



ORTHO2

# The Patient Satisfaction Survey

Start the Year Out Right

by **Rosemary Bray**

In 1920, nineteen years after opening the first Nordstrom store in Seattle, John Nordstrom hung a huge sign from the ceiling in the entry way of that original Nordstrom store. It said simply,

*If we are treating you well, please tell others.  
If we are not, please tell us!*

He wanted his customers' opinion of the service, the product and the people who were delivering both at his stores.

We are in a business similar to John Nordstrom's. Though not a department store, we too are delivering a product and, hopefully, great service along with it. January is a perfect time to ask our customers (patients) their opinions about us. We don't need to hang a huge sign from the ceiling for our patients to see as they walk in the door, but we can have a Patient Satisfaction Survey set out at the front desk with a cup full of pens and at the top of the Survey we can include the same words John Nordstrom posted long ago: *If we are treating you well, please tell others. If we are not, please tell us!*

Formulate about 25 questions regarding all aspects of your practice that allow your patients to evaluate the service they are receiving from you. Be sure to look at clinical areas, financial areas, communication, telephone, treatment explanation, billing and computer services, as well as the overall "feel and service" of the office. Rather than having patients answer yes or no to the questions, ask them to grade each item on a 1 to 10 or 1 to 5 scale. Provide a box for completed surveys rather than asking patients to hand them over to you; they will feel more secure using a closed box with a slot at the top.

It is costly to mail surveys and provide self addressed stamped envelopes for the return, so hand them individually to each patient and parent who comes through the door beginning in January until you have gone through your complete appointment rotation cycle. This also gives

a more personal touch to the survey, especially when you hand it to a mom and tell her that her opinion is very important to you.

When each of your current patients has had the opportunity to complete a survey, review all surveys together at a team meeting. Separate the ones that give you *straight As*. (And you will get many of those!) Pat yourselves on the back and smile for just a moment, and then move on. Those who rate you superior in all categories truly will make you feel good about your practice, however, those people do not help you to grow and to improve. Your Raving Fan Patients love you no matter what. It is the less than glowing surveys that you will want to read and take to heart. Bill Gates tells us that our most unhappy customer is our greatest source of learning. How True! Look for remarks that will perhaps not feel so good to read, but will help you make your practice even better than it currently is.

It is very important to ask for the signature of the patient/parent completing the survey so you know who that Raving Fan is. But more importantly, you want to know who can never find a parking space, who says Susie at the desk is sometimes rude, who wishes she could get a more convenient appointment time, who does not appreciate being kept waiting 30 minutes every time she visits, and who wanted a different financial arrangement but was afraid to ask. They will sign it if you kindly indicate Signature (optional but greatly appreciated) at the bottom. Be sure to include lines for additional comments and suggestions. This can be the most valuable information from the entire survey. This document is of course, not a copy of a poor copy, but is crisp and error free and looks as good as your clinical ortho does!

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# About the Author

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Rosemary Bray has been employed in the dental profession for more than 30 years, with experience in general dentistry, periodontics, and 18 years in orthodontics, including 16 years as Office Manager and Treatment Coordinator for Dr. Dennis McKee's San Diego orthodontic practice. Rosemary has opened the Ortho2 Users Group meeting and is a contributor to the Ortho2 Consultants Corner. Her experience includes teaching, lecturing, study groups, and membership in the National Speaker's Association and the San Diego Children's Dental Health Association. She is a visiting Clinical Instructor in the orthodontic department of the University of the Pacific School of Dentistry in San Francisco and is on the Board of Directors for the American Association of Orthodontics Foundation (AAOF).

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I have seen Patient Surveys requested on deband day in many offices. I see two concerns and therefore recommend against requesting the survey at the conclusion of treatment. First, it is unfortunately too late to make corrections for this family in response to any concerns they might mention, as they are now finished with treatment. Second, most people will only write great remarks about you because this is the happiest day of their life and they just want to get out the door and start grinning! A little biased, I would say!

Each year, start your new year out right and survey your patients. It is also a good idea to put one inside your Walk Out Packet to your new patients so you can learn early on what concerns they might have – and then make a commitment as a team to make it better. The motto of your office can be, as my mom taught me in elementary school:

**Good Better Best  
Never Let It Rest  
Until Your Good Is Better  
And Your Better's Best! ☺**