



**ALL-STAR DENTAL ACADEMY™**



**STUDY  
CLUB**

## **STUDY CLUB SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS**

SUMMARY · HIGHLIGHTS · TRANSCRIPT

### **#6 ATTRACTING FEE FOR SERVICE PATIENTS**



# ATTRACTING FEE FOR SERVICE PATIENTS

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## TRANSCRIPT

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Alex: Hi, everybody. And welcome to this month's All-Star Dental Academy Study Club. This month, we'll be discussing the issue of fee-for-service, how to get more private pay or fee-for-service clients.

Let's begin Study Club.

We're waiting on Larry, our head instructor, to come on board. But, in the meantime, before we do that, we're going to have our Superstar Instructor, Heather Nottingham and I have no bias towards her, even though we share the last name, same name, right? But she is our phone skills professor, teacher, student...not student, instructor. She's fabulous. So, I'm going to have her talk a little bit about the new patient process with respect to fee-for-service clients and her experience.

Now, for those that are not familiar with Heather's background, she worked as a Bloomingdale's trainer and retail sales manager. Made her way into dentistry, helped take a practice that I was working with from one million to two million in less than 18 months. Kind of funny, she had a million dollar clientele book in Bloomingdale's and she brought that into dentistry and it was just fabulous what she did with very little experience and, then, being able to develop these systems and bring a high level of customer service. So, very appropriate for the topic of fee-for-service and we find that you never can have too much customer service. Whether you are a fee-for-service practice, a PPO practice or HMO, you could always bring more great service. So, you always want to err on the side of more. And Heather, there's always more to her. She's known as the Million Dollar Customer Service Genius, so without further ado may I welcome Heather Nottingham.

Heather: Yes, I'm here.

Alex: Okay.



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Heather: So, today, since we're talking about fee-for-service, there's two things that we're going to talk about. We're going to talk about the fee-for-service mindset and then, also, we're going to cover how to get more fee-for-service patients. Those were the two things.

The first one we want to talk about is having a fee-for-service mindset. And since I teach the phone program, in my opinion, the fee-for-service mindset starts with the first phone call. When a patient calls up or prospective patient calls up.

If you've ever called, let's say, a five star hotel like the Ritz-Carlton, and we're going to have an awesome webinar tonight about the Ritz-Carlton approach, or if you've shopped in a high end store like Bloomingdale's or Saks, then you know that they not only have the best customer service in place, it begins, it's not just in the business. It's when you pick up the phone and you call them. It starts immediately if you have a question for one of their sales associates.

In order to get higher end patients, what you have to do is you have to put out a high-end philosophy in your office. And you have to carry that philosophy into everything that you do. This means that everything that you do, you go above and beyond for your patients. So, for example, if you have let's say, Saks Fifth Avenue and you call them to ask them a question, do you think that they would rush a customer off the phone if they were busy or put them on hold? Absolutely not. You would never experience something like that. So, it's the same thing. You have to look it at the same way in your dental office. You're going to want to spend as much time as necessary with your patients to give them amazing service. That doesn't mean that you have to talk their ear off if you've helped them and you've gone above and beyond, then that's what you want to look for.

So, some top tips to get that fee-for-service mindset in your office. First, you want to be prepared to consistently "wow" your patient. And, again, that's not just on the phone but in the office as well.



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The second is you want to know how to really connect and build rapport with your patient so that you can effectively meet their needs. You want to ask questions about them and be genuinely interested in what they have to say.

The third is you want to share the sizzle. And that's something that we teach in the program at All-Star. And what that means is, you want to know not just the features, but the benefits of why they should choose your office and what sets your office apart from the competition. And when we say competition, the competition isn't just other dental offices but it's anything else that they could spend their money on. So, it's the new, the latest iPhone or whatever they could spend their money instead of coming to the office. You want to say why your office is the choice that they should make.

The fourth is you want to show the value. So, why should they pay out-of-pocket to come to your office versus just, you know, paying a co-pay or no payment at all in another office. This is really important because it's like someone having a free hotel stay but it's for the Super 8 Motel versus paying an expensive night to go stay at somewhere like the Ritz-Carlton or somewhere like that. You're paying for the experience. But you have to make sure that if they're paying for the experience, your office can actually deliver that experience in the way that it's going to be important to them.

