

Wayne Gretzky Turned a Dentist into a Superstar

by Kathleen A. Johnson

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Like all good fables, this one is powerful because of the valuable lessons it teaches.

Once upon a time, there was a dentist named Dr. Volunteer. He was a very good dentist and very well liked by his patients. The only problem was, not enough people knew what a good dentist he was and therefore Dr. Volunteer's production was not as high as it could be. Rather than become angry and blame his staff, Dr. Volunteer decided to reevaluate his practice and see if there were any missed opportunities.

Dr. Volunteer's office was located in an average-sized suburban hamlet, very close to a grammar school and a high school, and he often received emergency calls concerning the children in the village. No matter what the season, boys and girls playing various sports often suffered dental injuries, including having their teeth knocked out or cracked. It surprised Dr. Volunteer that so many parents, teachers, dukes, and coaches did not know how to handle such emergencies. Dr. Volunteer realized this might be the missed opportunity he was searching for and, with the help of his trusted consultant, he set about finding a way to make everyone happy.

The first thing Dr. Volunteer's consultant told him was that no matter what he decided to do, he had to make sure his staff was well-informed and behind the project one hundred and ten percent. (His consultant was awfully demanding). Dr. Volunteer said that was fine, but was there also a way to involve an element of hockey, his favorite sport, in the project? Given how prone hockey players are to dental injuries, the consultant realized this was a natural and she agreed. Together, they called the one hockey player with the marketing savvy and family values to guide them through this project, Wayne Gretzky. Mr. Gretzky was more than happy to help and while his suggestions were many and good, what follows are the ones Dr. Volunteer found most helpful:

Top five things Wayne Gretzky, supposedly, said to do:

5. Be certain your staff is trained to handle emergency phone calls.

Time is a factor in avulsed tooth accidents so putting the patient on hold or getting the doctor is not an option. By handling the situation in a calm, reassuring way, patients will not only appreciate the help, they'll be impressed and tell their friends.

4. Inform patients of your emergency policies so they know they can come to you.

In the immediate aftermath and confusion of an avulsed tooth accident, many parents, teachers and coaches may be tempted to go to an emergency room rather than your practice.

3. Provide tip sheets to your patients (prevention and steps to take after an accident).

In lieu of paper, a refrigerator magnet could provide valuable advice along with the practice's emergency phone number and address.

2. Offer free, seasonal clinics on pedo accidents to local teachers and sports leagues.

These clinics can be held at the office so people become familiar with the location. Schedule the clinics to coincide with the beginning of school terms and major sports seasons: baseball, football, basketball, hockey, etc. The goodwill created within the community and sudden familiarity with the practice will be enough for many people to try your practice.

1. Volunteer to become "Official Dental Advisor" of a local little league or high school.

The time investment is low, perhaps requiring little more than running a few seasonal clinics for adults, teaching children how to mold mouth guards, and keeping your cell phone on over the weekends when games are played. The affiliation, however, creates marketing opportunities based on loyalty (for a school or team) and an impressive title: The "Official" anything implies you were chosen for the job over others.

Top five things Wayne Gretzky, supposedly, said to avoid:

5. Telling your patients, "I'm all about saving teeth. They are the canvas upon which I paint."

4. Offering bullies on the local pee-wee team "a quarter for each tooth you knock out."

3. Spreading a rumor that mouth guards cause tooth decay.

2. Putting up posters of hockey players in the office and telling children, "Don't you want to look just like that guy?"

1. Yelling out at random sporting events, "Knock his teeth out!"

The project was a success, Wayne Gretzky went to the Hall of Fame, and Dr. Volunteer practiced happily ever after.

Of course, the stuff about Wayne Gretzky never really happened (except the Hall of Fame, that's a gimme), and Dr. Volunteer is actually an amalgamation of several of my clients. But the lesson holds true. By giving a little of yourself, you'll get something in return. It may be some positive P.R. or a few new patients. Or it might be something as intangible as goodwill, personal satisfaction, and the rarified air of superstardom—even if it is only within a twelve-block radius.