



ORTHO2

Re-Thinking Patient Cooperation

by **K. Ryan Alexander**

At nearly every initial consulting visit, I am accused of being an alien: “Well, Ryan, the scheduling system is terrific, but how are we supposed to stay on time if our patients do not cooperate? I don’t know what planet you’re from, but here on Earth, patients are regularly late for their appointments, have multiple broken brackets, and terrible oral hygiene to boot!”

As fun as interplanetary consulting sounds, I can assure you that my feet are firmly planted on Earth.

So, the question for the ages (mostly 6-17): How do we get young children and teens to cooperate? It’s the first principle of the playground: make it more fun than whatever anyone else is doing, and everyone will come join you! To accomplish this, we must shift from an expectation of cooperation to an invitation to participation. I am convinced that by reframing the issue of patient cooperation, a practice can turn what was once a dreaded and boring system into a vital part of the practice marketing system.

- **Expectation:** Don’t chew gum! Don’t eat popcorn! Don’t touch those gummies, or so help me I will tear my hair out while I repair that bracket for the seventeenth time!

To children, and especially teens, do’s and don’ts are a sort of white noise. They do, however, like games, and learn best through play—so, let’s make this a game. We need to make the time spent in our orthodontic practices feel less like a parental responsibility and more like it is the patient’s game to win. If you can use all of the marketing and new patient enrollment expertise and reframe things so that you not only get the sale, but turn your patients into raving fans—well, now, that’s a good place to be.

- **Invitation:** Let’s talk practical application. There are many ways to issue a participation invitation, but here are a few ideas:

- Make them part of your team. Right up front, let the patients know that they are not only cared for, but in joining your practice they have gained a cheering section. From day one everything in the practice should focus on elevating the patient’s mind-set from being a patient in your practice to a valued team member, who without their help, the game of braces cannot be won. Each time a patient arrives five minutes before their appointment time and is ready to go on time, be sure to give them a high five to celebrate the win. Enthusiasm is the best marketing investment your practice can make. When you invest a consistent stream of kindness and genuine interest in cheering on your patients’ progress to the finish line, then a visit to your practice will become the highlight of their month.
- Start a patient rewards system. The more points they accumulate, the better prizes they win!
- Publish a set of rules to the game of braces so they know what it takes to win, with an accompanying report card. The report card can take the form of a board game or a scorecard, and when they play by the rules, they score or move up the board! If a patient’s oral hygiene is holding them back, then they don’t score or make as much progress that month. If they go too long without scoring, someone will have to talk to the coach about it. But, if the patient is winning they must receive regular rewards, and if they consistently do well you might offer an opportunity to win even bigger prizes, with contests celebrating one key area of patient participation each month.

Rethink. Retool. Re-energize. Reframe cooperation so

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that it becomes fun for patients. When your orthodontic team finds it fun to explain how to play and win the game of braces, then your patients are sure to follow and turn the patient participation system into the crown jewel of your marketing program. Make patient participation a fun and enjoyable system where the patient is the superstar surrounded by a team of caring, enthusiastic team members, and the patient will find their victory when they cross the finish line with a beautiful smile that they helped create! ☺

About the Author



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