

Ep #22: What Would Your Patients Say



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Dr. David Phelps and Evan Harris

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](http://www.DentistFreedomBlueprint.com) with Dr. David Phelps and Evan Harris

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You are listening to the *Dentist Freedom Blueprint* podcast, with David Phelps and Evan Harris. Navigating you through the uncharted waters of a turbulent economy with straight-forward advice to, transform your practice into a self-sufficient cash machine, compound your net worth assets, and multiply, multiply, multiply your passive cash flow streams.

David: This is Dr. David Phelps back with you again today with my good friend and co-host Mr. Evan Harris. Evan, how are you doing today?

Evan: I am not good at all, David. Actually, I must say, I am good, but I feel as though things could be better.

David: Oh you threw me for a loop there for a second. Evan, you're always on top of the world here. Well listen, you know what, I want to get right into today's topic and this is one that you and I talk about quite often. It's about differentiation; it's about positioning ourselves, in this case our dental practices, in the marketplace. The marketplace where we're seeing a commoditization of our practices for lots of different reasons we've already discussed before on some of our podcasts. Here's the question I want to pose today Evan. What would your patients say if they were asked what is your dentist like?

Evan: David, I got to say. That's a pretty powerful question from a perspective of I'm living in office right now that has purchased, a doctor purchased a practice that was bland. Vanilla, in my opinion. There really was no personality at all. If someone walked into the office and they did not see the dental chair, I don't think they could have told people what was done there. It could have been a tan salon, for all they know. It was just white, they had some knick knacks here and there. Other than maybe seeing a sign that said Delta Insurance or something along those lines, it didn't give any flavor at all to the patients. The

Ep #22: What Would Your Patients Say

bind doctor came in and has hobbies, has interests, has passions. That bind doctor began to place things that were meaningful to them on the walls, on the shelves, and then engaged the team members to do likewise.

I've got three different practices that have done this, and I've been watching their success. We've kind of cultivated different ideas to be able to bring more of that patient experience to the practice so that when the patient leaves they have a story. It's beyond a story of good dentistry, or they got me in and out on time. There's a personality behind that, and I'd be happy to share these three case studies with you as we move along on this podcast.

David: I think that's really important, in fact you took the words right out of my mouth. I was going to say it sounds like personality, and personality is a great differentiator. I think a lot of doctors and dentists grew up over the years, not so much maybe in the last four or five years, but certainly back fifteen, twenty, twenty five years ago with we need to maintain a very professional environment. We need to be sterile, and of course that's important, but the sterility doesn't lead to, as you said, any kind of experience or story. The personality. I think there's different ways that we can show personality, as I know you're going to allude to with these case studies. Sometimes the dentist feels like, Evan, that he or she still wants to maintain a professional demeanor and I think that's good, some doctors maybe are a little bit more personable and they'll cut up a little bit, carry on. I think it's clear that we're not talking about that every dentist has to all of sudden be some extrovert, but they can use different ways to exude personality.

A lot of times it can be through your staff as well. You want to take it a little bit further with that?

Ep #22: What Would Your Patients Say

Evan: I'd be happy to. What I've seen just recently is this one lady dentist, she does a lot of missions trips. She's passionate about giving back, and she just takes pictures with her iPhone I believe. Nothing, she's not a photographer per se, but these pictures are gorgeous. They're throughout her office. They don't scream mission trip, or anything that says you know I'm so great and look at me contributing to the world, but they're these beautiful vistas and they're these people that say it looks like they're part of a tribe, or there are these stories. Look, a picture of a hut. All these different things. It begs the question to the patient, where is that? Wow, that looks pretty, or wow that's unique. Where is that? Then now there's a story behind it, and now the team members are starting to take pictures on their trips. They have a story behind those.

This dentist, this lady dentist, that I consider a super star, she does dentistry for free on patients that otherwise couldn't afford it. She travels to far across lands on her own dime to go and do it, then brings back great memories and pictures to put on the walls. I asked her, I said wow does that bridge a patient connection? She says absolutely. That was not her main driver. For her, she wants to be reminded why she does what she does, and there are certain days that frankly are quite hectic. She forgets. When she sees on the walls the places that she's gone and the people that she's served, it reminds her of her greater purpose. That she is the doctor, she is the healer, and that yes, she treats patients in her practice incredibly well, and she makes an amazing difference on patients that really might have an amazing swelling. They might have serious health complications, but because of her skills, she's changing lives both in the bush as well as here in California.