The fifth is you want to go above and beyond, and we talked about this before. So, keep open lines of communication with your patient so that they feel special. If you tell them that you're going to call them back in 24 hours, well, then, call them back sooner than that. You always want to under-promise and over-deliver. If you tell them that you're going to work to get them an appointment sooner, make sure you do it. Or at least keep them in the loop as far as that you're working on it. If you start something in your office, make sure you take it to completion for the patient.



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And then, lastly, make every interaction with your patient special as if you're talking to a family member or somebody that you are really good friends with that you haven't spoken to in a while and you're really excited to help them and talk to them. So, that is all the aspects of the fee-for-service mindset with respect to new patients or talking to patients on the phone.

With respect to getting more fee-for-service patients, and I'm sure that Larry is going to elaborate on a lot of these things, but it starts with your marketing message. So, how does your website, your social media, emails and...what perception is it putting out there to patients? If you're saying you're this high-end practice but then you have a really, like, crummy website, what perception is that giving off? Or if you have an awesome website but then they come in and the office is in shambles, then that's not keeping up that same perception.

So, are you "wowing" your current patients so that you're going to get more high-end referrals? That's another important aspect. What type of services does your office offer? If you're trying to portray this high-end office, do you have high-end services? Do you have amenities for the patients, things that are going to make your office stand out? What does your office look like? So, this goes back to what we talked about before in that if you are supposed to be this high-end great customer service office, it doesn't have to look like the most fancy office, but it needs to be neat and clean, and well kept and somewhat modern so that they feel like they're getting a better experience going to you.

And, very importantly, because since this is what we teach, is your staff trained to give the best service experience possible both over the phone and in the office? If you have the same consistent message, "We give great customer service," but then somebody calls the office and they get hung up on, or put on hold, or somebody rude, well that is definitely going to be a turn-off to the patient.



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Matter of fact, a little interesting tidbit here is we first started financing cars in the United States during the Great Depression. And, so, that was a way for the car companies to actually sell more cars, was to help people with the payments. And, so, yep. I think third-party financing is a great idea. Matter of fact, we all know it, whether we admit it or not, probably the biggest reason why people don't go to the dentist is because of price. And, so, I like you to talk about it early, and I like you to talk about it often so that people can be comfortable with it and you know get comfortable with the payments. But third-party financing, there's a lot of good companies out there and, so, I like Care Credit because I feel like they've got the best package, you know, for things for patients. But regardless of who you choose, make it easy for patients.

Matter of fact, have a page on your website just dedicated to financial arrangements. And, matter of fact, I'd have your treatment coordinator make a little video because this is pretty easy to do these days. Just talking like, "Hi, I'm the treatment coordinator and part of my responsibilities would be to review your fees and discuss how your insurance company will help you with your coverage," and so on and so forth. "And some of our patients like to pay for their treatment over time." You get where I'm going, but make it personal for the person to see the treatment coordinator and talk to them. And let them know that, "Hey, we'll discuss this with you." And, so free-for – excuse me – third-party financing, to me, is must in a fee-for-service practice, but I see where it has no effect, no effect whatsoever on profitability. And it's because, like the retailers discovered years ago, people will accept more treatment when they feel like they can afford it. Back to you, Alex.

Alex: Heather, do you want to ask? You had a good question to ask Larry. Do you want to ask or do you want me to ask it?

Heather: No, you can go ahead.

Alex: Okay. So, for those that want to transition to fee-for-service, this is question. They're like nervous and certainly one can have both, but if they



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want to be fee-for-service only, no insurance. How would that happen? How long would it take?

