



# BusinessBite

*Practice Management Information for Implant Dentists*

## **“Implant Guys” respond**

Nearly 1,000 of those who received the February 2010 Business Bite clicked on the article entitled “Why I left my Implant Guy.” There were even six readers who took the time to communicate directly with written the author, who in addition to being a real, live patient of an implant dentist, happens to also be an expert in customer service.

The responses ranged from complete and total outrage (“referring to me as a Dental Implant Guy is as demeaning to my profession [as] would be calling you the Telephone Broad...” to one doctor who inquired about how the author could help him with his new implant practice. Before going on, we want to say that publishing the article and using the term “dental implant guy” was in no way, shape or form, intended to refer to or demean the profession as a whole.

The author was writing about her own experience and the way she felt he and his staff treated her. It was intended to make our readers think and perhaps reflect – as did one implant dentist – on how his own office might be viewed by his patients. This particular dentist shared the article with his staff, asked them to read it and then put it on the agenda for discussion at their regular Monday morning staff meeting.

One member of this doctor’s staff wrote in part, “I think it is so very important for your story to be heard. I would like to think that such an experience could never happen in a practice like ours. It is still a reminder to all of us that patient satisfaction is a key factor in our field.”

She also said, “Working in an office like ours, where our patient comfort and relationships are already such a priority, I feel as if I can take what you wrote about and try that much harder to ensure no one ever leaves our office feeling the way you did.”

Another doctor raised an interesting question: “where was the signed informed consent and appoint to discuss the procedure?” As he pointed out, the “first visit should include a detailed discussion of the procedure, the risks, benefits, alternatives and then finish with any and all questions being answered.”

He also pointed out that some responsibility for care does rest with the patient as well. “Any potential patient who doesn’t ask for full disclosure of what is going to happen to them is asking for trouble and is at the very least naïve.”

Another doctor noted that in his office, his experience with the patient begins on their first visit where he is introduced to the patient in the hygiene room “by one of my very friendly hygienists. I build rapport there.”

One of the allied staff who communicated with the author pointed out that no where in the article was there any mention of the financial considerations for the procedure. She points out that most of their patients are very concerned about this and since most insurance programs don’t cover implants, it is an out of pocket expense. The author’s comment was interesting: “The implant had to be done. I did it. Maybe there might have been a hundred dollar savings by shopping around. But my dentist recommended this implant dentist. I trust my dentist. So, I went.”

So, what should we learn from this “teachable moment?” Well, one thing is that sometimes we shouldn’t assume that everyone else will take what we intend as light and humorous the way it was intended and will be offended by it. But beyond that, we should have learned:

- The customer always thinks they are right and this is the perception we need to work with. Although we might expect that the patient should ask more questions, they may not necessarily know the right questions to ask, particularly if this is their first experience with dental implants.
- Without the patient, we wouldn’t be in business.
- We should be more attuned to what the patient is saying and perhaps not saying. Look at body language as well. Ask very basic questions, such as “is this your first dental implant? Are you nervous? How can we make you comfortable?”
- Understand that often the patient is there because of someone they trust and that may not be you...yet. We have to earn their trust.
- Don’t lose sight that patient’s entire experience may sometimes be just as important in whether they are satisfied as the final outcome.
- Patients talk with friends and can be a great source of referrals or, if they had a bad experience, a non-referrer or worse.