



# CONQUERING THE CONSULTATION OBSTACLE COURSE

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If you ever feel like you are jumping through hoops to convince potential patients to take the leap toward elective surgery, you are not alone. Refractive coordinators and doctors everywhere have a big job to do when it comes to converting leads to patients. In your eyes, the decision is a no-brainer. After all, you are changing lives for the better every single day by improving vision. You have seen the real-life improvements time after time.

Unfortunately, the obstacles of fear, cost, and uncertainty often take control of a potential patient's mind, causing delay or even complete abandonment of the elective surgery decision. Is there a way to conquer the consultation obstacle course?

The answer is a resounding Yes. The method is consultative selling.

## ABANDON THE USED CAR SALES APPROACH

As you no doubt suspect, you cannot approach selling your procedures the same way you would sell a used car (pressure tactics, back-and-forth negotiating, etc.). The emotional factors are completely different. In fact, you may not even consider your elective procedures as something that must be sold to patients. But the reality is that it may be even harder to convince patients to invest in their vision than it is to sell a tangible object that they consider absolutely necessary for daily life. Elective surgery is too easy to pass up in exchange for using their money to pursue other things.

## FORM A BOND WITH POTENTIAL PATIENTS

Consultative selling involves making a real, honest connection with potential patients. You can't expect people to place their trust in you—and invest their hard-earned money—if you only toss out technical jargon and walk away. By developing an authentic relationship with potential patients, you will open up a whole new dialogue of mutual understanding and trust. The following seven tips will help:

- 1. Adapt a patient mindset.** Step out of your medical role when communicating with patients. Remember that most do not have your same in-depth knowledge of the benefits and risks.
- 2. Establish a two-way dialogue.** Ask questions to help under-

stand their unique frustrations and fears. Don't talk AT them but WITH them.

3. **Remove distractions.** Give every prospective patient 100% of your attention. The person standing in front of you should take precedence over personal or office phone calls, other staff members asking for help, etc.
4. **Listen and watch for unspoken cues.** When you are 100% focused and interjecting questions at the right time (without interrupting), you will begin to understand what may be holding them back from making a decision.
5. **Know your competition.** This will help you understand what patients are seeing. Do they have lower prices? A better name in the community? Secret-shop your competition to learn as much as you can.
6. **Believe in what you sell.** Your staff has to feel confidence in your doctors in order to relay that to the patient (without overpromising). You have to truly believe that the procedure will change their lives.
7. **Follow up.** Prospects may need to consult with loved ones, check their finances, do more research or meet with other doctors. These are all good things. It means they are putting a good deal of thought into their decision. Be patient, but don't drop the ball. It can take 2 years for someone to decide to have elective surgery. Besides making follow-up calls, you can keep your practice top-of-mind by adopting protocols like sending drip emails (a series of automated emails meant to cultivate the lead

process) or encouraging them to join you on social media to get access to the educational information you share online. Occasional giveaways, contests, or community involvement will make the social connection more appealing to them.

### WAYS TO FALL FLAT ON THE CONSULTATION OBSTACLE COURSE

Certain actions or inactions can be the stumbling blocks that cause you to lose a potential patient during a consultation. Your entire staff should avoid making these mistakes:

- **Personal conversations in public.** The front desk area is no place for personal phone calls, venting frustrations, or any type of personal discussions (even positive ones—certainly never negative gossiping).
- **Long wait times.** Sometimes this cannot be avoided. Rather than leaving prospective patients waiting, fill their time with something helpful or entertaining. Offer free Wi-Fi, refreshments, reading materials, educational in-office videos, etc., and give constant updates on their appointment wait time.
- **Making assumptions.** Never assume someone can't afford a procedure or doesn't need financing. Your job is to outline the various options that exist.
- **Being unprepared.** You risk losing patients' trust if they have to repeat their personal information several times to different staff members. Any type of office confusion will also make the prospect question your professionalism.

### THERE IS NO ONE-APPROACH-FITS-ALL

While every patient interaction should have the same foundation of listening, communicating, and forming a bond, there will be different nuances of personalities that will shape these interactions. Some people will be shy and hesitant to share information. Others will be outgoing and forthcoming. Consultative selling helps you read these personalities and adapt successful communication methods to build relationships. Not every staff member intrinsically has these skills but they can be learned through training sessions. An investment in consultative selling techniques is an investment in your bottom line. **AE**



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### IN A BLINK

- Elective surgery must be sold to potential patients.
- Use consultative selling to develop authentic relationships.
- Read different personalities to adapt successful communication methods.