

# The Wal-Mart Mentality in a Boutique Dental Practice

**D**uring my recent presentation at the Yankee Dental Congress, I stressed the importance of providing extraordinary patient service. A dentist commented, "Karen, I agree with you. I understand that patients want this type of attention — especially in a fee-for-service practice — but what about the Wal-Mart mentality? People expect to get more for less these days."

"My point exactly!" I told this participant. "You have to give phenomenal service to maintain patient loyalty. In this era of big box stores, your patients have become accustomed to product discounts. If you fall short in service, your patients will migrate elsewhere. They're getting used to either getting more for less or paying more for *more*."

Heed the lesson from my experience with my health club trainer. I have a high physical health IQ. I exercise routinely, and I believe it's important to work out with a trainer. Recently my trainer raised his fee, and I'm willing to pay more. Or am I?

In your practice, you have patients with high dental IQs. They understand the need for great dentistry and they realize they'll get that exceptional care from you. You also raise your fees from time to time. Are your patients willing to pay more?

With my trainer's fee increase, I suddenly became more aware of the value and benefit of this service. As I studied the situation, I realized that he was *not* congruent with his fee. As I list what was wrong, think about how your patients are mentally computing this same type of list about you and your office, especially when you have a fee increase.

❶ **Lack of presence.** There are times during the workout when my trainer talks to others, watches news clips on television, yawns, and forgets to count the number of squats I do. Believe me, I'm not into over-squatting.

❷ **Lack of focus.** I've left training sessions realizing that we omitted certain exercises. While it's great to miss out on those bicep and tricep curls, that's why I'm there; I don't want flabby arms.

❸ **Lack of personalization.** One day he handed me some dumbbell weights that are far less strenuous than what I'm capable of using. I joked, "I'm insulted. You know I can do more than that!" He said, "That's right. Here you go," as he ran back and retrieved the heavier set.

These examples are not earth-shattering. After all, I'm still getting a good workout. Yet, at a premium price in a beautiful gym with state-of-the-art equipment, I want the best. I don't want to leave the experience thinking, "I don't really matter. I'm just one of many clients."

Interestingly, the list does *not* include lack of knowledge. My trainer knows his stuff. You know your stuff, too. Your knowledge is a given.

Do you think patients might be exiting from your office thinking they are just one of many? Are you really focused on each patient? Are you really in the moment with each patient? Do you personalize your dentistry for each of your patients?

When it comes to maintaining patient loyalty in a Wal-Mart-mentality society, you must provide more when charging more.

Linda Lakin, a consultant, speaker, hygienist for 28 years, and president of Linda Lakin Consultants, suggests these solutions. "We spend many hours

*continued on page xx*

**Karen Cortell  
Reisman, MS**

Reisman, author of "The Naked Truth About Giving Great Speeches," teaches organizations how to increase productivity by communicating effectively. She has been a visiting faculty presenter at The Pankey Institute, a speaker at dental meetings, and president of Speak for Yourself® for 14 years. To buy Reisman's book or purchase her other CDs, e-mail her at karen@speakforyourself.com. Reach Reisman at www.SpeakForYourself.com.



*continued from page xx*

on attracting and impressing new patients but often forget about our existing recare patients. It's time to treat these committed patients who keep our practices afloat like the valued customers they are. I like to think of my recare visit as the third date with someone I really like and am excited to spend time with. I greet them with anticipation, enthusiasm, an adequate degree of personalization and familiarization, and focus all my attention on them during our reserved time together. I concentrate on their needs and desires and apply my resources to exceed their expectations.

“Rather than assume that a recare patient still won't invest in veneers to upgrade her smile, consider where she is now socially, financially, and clinically. Ask the following questions:

- How do you feel about the treatment you receive in this office?
- Are you totally satisfied with your smile?
- Is there anything we can do to make your dental wishes and dreams come true?”

Larkin goes on to say, “Present treatment opportunities to your recare patients as you would to your new patients. Don't hold back based on a patient's previous status. See your existing patients differently and focus on how they present now, not how they were. Remember not to make assumptions about the patients already committed to you, but to give them the focus and presence dedicated to all new patients.

“Ask yourself, ‘Am I taking my existing patients — those who already trust and love me — for granted?’” ■

© 2006 **Karen Cortell Reisman, MS**