

Building a Successful Medical Practice through Disciples

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When I speak of salespeople, what image comes into your mind? Is it that of a detail representative walking into your office to detail you on a new product that has the benefit of improving your practice or the services you provide to your patient? If so, I am here to change your impression of a sales representative. It is my belief that all of us are or will find our selves performing the roll of a sales person. The purpose of this article is to define the science and skills of a sales person to you the physician. When you apply these skills to building your practice you will reap the benefits of success measured beyond your income.

Prior to getting started, let me begin with an example of a theoretical physician beginning his new practice.

Dr. Jones is starting a new practice in a new town. He is a knowledgeable well-trained physician and has opened a well-equipped, state of the art office with courteous qualified staff in a nice location with plenty of parking. The first day he has no patients! In fact the first week he only sees two patients. He has a lot of dead time on his hands. He is a bright young man so he decides he has to go out and sell himself to others to get the referrals he needs to build a successful practice. He begins with his colleagues by attending medical rounds at the hospital and local medical meetings. He informs his colleagues of his training, and may even provide them with a curriculum vita. Sure enough patients begin arriving at his office. But this Dr. didn't stop there. Dr. Jones joined the local Rotary Club and met many of the influential members of the business community. He also visited the local churches and synagogues and spoke with the Minister's, Rabbi's and Priest. He not only sold himself to them but he went the next step and asked for the names of some of the most prominent members of their place of worship. He made contact with these individuals through invitations for lunches, golf outings dinners etc. He sold himself to them and made them his **Disciples**. Now his practice really takes off. However he didn't stop there. When he treated his patients he showed true concern, he got to know them and their families. He continued the sale **by making his patients his disciples**. They in turn sent him more patients. But he didn't stop there; he listened to his patients. They told him they wished he carried the products they needed in his office so they wouldn't have to go all over town looking for them. So he added those common products to his offering in the office. **By doing so he not only provided a needed service to his patients, he created another profit center to his practice**. They told him they loved his care and professionalism; however they found the hour and a half wait annoying. He too was becoming worn out from such long hours. Hence he began a search for a new partner that could relieve him of some of his patients, shorten his day and still provide the care his patients have become accustom to. Now there is a salesman! *He understood the skills needed to convey his message in a manor that his clients would understand, he learned to probe, listen to their responses and react to them to improve his practice.*

There are five basic ingredients or steps to a successful sale, however before we discuss these in detail I want to discuss the most important ingredient to success, your attitude. **Winning people have winning attitudes**. There is not obstacle that can not be overcome. One must set their goal and then go about attaining it with the attitude of a winner. In other words, your attitude can help to create disciples and these disciples will create other disciples etc. At each level of the disciple trail, sales are created and that is when your dream will become reality and you will reap the personal rewards of success. So before we look into the basics of selling yourself and building a practice, remember, you must have a winning attitude, and a clear and concise goal to attain before starting the process in earnest. And remember, always be completely honest with your patients, with that in mind, let's continue to look at the sales process.

The five steps of the sale are:

1. Introduction
2. Interest
3. Need
4. Presentation
5. Close

Now I know most of you are now saying to yourselves, how can this possibly relate to developing my practice? Please read on.

Introduction

When meeting a prospective referral source for the first time, it would be nice if they know your name. A good sales person will try to have some information about this meeting before it takes place. In the example I used above, this information can be obtained from a Priest or Rabbi or a member of the Rotary. In other words, probe your sources of information to gain knowledge of the referral sources you are trying to tap. However if you find your self in the office of some one that you are looking to make a referral source, take a look around. Their office is their personalized den and will contain a wealth of information about themselves, their family and their interest. Use this information to develop a rapport and relationship with them; this will naturally lead to this individual to the next step, developing an interest as to why you are there.

Interest

The biggest mistake one can make at this stage in the selling process is spouting off about them selves before they know exactly what is important to this referral source. The most successful sales people use a process known as probing the customer. Good sales people ask questions and listen to the answers intently more than they talk. **My father once told me, "son we were given two ears and one mouth and we should use them in that order."** Why? Because given the opportunity a referral source will tell you what their needs are, when they need it and what is important in making the decision to refer someone to you. Once you have this information you can tailor your presentation to this individual in a concise manor. It will then give you the opportunity to outline your educational back ground, expound on the state of the art high tech medical devices you have in your office to treat your patients or perhaps the comfortable chairs in your waiting room and the large selection of magazines you offer. It may be your experienced well trained staff that is important to this individual or the follow up phone calls to your post operative patients. What ever it is, your can find out this information by probing your referral source and listening to their responses.

I once worked for a man that was a great sales person. He had a famous line that worked in any situation, it was, **"That's why I am here"**. The phrase is so simple yet it is the most effective phrase I have ever used. You can use it with a referral source after they have given you the information you need, or after a patient has told you of their problem. For example, "The patients I refer to Dr. Jones complain that he doesn't carry the products he prescribes in his office and they have to run all over town to find them." That is when you respond, "That's why I am here". When it is used in this situation it created the question in the customer's mind of, "how did they know I needed this?" Or "How did they know I had this problem?" This catch phrase then puts you in a position to further clarify the need with the customer.

This phrase can also be used in a negative situation with a ranting and raving customer. When they have stopped their tirade you say, "That's why I am hear". Once again it will stop your patient or referral source in their tracks wondering how you knew they were upset. This puts them off guard, giving you the advantage. ***This phrase allows you to address the situation in a calm and effective manor while they are still off guard and listening. In any event, what we have done by asking questions in the interest phase is create or learn of a need.***

Need

If you have done your job properly, the probing in the interest phase has led to a need that needs to be fulfilled in order for the process to conclude in a positive manner, in other words you are successful in selling this person and it closes with an order. At this stage your referral source has given you the necessary information you need to sell them on your attributes and philosophy of your practice. Now it is time to present this information in a clear concise manner.

