our day. We're dealing with the health of a real human being. What may be routine for us could seem scary or concerning to them.

It's essential that we recognize the human side to what we do. It's our responsibility to take time to develop meaningful relationships with our patients, which will allow us to provide better and more comprehensive care. When we do, we become an advocate for other people's dental health.

Here are five essentials to help you become your patients' best advocate.

1. BE HAPPY TO SERVE.

Do you seem happy to the people you work with, be it team members or patients? Think about it for a moment. Would your patients and staff describe you as happy? Do you greet others warmly, with a smile? Are you happy to come to work and grateful for what you get to do? Do you focus on the positive and celebrate daily?

2. GET TO KNOW THE HUMAN ATTACHED TO THE TEETH.

Ask questions to get to know more about what's important to the individual. What were their past experiences like?

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What are their specific goals and desires for their dental health? Do they have concerns about treatment?

3. EDUCATE YOUR PATIENT BY HAVING A CONVERSATION, NOT GIVING A PRESENTATION.

That means asking and answering questions as you go along, to avoid assumptions. Stop the data dumping and present information in bite-size pieces. Avoid industry slang and communicate on their level. Verify time, sequence, cost and compliance (what they need to do to support the best outcome).

4. FOCUS ON THE WIIFTP (WHAT'S IN IT FOR THE PATIENT).

Show up 100% by being present in the moment. Always contemplate what would make your patient feel more welcome, more comfortable in the moment, and help build a stronger relationship. Keep your patients in the loop by informing them as to what you're doing and why. It's what we say or don't that creates their perception. We lose value when we don't let our patients know what we're doing. If we don't say it to the patient, it doesn't exist.

For example, when you do an oral cancer exam, explain to your patient what you are doing and the reasons why. Even for those individuals you've seen for years. Inform them every time. The "why" must always be a value statement, highlighting the benefit for the patient and not the practice or team.

5. ADDRESS COMPLICATIONS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

Come from a real place of care, concern, and curiosity, versus judgment and criticism. Always consider what it might feel like if it happened to you. How would you treat them if they were a family member? (Let me clarify; a family member you like!) Start out by asking, "How can I help you?" Then be present, listen, and actively hear what they are saying. Share with them how you can help them by saying, "I can help you and this is how."

When we focus on being advocates for our patients as real people (not just teeth), we can develop more meaningful relationships that will enable us to provide better and more comprehensive care to them and their family. It's a win-win for the patient, practice and entire team! ■

MEET THE AUTHOR



ASCA SPEAKER

Judy Kay Mausolf is a speaker, author, and dental culture specialist with expertise in helping others become happier and more successful! She coaches dentists and their teams how to become effective leaders, communicate more clearly, work together better, and deliver service with greater focus and passion, which result in cultivating a happier, healthier and higher-performing culture.

She is Past President of National Speakers Association (Minnesota Chapter), Director of Sponsoring Partners for the Speaking Consulting Network, a member of the National Speakers Association and Academy of Dental Management Consultants, and recognized as a leader in consulting by Dentistry Today. She is author of two books and a contributing author for many dental magazines. She also publishes a monthly newsletter entitled "Show Your Shine".

Judy Kay lives in MN with her awesome husband Steve, and Zoe...their 7-pound Yorkie!

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