When you make an appointment to see your physician, what are your expectations? Do your expectations change if this is the first time you are seeing the physician? Are you focused on only the problem you are seeking answers for, or are you seeking exceptional service beyond the physician?

As audiologists, we pride ourselves in our knowledge, expertise, and ability to care for our patients. Identifying our patients' needs and developing a plan of care should be the most important part of their journey. However, there is more to the visit than just the appointment. It is the experiences they receive from the start of their journey to the lasting impressions they share with their friends and family. Use all of your resources to make small improvements in your practice to provide an exceptional patient experience.

Soliciting an online survey after the patient's visit can be a great way of getting a feel for how your office was perceived. Several online survey companies cater to audiologists for their targeted questions. Ask about their initial thoughts on the office, friendliness of office staff, opinions on thoroughness of testing, and recommendations offered. Be sure to also add comment sections to get that personal experience from each patient if he or she would like to add in more.

Utilize the survey results at your monthly office meetings to share with staff. They will appreciate the positive comments and should make the best out of negative feedback by implementing new techniques to the practice. See how procedures and tactics evolve each quarter by taking input from the surveys. Use the statistics and testimonials that are given for all of the line-item questions for headlines on your Web site, print ads, and direct mail pieces. The heading “97 percent satisfaction rate with our services!” is an impressive introduction to your practice.

Making that patient experience unique and memorable begins when they make the first phone call to your office and does not end, for some, for many years after that initial phone call. The company philosophies, mission statement, and mantra should be resonated by each member of the hearing health-care team. Your front office staff is the first point of contact and is pivotal in forming patient opinions. The clinical staff continues this perception, and each time another phone call is made the patient...
should feel that he or she is experiencing something very unique. One never knows when the next endorsement is to come from a loyal patient!

Looking outside of audiology to other industries, we can find many businesses that have exceptional customer service practices.

The Ritz-Carlton hotel chain uses these three steps as a standard of service for their guests:

1. A warm and sincere greeting. Use the guest’s name.
2. Anticipation and fulfillment of each guest’s needs.
3. Fond farewell. Give a warm good-bye and use the guest’s name.

Jet Blue has created an interactive experience on their Web site (www.jetblue.com/experience) to demonstrate the airline through the eyes of four customers. Each customer has a different focus, time, space, play, and treat. You can walk through a testimonial from each customer raving about how Jet Blue has addressed his or her most important need when flying. A well-designed Web site not only draws those looking for a provider but can be a resource to existing patients. Use these ideas to capture new patients and educate existing patients by making simple changes to your Web site.

Starbucks is focused on customers. It has shown growth and penetration into the market over the past 30 years when it started expanding beyond the state of Washington. Starbucks’ focus on customer service can be used within most industries. According to the Starbucks Web site,

When we are fully engaged, we connect with, laugh with, and uplift the lives of our customers—even if just for a few moments. Sure, it starts with the promise of a perfectly made beverage, but our work goes far beyond that. It’s really about human connection.

Use the patient experience to grow your practice. Small improvements can make significant differences in patient retention. Reducing wait time, offering a beverage when patients first sign in at the desk, always inviting family members to attend counseling sessions or explaining why a speech in noise test was performed; these are the small touches that can be added to further set your practice above the rest.

Tracey Irene, AuD, is a senior audiologist with Professional Hearing Services, a division of Moreland Ear, Nose, and Throat Group, LTD, in Milwaukee, WI. Soriya Estes, AuD, is the owner of Estes Audiology Hearing Centers in Central Texas. Irene is a member and Estes is chair of the Academy’s BEST Committee.

Reference


Illustration by Johanna van der Sterre.