Those walls speak to her and they give her energy and fuel to have a better day as well as be more present with the patients that are there with here at that moment.

Ep #22: What Would Your Patients Say

David: That speaks to her. Now let's talk about from the patient standpoint. What do you think this means to a patient? Because again, typically as dentists we think about our certificates, our licenses, our continued education, the technology. You get sterility, look like we're up to speed with all of the latest and greatest. Again, not saying that's not important, but what does this story about this doctor and her mission trips, what do you think that exudes in the patients? We're not talking about quality of dentistry here, so what is it Evan?

Evan: I've even heard conversations in the practice while I've been there. There are people who will ask things like where is that? The conversations, oh that's where doctor went with a group of doctors. They flew in, and they treated people in that area. Now it's oh wow, she does that? How does she pay for that? Or how does that work? How does she take the time? Then it's a story of she's passionate about making a difference and contributing to people using her skills that she's gone to school for. The patients from what I could tell, it's like they want to be a part of that. They don't just want to go to a good dentist and have pretty teeth, although that's great. Now they're a part of an organization or a group that they feel good about. If someone asks them who's your dentist, they can say you know who my dentist is? My dentist is, and they can share she's not just an amazing clinician that has a kind, chair side manner, but this dentist is making a difference.

By her being a patient there, I feel like she feels she's a part of making that difference, even though she didn't fly to Africa or wherever the trip was. I believe she feels like she's a part of it. That is what I think makes a difference. That patients want to be a part of something greater than themselves.

David: I think you're exactly right about that. What about for the team, for the staff? Same thing? Does it make them feel like they're a

Ep #22: What Would Your Patients Say

part of something? Maybe some of them go with her on the mission trips, maybe they don't, but nevertheless there's story there and there's got to be a bond. We talk a lot about in practices really the need to create a real culture. How does that affect the team in that regard?

Evan: I'd have to agree, now I'm seeing other pictures coming up that are taken by the other team members where they're trips of significance, in whatever way. When I say missions trips I'm not really meaning a religious connotation, literally these are just people flying over there, they're just trying to do good for people that are in need. There's really not like an agenda, there's people of all faiths, all colors, all different types of specialties that are just going. Now the hygienists put up this beautiful photo, and now she's got a story. Just happens to be right by her hygiene room. Patients are asking her and other people, other team members I think are asking themselves what could they contribute? What would they like to be up on the wall? The doctor pays for the beautiful photo to be actually produced and matted. The team member, all they need to do is just capture magic moments and put themselves in the positions where that magic moment can take place so that they can capture it, and now have a story with the patient and have the patients feel that they're a part of these people's lives.

David: To be clear, I think this particular doctor's office, you said that this doctor purchased the practice, it was very bland. Didn't have any personality at all, so this is something that she relatively quickly incorporated, she kind of knew exactly what she wanted to do and how has that changed the overall practice?

Evan: I think tremendously. The practice actually looked nice before, but I didn't think it had any true character to that one, the leader or the team member. Now I feel like the team is even more

Ep #22: What Would Your Patients Say

congealed, and more clear on their purpose. There was another practice that I can think of that the doctor has hobbies of mountain biking and rock climbing. Now walking in the front desk, it's clear that there are activities being done here. It looks like they're somewhere in Arizona, it's got beautiful ... The furniture looks like it has that Arizona look. The pictures on the walls are of famous rock climbing places. Patients are into that, the patients are already commenting wow that looks really amazing. That's a pretty picture. Is that doctor up on the rocks right there? Yeah, actually it is. Now it's almost like the he is attracting more patients like himself. I've seen bicycles parked outside, I've seen bicycles that are really expensive parked in the pack. You know a patient comes in and says hey do you mind if I bring my bike in? Yeah sure, park it in the back.

