

THE 9 AREAS OF EXPERTISE: SCRIPTING

By Roger P. Levin, DDS



Levin Group^{Inc.}



THE 9 AREAS OF EXPERTISE: SCRIPTING

By Roger P. Levin, DDS



In consulting relationships with more than 24,000 dental practices since its founding in 1985, Levin Group has developed high levels of knowledge and skill in all areas of practice management and marketing, which we refer to as *The 9 Areas of Expertise*:

1. **Production**
2. **Collections**
3. **Team Building**
4. **Scripting**
5. **Case Acceptance**
6. **New Patient Experience**
7. **Hygiene**
8. **Scheduling**
9. **Marketing**



This whitepaper explains scripting—what it is, how to use it, and why practices that use scripts outperform those that don't.

The biggest communication challenge in dental practices is saying the right things to patients at the right time and getting the right results. Dentists and staff frequently lack verbal skills on a par with their other capabilities. What's more, team members may not fully understand the practice's business objectives or the consequences of their interactions with patients. These communication problems undermine practice performance.

Several years ago, Levin Group's team of experts addressed this issue by adapting the technique of using scripts to improve communications between practices and their patients. Already employed successfully in many other types of businesses, value-building scripts represented an innovative breakthrough in upgrading the verbal skills of dentists and staff members.

Mapping out Conversations with Patients

Most of us think of scripts as something actors memorize or speakers read from a teleprompter. Actually, they are also used extensively by salespeople, customer service representatives and others whose performance can be upgraded by greater control of interactions. In situations where management determines what should be communicated to customers, yet must rely on their employees to do the actual communicating, scripts provide the necessary linkage between intention and implementation. To use a dental example, if the doctor wants to know how all new patient callers found out about the practice (for marketing purposes, etc.), this question can be integrated easily into the front desk coordinator's scripting.

THE 9 AREAS OF EXPERTISE: SCRIPTING

By preparing scripts for the most common exchanges between team members and patients—in such areas as customer service, case acceptance, scheduling, referrals and collections—dental offices can streamline day-to-day activities, reduce stress and orchestrate all efforts that contribute to practice growth. Messages conveyed to patients will be consistent, from one team member to another and from one office visit to the next.

Although scripts cannot dictate what patients say or do, they can anticipate actions and reactions. Trained with scripts, staff members know how to respond to virtually anything patients may say, in addition to being able to guide them toward practice objectives.

Principles of Creating Effective Scripts

As in all aspects of business management, there are experts in writing scripts. Practice owners and office managers can, however, develop reasonably effective scripts on their own by following these basic rules:

- 1. Begin with specific targets or objectives.** Overall practice success derives from a number of smaller successes—most of which depend on patient compliance, consent or perception. In any given situation, the practice can define a desired result. A good script guides the conversation toward that result.
- 2. Focus on motivation rather than manipulation.** Making demands or pushing patients will weaken and eventually destroy their relationship with the practice. Subtlety is much more effective. Scripting adds this quality to interactions even for staff members who do not naturally have this skill.
- 3. Keep language simple.** Scripts are guidelines, not meant to be memorized and delivered word-for-word, so points should be made simply and in such a way that no one will misunderstand.
- 4. Use “power words.”** Words like *great*, *amazing*, *wonderful*, *awesome* and *fantastic* have a dramatic effect on patients, so they should be included in scripts... not to dictate exactly which words to use (everyone has their own favorite power words), but to remind staff members to include such modifiers in their conversations.
- 5. Create alternatives to reflect different patient responses.** Asked a question that can be answered “Yes,” “No,” or “Maybe,” a patient may take the discussion in any of those three directions. Practices should develop scripts to prepare team members for all such possibilities, based on their experience with how patients respond in different situations.
- 6. Structure scripts with a beginning, middle and end.** The first sentence of a script should set the stage for what follows, identifying the topic of the conversation. This should be followed with statements that provide details, explain benefits and convey value. The script should end with a summary statement that briefly repeats what’s been said and what decision has been made.

