



Implant Game Changers

A Whitepaper Series By Roger P. Levin, DDS

Implant Game Changers is a monthly whitepaper on an important implant practice management topic. It provides you with a quick and easy way to understand a specific business challenge and how to translate the solution into higher production and profit, greater efficiency, more implant patients, lower stress and greater personal satisfaction.

The Power of Networking

Networking is a subject that isn't taught in business schools. Although there are books and articles written on the subject, most people don't understand the basics or science behind the power of networking. It's one of the most important and powerful skills that any specialist can learn to increase referrals, contribute directly to production, and positively impact their career. Without networking, specialists will find it difficult to build a strong referral base and a steady stream of referrals. But where do you learn about networking?

The Foundation of Networking

There are few people, and they're generally rare, that have networking in their DNA. They collect other people as contacts in the same way some people collect art, coins, or even fountain pens. They do it naturally and automatically. The good news for the rest of us is that anyone can become exceptional at networking if they want to and are willing to put in the effort. The bad news is specialists who refuse to participate or master the art of networking will often end up with referral challenges throughout their career.

Those who are looking to up their networking game should know that the start of all networking is likability. In fact, this is a key factor in any relationship. If someone else doesn't like you or have a natural gravitation towards you, then it's unlikely that a strong relationship can be built. Relationships are the backbone of every specialty practice and will determine how successful or unsuccessful that practice will ultimately be. Specialty practices that build better relationships have more referrals, more production, more revenue, and more income. This is just a simple reality.

In order to build a strong foundation of likability as the precursor to networking, each specialist and professional relations coordinator (PRC) needs to work diligently on their interpersonal relations skills. This is probably not something that most specialists anticipated having to do to become successful.

As dentists and specialists, we work hard to become highly skilled at providing a healthcare service to improve the health and well-being of patients. Theoretically, you would not have to be likable or have a pleasing personality to help patients improve their quality of life. However, just like almost every profession, relationship-building and networking are critical factors in the pathway to success.

Let's look at a non-dental example. When we think of university professors, we want to admire them for their knowledge, expertise and contributions of new information based on their work and experience. That alone should determine who is recognized as the best and most successful professors. Now let's look at reality. The academic world is as "political" as every other field. Moving up often has to do with who you know, who likes you, where you have relationships, and being in the right place at the right time. It would be wonderful if everyone were simply judged based on their level of skill and expertise, but that isn't reality.

The statement that I have made in many specialist seminars on practice management and marketing is: "Referring doctors don't refer to the best specialist. They refer to the best relationship." We have been observing this for over 37 years. Once again, this may not be fair, but it's reality and the sooner a specialist can understand and embrace this concept, the sooner the specialist can begin focusing on building relationships.

How to Win Friends and Influence People

You may recognize the section heading that you just read. It is the title of Dale Carnegie's best-selling and famous book on interpersonal relations. In my opinion, and I have read many books on this topic, this is by far the single best book on how to develop positive relationships with others. My suggestion is that you read it and reread it every couple of years.

Even if you have read the book before, you will find areas where you have fallen off, forgotten things, or noticed new information relative to how you're networking and building relationships today. I also strongly recommend that you have your entire team read the book and focus on different aspects of what Dale Carnegie teaches in your monthly staff meetings.

In the book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Carnegie does not propose tricks or manipulation. Every concept, which was well researched at his time, focuses on human nature. People gravitate to people they like, people who appreciate them, and people who take the time to identify the good things they have done. These are the fundamentals of networking that are so important to successfully building a network that will support you, and in the case of a specialty practice, refer.

One of the great concepts that I came across many years ago is a quote from a famous Stanford professor named John Gardner. The quote is:

"It is more important to be interesteded than interesting."

This quote will help any specialist increase networking capability and build positive relationships. What Gardner is saying is that most people are guilty of focusing more on showing other people how interesting they are. This makes sense from a human psychology standpoint because people want to be seen as interesting. However, when people spend time working to be interesting, they are missing time spent on being interested. Being interested means being curious and asking questions, learning about the lives of other people, and showing that you care. This attracts others to you because you took the time to display interest. If you're going to be successful with networking make sure you spend time being interested in your referring doctors.

The Networking Schedule

Believe it or not, networking can be made into a system. When we think about networking, we think about going to places where we can meet people and get something out of them. Instead, think about designing a networking system that is consistent, repeatable, implemented, and measured. Here are some examples of components of a networking system.

Select three referring doctors on a rotating basis to send text messages to every day. This will allow you to send 576 text messages a year based on a four-day week and 48 weeks a year. This is powerful networking. The texts should have short messages such as mentioning that a certain patient case went very well, thanking the referring doctor for a referral, or providing some piece of information. Make this a consistent part of your daily networking system.

Call one referring doctor every day to review a case. It's likely that there is one case worth commenting on with a two-minute phone call, typically at the end of the day. If you don't reach the referring doctor, simply leave a positive voicemail with the information.

A doctor should personally visit referring offices periodically. The front desk staff tremendously enjoys seeing specialist to whom the practice refers. It also gives you a chance to say hello to the referring doctor, drop off information, or provide a two-minute update on a case.

Have meals with your referring doctor on a set schedule. When you have a meal with someone your relationship will never be the same again. You can build better relationships by getting together periodically with referring doctors, one-on-one or even in groups. (And remember to be interesteded in them.)

Creating networking systems will help you build a repeatable process to ensure that networking happens. Too many specialists spend their time focused on a small group of referring doctors who are often their personal friends. In their mind they are networking; however, they are doing it with a very limited group and not broadening their reach. Networking systems are about maintaining your current networks and building new ones. The same is true for referral marketing. If you're not adding new referral sources periodically, the practice will suffer when it inevitably loses a referral source for any reason.

Summary

Networking isn't taught in business schools despite being one of the most important factors in the success of any service business. Those who can network successfully will always build successful specialty practices. There are some who are naturals, but they are few and far between. Most specialists must consciously evaluate the current level of networking, and most will also find that it's below where it should be. This is simply the result of a busy life, lack of motivation to spend time pursuing referring doctors, and the busyness and success of the practice as it stands today. To maintain that success over time will require networking. The key is to make it a consistent, repeatable process that is turned into a system. Long-term successful networking creates an environment where any specialist can be successful and increase the levels of success.

But you must do the networking.

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