Well guess what's in the back? The doctors bicycle, the doctor bikes to work every day. Now that's creating a patient base more of what the doctor is looking for, because I find that the doctor who, that doctor who bought the practice, a lot of the patients really weren't like him. He wanted to have a practice of people he enjoyed being around. Well quite quickly, as he puts it out there of what he's interested in, more and more people are attracted. There's a doctor that I know that's pretty close to a professional cyclist, and I continually see people coming in with jerseys, wearing their cycling outfits clicking with their cycling shoes, and they're coming for dentistry. Then they're going to go continue on their big ride. That I've seen enhance both the doctors life, and the patient base. Word gets out, there's an affinity, there's a common bond, and off the practice goes. They know who they are, they like who they are, and others do too.

David: That's really cool, you're creating a real community. I'll tell just a quick aside is that I found my internist, my general practice internist at the gym I go to. This was some years ago, but I was

Ep #22: What Would Your Patients Say

looking for one and I just happened to be talking to a guy that came in, worked out regularly several times a week and I just liked the way his character ... He seemed like a nice guy. We created a conversation. I just figured out, you know what? He's here all about health, he walks the talk, and he's been my internist now for a number of years. Insurance dictates are not going to cost me personally to move to somebody else because I want to go to him, because there is a bond there as you said. There's a trust that's been built up, there's a rapport that's just not going to happen without knowing something about who this doctor or dentist is.

Evan: I agree. I was with another doctor and he says, well I don't really have a lot of interests that I want to put up on the wall. What can I do? That doctor didn't really want to put himself out there. Well here is what they did. They had each team member create a picture board. They bought these frames, frames are pretty big, then they have little squares, or little frames within the frames. Each person had the same one, but would put different things in there. What I mean by that is they would have a heading like family, and then there'd be a picture of their family. It might be a single person with a dog, okay that's family. Or a picture, say they're young and they're unmarried, they're with their parents. Or it's a family, they've got four kids and there's a husband and wife in the picture. Whatever it is, family. Then they would have the names underneath, you know? Cody, Ashley, et cetera, et cetera all the way through.

Then it would have hobbies and it would show whatever they like to do. One person was really into camping, so there's a picture of the family with tents and camping. It was this beautiful cute picture board and each team member had theirs. It was a big picture of them so it was clear who it was we were celebrating, then their family, their interests, et cetera. Patients would always walk up and look at them. Go oh wow, I had no

Ep #22: What Would Your Patients Say

idea you were into that. What I've found as I'm just kind of there scanning, listening, is they're looking for things of similarity. I never knew you liked camping, we go camping too. Where do you go? All of a sudden now they're talking about camping. It feels as though they're trying to find common ground.

Now there's so much more than just going and getting dentistry checked on the street. I always ask my doctors why should they come here and not the clinic down the street? The clinic down the street probably can get people in faster, it might have cheaper fees at least on the front end, it's going to be clean, they'll probably have a lot of technology, and they'll work with every insurance under the sun. Other than that, why wouldn't they come there? Frankly, if they don't give a difference I don't think the patient really should. They should experience the difference, yes typically the care is probably going to be higher but the patient doesn't know that. Why should they come? Now they feel like they're a part of a family. They feel like there's more than just going to the dentist.

By identifying with a team, oh Alicia's going to work on my teeth. Oh Dr. Jones is going to come in. Its first name basis, they know each other, they see what each other likes. It builds rapport so by the time it comes down to needing a crown, this is a mountain climber, this is a mission trip person, this is a person that has already built that rapport. They're a trusted advisor, they're a trusted friend. Not just some guy in a white lab coat or a lady who's going to dictate what they need in their dentistry.

David: Well I like the fact that you made the point, Evan, that this mission, if you will, of telling a story, putting the personality out in front in the office does not have to fall on the back of the doctor. Usually we think that it does, well here's something else I have to go do. Getting your team on board in letting them

Ep #22: What Would Your Patients Say

have their vision board as you said, because pictures create conversation. They're part of a story, and people love pictures. You mentioned it already, people love to share pictures, show pictures, ask questions about pictures. Tell the story, and from story again becomes the bonding in the relationship so it's not all about dentistry.

Let's talk about why that's important today, because I know, you and I both know there are lots of dentists who are very concerned about the current state of affairs in the economy and in the industry itself with more intrusion by managed care insurance. I know a lot of dentists are feeling the crunch, like they have to take more and more of the managed care reimbursement plans, and to some extent maybe most practices need to take some of that but that can be maybe what pays the base overhead. Let's think in terms of the long term high relationship patients that one can create by doing just the things we're talking about today. That kind of bonding and the referral culture that can result from the personality that one is showing and talking about in the practice is one that can again I think surmount whatever is happening in the insurance industry.