THE 9 AREAS OF EXPERTISE: SCRIPTING

Subjects for Scripting

Every practice will have its own categories of scripts depending on their circumstances and priorities. Here are some of the most common:

- **Answering the Phone** – No matter how busy the office may be, anyone who answers the phone must be prepared (i.e., scripted) to project warmth, competence and a strong desire to be helpful. The team member should be ready to transition into a more targeted script after the enthusiastic greeting, based on whether the caller is a new or current patient.
- **Welcoming Patients to the Practice** – All staff members (including the doctor) should rely on scripts to make guests feel that they are truly welcome and that the practice will do everything possible to make them comfortable and provide the services they need. With new patients, the welcome should also include acquainting them with the facilities and amenities, praise for the doctor and staff, explanations of services and policies and assistance with initial paperwork.
- **Case Presentation** – Excellent scripting should be used whenever presenting elective and cosmetic treatment options. These are want-based rather than need-based procedures, which means that patients need to be influenced rather than merely informed. The doctor, treatment coordinator and, in some cases, hygienist must all be scripted to clearly communicate the *benefits* of treatment.
- **Overcoming Financial Barriers** – In most cases, the biggest barrier to case acceptance is the cost. The first step in addressing this obstacle is to have a sufficient range of financing options, from discounts for full payment in advance to outside financing that features affordable monthly payments. Scripts for case presentations should *always* include an explanation of these options, because team members usually can't tell which patients will be interested in what financing alternatives.
- **Addressing Other Objections and Questions** – Scripts should be prepared for dealing with all manner of questions that patients pose, as well as with any concerns or confusion. In some cases, patients will be upset, so these scripts should demonstrate empathy and an absolute willingness to come up with answers and resolve any issues.
- **Efficient Scheduling** – The practice will need scripting to guide both new and current patients into appropriate time slots. This category of scripts also includes those used to confirm appointments, react to last-minute cancellations and no-shows, and "train" patients to follow through on their commitments to the practice.
- **Handling Collections** – This is one of the most sensitive areas of communication with patients and is therefore heavily dependent on scripting to achieve the desired financial results while preserving relationships with patients. Based on payment policies that have been clearly explained to all patients, collection scripts ease the discomfort some staff members might feel about this subject and make it easier for them to handle collections with confidence.

THE 9 AREAS OF EXPERTISE: SCRIPTING

- **Asking for Referrals** – Perhaps the most potent source of growth for dental practices today is referrals of new patients from current patients—yet a surprising number of practices fail to take advantage of this simple, inexpensive marketing strategy. In many cases, the reason is that staff members don't know how to ask without feeling uncomfortable. Scripts alleviate this problem.

The Training Advantage

Unlike many types of training, in which gaining knowledge about a subject and *applying* that knowledge are totally different, disconnected processes, training with scripts and using them on the job are very similar. Learning how to use scripts does begin with reading and discussing them, but the heart of script training is role-playing. With teammates standing in for patients, trainees role-play using the scripts to achieve practice goals. They learn how to translate the intent of the scripts into their own words... making the scripting all the more effective by personalizing it.

Role-playing with scripts quickly prepares staff members to operate practice management systems skillfully and reach their performance targets... and it can actually be fun (contributing significantly to team morale). Script training can be performed on special training days, during Monthly Business Reviews™, and in one-to-one sessions for refreshing techniques, learning script modifications and cross-training.

Conclusion

Many dental practices fall short in the area of verbal skills, resulting in greater stress and an inability to capitalize on its true growth potential. Scripting can transform inconsistent, ineffectual practice/patient dialogues into focused, purposeful and highly successful communication.

Dr. Roger P. Levin

Dr. Roger P. Levin is a third-generation general dentist and the Chairman and CEO of Levin Group, Inc., the largest dental practice consulting firm in North America. A keynote speaker for major dental conferences, Dr. Levin presents more than 100 seminars per year. He has authored 68 books and more than 4,000 articles. In 2014, he received the Dental Excellence Award for Best Practice Management Consultant from *DrBicuspid.com*. For the past 12 years, he has been named one of the "Leaders in Dental Consulting" by *Dentistry Today* magazine.



THE 9 AREAS OF EXPERTISE: SCRIPTING

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

The 1-Hour No-Cost Practice Diagnosis, Only From Levin Group

Take the first step to a thriving practice. Schedule a simple yet powerful phone call with a Levin Group Certified Practice Analyst, who will assess the current state of your practice and reveal how you can improve practice production.

Call 888-973-0000 to schedule your complimentary evaluation today.



Your First Step to Higher Income — A Practice Performance Analysis™

Get the peace of mind you deserve... with a Practice Performance Analysis™. More than 5,000 dentists and specialists have used this analysis to gain a better understanding of their practice. You owe it to yourself.

Conducted at your practice with minimal interruption to your business operations, the analysis will give you the information you need to make positive changes in your practice. To find out how one of our Certified Practice Analysts can provide the objective information and insights you need to increase production, call 888.973.0000 or visit www.levingroup.com/analysis.