Larry: Well, it could happen as quickly as 30 days. And then, more likely, it's going to take maybe six or seven months or whatever. This is how you get comfortable with it. Look at your numbers. If your write-offs, I'll just give you simple numbers, if your write-offs are more than 20% of your gross production, then you know you're starting to tread water. It's a sign that your involvement with insurance is growing too large and now you're vulnerable to them. And I like that 20% benchmark because, at that point, you're pretty much writing off one day a week. And, you know, at the end of the month, you've written off four days. Now, that's a whole week. And at the end of the year, you've written off 12 weeks and, so, you know, that's three months or four months. And, so, you know what I mean, you've written off a lot of dentistry, let's just put it that way. And you've worked really, really hard. So, if you're write-offs are more than 20%, it's telling you, "I'd better look at these dogs first." And maybe get off of those plans and let that get under your belt. You know, let that get under your belt.

And then start looking at your marketing. You know, if you're getting too many, what I call, discount shoppers, and you have every reason to expect that they're out there today if you're offering too many discounts because that's what people do. You know, we go to Scoutmob to get a discount to go out to eat. You know, we go to Social Circle. We go there to look for discounts because so many are out there.

So, look at your marketing to see who you're already attracting. And if you're getting more patients who are looking for discounts or more patients who are coming to you because you're on their plan, then your marketing isn't really working for you. And, so, start looking at that. You want to get your adjustments under 20%, you want to do that. And then when you notice that your new patients coming in aren't looking for a discount or they're not coming in because of a coupon and I can see that I can replace the patients that I'm going to lose from not participating, but I'm really able to replace





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them with fee-for-service patients, then you know you can reduce your participation even more. So, that's the way, that's how long it would take. But my experience is that it doesn't take as long as it sounds

Alex: Now, Heather I'm going to put you on the spot here because I know you didn't prepare for this but Tom wanted to know about asking the price over the phone, which is something that comes up a lot or that the insurance question over the phone, these are very popular questions that offices get stumped with. They could relate to fee-for-service or, to some extent, and I know you go into great detail into your training program at All-Star Dental Academy but could you maybe give us a little overview about that or mindset towards it?

Heather: Which one? Which question?

Alex: Hold on. Let's see.

Larry: The shopping question?

Heather: Like if someone calls and they're asking about price?

Larry: Yeah.

Alex: Okay. Tom says, "context preparing fee-for-service patients to avoid sticker shock." But I think initially was asking about the price question.

Heather: I mean, the first thing is that, you know, sometimes when a person calls and asks the price, because most people call ask the price, especially if it's something cosmetic or they need to have something done, they were told, "Oh, you need to have a crown, or you need to have this done." So, I mean, Larry teaches the same thing. Pretty much all they know is to ask the price. That's what they've been taught. They don't know anything else to ask. So, that doesn't necessarily mean, though, that they're a price shopper. It's just, that's what they know. So, you can kind of break it down by going through the great call process. You do the proper greeting and then you're going to find out during the rapport section a little bit more about what they're really interested in. Is it just the price? I mean, maybe, how do you



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know they haven't seen another doctor before, where did they hear the price, where are they... how do they know that they need to have done what they need to have done. You know, why are they looking for a new dentist, those types of things.

So, in the rapport phase, you're going to uncover some of what really they're interested in and then you're better able to engage the patient in the e-section of the great call process and then really kind of speak to the issues and maybe it's not really the price, maybe they just want to have something done really well but they just want to have a general idea about the price. Maybe... We assume that if they ask the price that they're going to object to it or they're going to say it's too high. But that doesn't always happen. A lot of times, they just want information. They just want to feel like this is best place for them, so that's why it's our job to be able to give them that information and help them make the decision and make them feel the confidence and the trust in the office. And then you go back and then you engage them. And then, you know, once you tell them the price, if then they say, "Oh, well that's too expensive," then you can still engage them further, get more information. What are they basing that off of. A lot of times, it's just a, you know, a few second conversation where they say, ...

Alex: That's true.

Heather: "Oh, it's too expensive." And you say "Oh, okay," you know, "Thanks anyway. Talk to you later." But if you really care about the patient and you feel like your office is the best office for them and that you're best equipped to help them and that you know why your office is superior because of your sizzle points and things like that, then it's your job, your responsibility to make sure that they have the information so that you know that this is the best place for them, regardless of the price. "Yes, you're going to be paying a little bit more or a little bit less relative to other offices, but here's what I've heard you say is important to you as a patient..."