Presentation

Throughout the probing process we narrowed down what services, education etc are important to the referral source or the services and products that are important to our patients. Be knowledgeable, your patient or referral source is expecting you to be an expert. However, if you find yourself in a difficult diagnosis, don't be afraid to say to a patient, wait here, I want to refer to one of my medical books. Remember, honesty is the best policy. Never be afraid to offer information from another referral source that could help the one you are dealing with. They may express other unrelated problems that you have heard solutions to from other sources. Make yourself valuable. One of my business partners and good friends, John Hanawalt says, **"Knowledge is power". Become an expert and create value in yourself, Leverage this value into relationships because relationships sell.**

Through out your presentation it is important to gain commitments from the referral source that these features and resulting benefits of your practice will satisfy their needs. If your presentation and resulting commitments appear to be going well, you can try a trial close. However one must be careful to ensure that the referral source is fully aware of all the benefits he or his patients will enjoy by using your practice. At the very least, by the end of your presentation, or discussion, your referral source should appear to be happy with your presentation and leave the door open for you to close.

Closing

It never ceases to amaze me how many people walk away from a potential sale and never ask for the order. There are many ways to close a sale but it comes down to one question, how many do you want to buy? Translated, "will I be able to count on you to send me your patients that are in need of my expertise?" The answer should be yes and you have received the commitment you came for.

Remember, all of us appreciate it when we receive a thank you note of gratitude for something we do. This includes your referral sources, so when this referral source does send you a patient, be sure to send them a follow up letter of gratitude separate from a follow up on that patients' progress. This will go a long way toward creating a disciple.

It is my contention that the next or sixth step is an essential one that ensures success beyond closing the deal. That step involves follow up, training, assisting in any way to help promote your service to others. I call this the **Disciple Stage**. I refer to it as such to *remind all of us that it will involve multiple actions to achieve that goal*. Once we have the patient, we want to make them a Disciple of our services **so they can convey our message to others. You must make your patients comfortable with on all of your services so they are comfortable in carrying that message to others in the same manner you carried it to them. In doing so, we will have created a full circle in the sales process. The result will be an increase in the patient load.** Hence the sixth and last phase of the sale, and I believe the most important is the **Disciple Stage**.

Disciple

Webster's Dictionary defines disciple as: **One who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another as a convinced adherent of a school or individual. They become a**

follower. Just think if you could clone yourself and put fifty of you in your market selling you practice. WOW! You would be a rich man. Well a good salesman does just that with his disciples, he clones himself by responding to their needs in a professional manor. He becomes involved in their personal lives. By doing so with enthusiasm and a bright attitude he creates an extension of himself and his followers go out and create more disciples and so on and so on. ***This is when your success will grow beyond your wildest imagination. Make your patients and your referral sources your friend and a disciple.***

Follow up

Remember in your practice to follow up not only with the referral source but with your patients. Have a staff member call them at home after a procedure to ensure they are doing ok. Send a thank you note to the referral source reminding them their patient is doing fine. *Go to extra lengths to ensure everyone is happy with your services; give them the personal touch we all enjoy.*

Friends

Make your referral sources and patients your friends. This is probably the most important aspect of any profession in the world, and if in fact this is missing from your day, then I suggest you go looking for another career. When you get up in the morning and walk out the door, are you going to work, or are you going to visit your friends? Think about that. Is it fun to get up in the morning, get dressed and walk out the door for your days activities? If not, if you get up and have a knot in your stomach or dread what you have to do, then I suggest you look for another career, no matter what you are doing.

When I leave in the morning I am going out to socialize with my friends and while I am doing that I am going to make money because my friends want me to be successful. That's right, you have two choices, you can love your profession and make everyone your friend, or you can go to work. I prefer enjoying my profession and so I make everyone I come in contact with my friend. And I do mean friend. We go out together, we share information, we look out for each other and we help each other. Friends are not as sensitive to price, they are more concerned with **quality, service, dependability and reliability**. And how likely is it that your competitor will come in and take your business away? Do you think your friend will give it away? I don't think so. Get to know your customer's and their families and **have some fun**. *Make them disciples of your self. Everyone likes success and wants to be a part of it.* Your friends will help you get there and at the same time, share the ride to the top.

In conclusion, we are all salesman, whether you are a mother with children trying to convince them to eat a good breakfast, a doctor, lawyer, or banker building a practice or a salesman developing a territory. We all have to use the power of persuasion at some point during our day and by following the rules of disciples, we can make our life easier and rewarding.

Be professional; learn all you can about your patient invite them into conversation and ask questions; get to know them, their likes, dislikes, their problems their successes. **Take notes.** *Show genuine interest in their live and make them your friend.*

Become an artist, be creative, think outside of the box and develop methods of demonstration that paints a clear picture your patient can visualize in their mind. This is especially true when, for example, trying to explain high technology to a patient. The KISS principle applies as well. **(Keep It Simple Stupid)** Often times your method of demonstration can create interest, create a disciple, sell your practice, and as a result, your patients will always remember you.

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Mr. Watts is a graduate of the University of Rhode Island. I have 30 years experience in Medical Sales including 18 years in Orthopedic Implants. I have held the positions of Physician Sales Manager, National Director of Sales and have been a Orthopedic Distributor Principle. I am currently Co-Owner and Vice

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