



Running Your Practice Like a Fine Restaurant

A guide to excellence in dentistry

Michael Sonick, DMD

The year 1985 marked the inception of two businesses: Danny Meyer’s Union Square Cafe in the bustling heart of New York City and my dental practice in Fairfield, Connecticut. This was no ordinary year for these businesses; it was the beginning of a journey toward excellence and success in two vastly different fields with some surprising parallels. The Union Square Cafe garnered much acclaim, and Meyer, who became a titan in the culinary world, has since expanded his empire to include celebrated venues such as Gramercy Tavern, Eleven Madison Park, and The Modern—a Michelin-starred gem nestled in New York City’s Museum of Modern Art. Meyer’s passion for excellence, particularly regarding the Zagat Survey’s esteemed criteria—food, decor, and service—has consistently placed his restaurants at the zenith of New York City’s dining scene.

The analogy that can be drawn between a fine dining experience and an excellent experience at a dental practice is profound and multifaceted.

At the core of both industries should lie a universal goal: the pursuit of delivering an unparalleled experience. As healthcare providers, our mission should transcend merely achieving clinical outcomes; it should involve fostering a deep-seated connection with our patients that is akin to the hospitality that elevates a meal into a memorable dining experience. This is as important as the delivery of excellent clinical care.

Clinical Work: The Culinary Art of Dentistry

In dentistry, much like with food in the culinary world, the quality of our “product”—our clinical work—is not always immediately discernible to our patrons, the patients. They may not recognize the intricacies of a Class II restoration or the finesse required to perform a well-executed root canal treatment, but they are acutely aware of how their restorations look and their overall experience receiving them. Combining exceptional “ingredients” (ie, modern dental materials) and “culinary artistry” (ie, evidence-based techniques) to deliver restorations with excellent esthetics while appropriately managing pain and avoiding

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sensitivity and other complications is paramount in shaping our patients' perceptions that they are receiving a quality product.

Decor: Setting the Stage for Comfort and Trust

Before patients ever cross the thresholds of our practices, their journeys begin with impressions formed through their referral sources, the appearance of our websites, and the physical appearance of our locations and buildings. In the same way that the ambiance of a restaurant sets the stage for the dining experience, the ambiance of a dental practice, from the cleanliness of the parking lot and the warmth of the reception area to the interior design and organization of the operatories, sets the stage for the patient experience. Although elements such as a pleasing interior design and comfortable furniture go a long way in reducing anxiety and improving patients' perceptions of their experiences, in the post-COVID-19 era, cleanliness and safety have taken on even greater importance, with patients placing a premium on well-maintained facilities that signal thoughtful care and professionalism. The environments that we create speak volumes about our practices, and that directly impacts our patients' comfort and trust.

Service: The Heart of Patient Care

The essence of exceptional service in both dining and dentistry lies in creating memorable personalized experiences. This is especially true in cases outside of cosmetic dentistry, where the relationship with the dentist and dental team has a more significant influence on patient satisfaction. The creation of a memorable experience involves every touchpoint with patients, from the initial phone call to the moment that they walk out the door. In this regard, the incorporation of personal touches, such as maintaining patient photographs in their charts so that they can be immediately recognized and greeted by name upon arrival, can transform a standard visit into a bespoke healthcare experience. All of our interactions with patients should make them feel valued and prioritized, embodying the sentiment that we are "on stage" and delivering a performance that exceeds their expectations.

Craft an Upscale Experience

Running a dental practice with the ethos of a fine restaurant is about more than just providing top-tier dental care; it's about crafting an upscale experience that resonates with each patient on a personal level. It's about cleanliness, ambiance, and a service that makes every patient feel like the most important person in the room. As healthcare providers, we have the unique opportunity to impact lives not just through clinical excellence but also through the art of hospitality. By focusing on refining these fundamental aspects—dentistry, decor, and service—we can elevate our practices into a realm where healthcare meets the heart and fosters healing through deep connections, unparalleled comfort, and the highest quality care.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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