

Why I Left the Dental Implant ‘Guy’

By Nancy Friedman, The Telephone Doctor

So my dentist tells me I need a dental implant.

My experience with dental implants is less than my experience with landing on the moon. So I’m really in his hands. I know that this field relies and depend on referrals. So, of course, I let him refer me to a dental implant guy. It was the implant guy right next door to my dentist’s office.

I should have realized what I was going to experience when I called to make the appointment.

It wasn’t very pleasant. It was cold, impersonal, unfriendly and unhelpful. And I haven’t even gotten to the dental implant guy yet. This was his staff, his ambassadors to the public. “Well,” I thought, “this should be interesting.”

When I say they were cold and unfriendly I suppose they wouldn’t think that. Since this was my initial introduction to the office, I expected they would have expressed some empathy, some interest, and some desire to be sure I was comfortable.

What I wanted was for them be seem interested in me. Perhaps they could have asked if this was my first experience with dental implants; find out if I was apprehensive, scared, nervous or anything like that.

They made the appointment just as though I was going grocery shopping. This first introduction, this first impression, has never left me. It’s embedded in my memory.

Ok, then comes the day of the appointment. This is almost funny, perhaps because of my sense of humor, not because it was really humorous. You see, due to my sense of humor, when the unpleasant happens, I tend to find it funny. Not “joke” funny, but “odd” funny.

When I make an appointment by phone and then walk into the office and let them know I’m there and no one acknowledges that they’re glad to have me, nice to see me or any kind of welcome, I find that “odd” funny. Don’t you?

“Have a seat, and we’ll be right with you” were their ‘welcome’ words to me. Unfortunately, their “we’ll be right with you” and my “we’ll be right with you” are miles

apart. I don't find 25 minutes "right with you." For the life of me, I cannot understand why people don't tell the truth. But then that's a whole other article.

So eventually I get into the chair. Now I'm really scared. But no one seems to care. If they do, I can't tell. They don't ask if I am. The assistant never introduces herself. So I ask her name. I would have felt so much more comfortable if she had said, "Hi Mrs. Friedman, it's nice to meet you. My name is Gail and I'll be Dr. "X's" assistant with this procedure. We're glad to have you here. I hope this will be a more pleasant experience for you than you might have expected."

By the way, I chose my dentist – the one who referred me to the implant 'guy' - years ago because of my experience when I went to make the appointment. I told the receptionist I have always been very afraid of dentists. She said to me, "Well let me tell you, Dr. F has hands like a butterfly." Man, that sold me. Not only could I visualize the scene, but I know butterflies are soft, gentle and you aren't even aware when they land on you. And she was right!

But I digress. OK, so now the IMPLANT guy comes in. I first make sure he will give me the 'gas.' No way I'm doing this without the gas. I get gas to get my teeth cleaned; I wasn't doing this implant without gas. "Oh yes, we have gas," he says. That's all. And he proceeds to work on me.

Again, no bonding, no rapport building, no conversation. Just start working. It was a cold, unpleasant experience. All his conversation was with "Gail" his assistant. Nothing to me.

What's wrong with this picture? A lot. I can only guess that they don't have class on patient relations in dental school. I am pretty sure they don't have it in medical school. I just thought dental school would be different.

Well, I had the dental implant done. But I can tell you I would never refer this doctor to anyone. From the appointment to the procedure it wasn't a great experience.

I trust that the dental folks reading this feel this is an isolated instance; but I can tell you from experience and from hearing from others, sadly, it's not.

Normally, I jot a few notes at the end of the article as to how to do it right. I'm only hoping that after you read this article and share it with staff that they'll get the picture without needing more information. But just in case they "don't get it," here are a few ideas to help you out.

- * Welcome the patient. (On the phone or in person.)
- * Smile on the phone and at me in person. We like that.
- * Assure us that we're in very good hands.
- * Be truthful. If it's going to be 15 minutes, tell me that. 25 minutes? Tell me that. "Right with you" isn't the truth in so many cases.
- * Thank me for my business.

Now since my nature is to look at the sunny/positive side of things, I will tell you that the dental implant guy did follow up a few days later with a phone call to see how I was doing. And while I felt that was a nice gesture, it never erased what happened. Frankly I expect a follow up call from any one who does surgery on me. That is, in my opinion, a "given." What's yours?

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