There is a top tier of clientele who will not shop around, who are not looking for the corporate clinic, are not looking to get Walmart dentistry if you will. What they're looking for, that care and that bonding, and if we don't speak to that, if we don't speak to that particular patient, and what their real desires are, then we're going to miss the boat. If our practice looks like every other practice, and maybe we're a really good doctor, but they don't know it and there's not the bond there. That's where I think so many doctors are missing the point right now. This can be done relatively easily by getting your team on board and letting them be a part of this.

Ep #22: What Would Your Patients Say

Evan: I completely agree, and to make it even easier in many of these instances the doctor has done very little. What I mean by that is it's often times the office manager or someone that is pretty artistic. Someone that has a joy to bring style to the office. They're working there more than anywhere else, so they might as well, and they're going to get paid for it. I've seen it in three different offices, the office manager, the lady up front, she just was really into that. She went to, I think she went to Ikea. One went to Ikea, one went to a different, like different places. They just bought these picture frames. They bought enough for each team member, doctor of course is covering it, but doctor didn't have to even leave the office. They even helped the doctor put his together. It's really, with digital cameras now, they're finding it can be really easy where all they need to do is just submit the pictures to the office manager.

The office manager had all the pictures, and then just write up a little bio, they just type it and go here I am in Yellowstone that type of thing. Here I am with Cody, Ashley, et cetera, et cetera. Then the office manager just types those things in. Then all they do is print, from the printer that they had in their office, or you could send it to a printer. Then just lay it on the mat and click, click, done. Game over. Doctor didn't have to do a thing. In some cases I think the doctors wife actually sent in the pictures to be very transparent here. Up it goes. That's it. New team member joins, no problem, or another team member leaves, all you have to do is just take something down. It doesn't look like anything is missing, and then a new one goes up. That's it. My goal is that people won't see this as this big effort to have to go to, it's something that I believe may be big in results but very small in effort and it doesn't cost anything on a monthly basis.

Here's what I've witnessed when I go into the corporate clinics. I'm not saying they're bad or good, I'm just saying that they're

Ep #22: What Would Your Patients Say

different. It's that there is often times different team members every six months. The retention is very low. They get burnt out, and even the doctors, I have many friends that work in corporate clinics. Nowadays they're getting rotated on a weekly basis. What I mean by that is there may be, let's say there's four, there's a corporate clinic and there's four of them in the area. There's a brand for example. They will be moved from those four clinics on a weekly basis. Meaning on Tuesday they're at one city, Wednesday they're another city, Thursday they're another city, and then they change again. The patients, even though that doctor may have been at that clinic for say four years, it depends on when the patient is scheduled. That patient most likely is going to get a new doctor every six months. Every time they're in, they're going to get a new doctor. They may have a new doctor every three months if they're on recall.

The experience to the patient is different, but if we don't create a big contrast I believe in our private practices, then the patient won't experience the difference. I want it to be the same doctor greeting them, the same front desk. I want them to build that deep rapport where they walk in, they go wow. This is amazing, this is truly like a family, because a corporate clinic is not going to do that. They're not going to put all these things up of the team members because they're changing every three to six months. Even the doctors names are changing, that's why they don't put the name typically on big letters because that's probably going to change in a matter of six months to twelve months.

If we are different, please my encouragement is show the difference and help the patient experience the difference.

David: This is a real opportunity, Evan, for any dentist who's listening to us today. Take the opportunity to do this in your own

Ep #22: What Would Your Patients Say

practice. It's not difficult, Evan, as you said. It can really re-position and differentiate the practice among all of the other clutter and commoditization that we have out there today. Just go out and make it happen. These are the small things but can make a huge, huge difference in one's practice. I think this is a great topic to cover today, I hope the listening dentists will go out and make this happen.

If you enjoyed the topic today, please subscribe to the Dentist Freedom Blueprint Podcast on iTunes. Download it, give us a review. We love to get reviews, and for sure share this with other people who you know could also benefit from the content we have. We look forward to seeing you again next week, same time.

Evan: Thank you David.

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