

the client's perspective

See your business the way others do

Looking at things from the client's viewpoint may not always be the easiest thing to do, especially in your own office. Most of us are so caught up in the details of our own lives that we fall into the old "I see this every day" trap and become blind to the clutter other people can't help but see. Generally, new customers in your office or business will be a little more discriminating and observant than you and some of your regulars are. However, returning customers constantly compare how things are now to what they used to be. You don't want to disregard their feelings either.

How can you learn to see things in your business the way your clients do? My suggestion is to really pay attention the next time you do business with someone else – whether in your field or one completely different. In fact, you might pretend to be a "secret shopper" for a few places, actually doing a silent survey of the conditions of each business. What kinds of things would cause you to return to a business? What would cause you to go somewhere else? Remember what you like and don't like about the establishments you investigate. Take notes if needed. Then take an honest look at these same things in your own practice. Here are a few ideas about what you might look for.

Cleanliness

It is easy to get busy seeing clients and making money and in turn forget about taking the time to clean up the office. Take a look around for dust, dirt and general sloppiness. Is the waiting or retail area neatly kept? Are there stacks of papers or laundry in plain view? Do the carpets need a good vacuuming? And what about your treatment/massage room? It should be a place that automatically puts the client at ease with its order and organization. Will they feel like they are the very first person on your table that day? Are your massage supplies, CDs and extra linens stored neatly or out of sight? Pay special attention to fingerprints on glass and mirrors, and dusty furniture. Make the time to tidy up a little each day.

Whatever you do, remember the bathrooms! Nothing turns me off faster about a business, especially one related to my health, than a dirty restroom.

Is there a working soap dispenser? Do you have paper towels (as opposed to hand towels?) Is the trash overflowing? Does the area smell fresh? As massage becomes more closely linked to the medical profession, cleanliness and proper hygiene standards will rise. The bathroom is a good place to start.

Promptness

While some people have ample time on their hands and don't mind waiting for an appointment to begin, most people are on a tight schedule these days. Are you in your office and ready for your clients before they arrive? Do you start and end each session on time? How quickly do you return calls? If you are running unavoidably behind, make every effort to inform your client of the situation ahead of time. If you do plan to run over the agreed appointment duration, clear it with your client first just in case they have a conflict. Time is a limited asset. Use your client's time, as well as your own, wisely.

Personal Appearance

First impressions only get made once, and unfortunately a lot of a client's initial impression of you and your business may come from the way you look. However, repeat customers may notice more about you on subsequent visits than they did during that first meeting. This means looking your best every day. Are your clothes always clean, wrinkle-free, in good repair, and appropriate to the setting you are in? Do you shower, shave and brush your teeth often enough? Are you reasonably calm, rested and otherwise well put-together? Think about some professionals who made you either comfortable or uncomfortable by their overall appearance. Who would you rather do business with?

Though not really something that can be seen, the way a person speaks can often add or detract to their overall appearance. It surprises me to hear the inappropriate things some people say in a business setting. Keeping your language clean and clear will do nothing but add to your overall appearance. Use correct grammar and know the meanings of the words you use. Learn to speak to people on their level – neither over-simplifying terms or talking above someone else's level of understanding. Omit any obscenities or

potentially offensive terms from your vocabulary (see "Creating Rapport," *Massage & Bodywork*, March/April 1999 for more on this topic). These few details can help make your mouth your best feature.

Agenda

Are you really doing your best to serve your clients? Or, do you have a pre-planned agenda that fits your needs better than theirs? Really think about this one. I have talked with numerous clients over the years who tell me about a massage therapist or other healing arts professional who did not listen to their requests. If I went to the dentist complaining of a toothache, I would expect him to spend the bulk of his time working on that problem, not trying to sell me on tooth bleaching. If your client asks for extra attention on his neck, why would you concentrate on stretching his calves? Make sure you are addressing the specifically mentioned or requested needs of your clients, not just what you think they need.

As always, whenever appropriate, refer your clients to other health professionals if they will be better served by another type of treatment.

The Extras

This can mean a lot of different things, but for us it's making an effort for your clients that other people don't or won't. In a nutshell, it is delivering the best service possible. My favorite customer service experience happened when I stayed at a Ritz-Carlton Hotel several years ago. My room was not ready when I checked in, but instead of making me wait, the front desk manager upgraded me to a corner suite at no charge. Then he gave me a voucher for complimentary drinks in their lounge to compensate for the inconvenience. Before I could even get across the lobby to the baggage desk, the bellman on duty knew my name and room number, greeted me and promptly took my bags to the room. It was a great way to iron out a problem and to ensure I had a great experi-

ence. The Ritz-Carlton made an outstanding first impression and won my loyalty while I was still in the lobby by providing more extras than I have ever had anywhere else.

While you might not be able to do things on the same level as the Ritz-Carlton, there are plenty of ways you can go the extra mile. Remember birthdays or anniversaries. Send thank-you notes. Have complimentary water, tea or coffee in your office. Send someone an article you think they would appreciate. There are so many other things you can do. The little things can go a long way in making people feel special and appreciated. Likewise, those same little things can and will change a client's impression of you and leave you standing apart from the pack.

The client's perspective of you and your business is so important to consider, especially in a service-based business like massage therapy. Pay close attention to the things you do and say, the way you look and sound, and the overall state of your office. While it is clear that many businesses don't care about some of these small details, the one's that do are ahead of the game. Follow these guidelines and make sure you are one of the people way up in front. **M&B**

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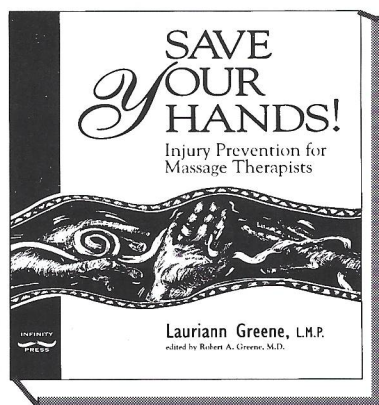
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