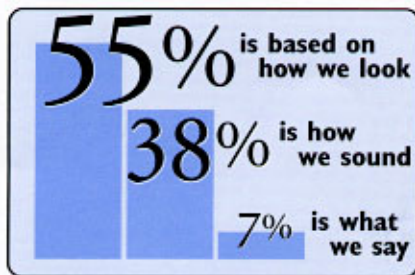


YOUR IMAGE TRANSCENDS WORDS

By Donna Chevrier, AICI

Did you know that your image is an instant message, more powerful than words?

According to psychologist Dr. Mehrabian of the University of California, this is how we communicate:



WHAT MESSAGE DOES YOUR image send? The most important message for health care professionals is to project that you care about the comfort of your patients. Many patients, because of an early association of pain with dental work, are simply “little kids” in adult bodies, so a consistent, caring message is the key to building trusting, professional relationships.

Those caring messages start well before your patients get into a treatment room. As they enter the reception area, the lighting, colours and layout all send instant messages. For example, an open welcome to the reception desk without an obstacle course of furniture, feet or legs is a first step.

Lighting is a very important element in creating warmth and true colour rendering. Table lamps usually provide a warm glow. Full spectrum fluorescent lighting tubes provide about 95% of the quality of daylight and render the most natural colour. They are also beneficial to those who suffer from SAD – Seasonal Affective Disorder – so a side benefit of using this lighting may be happier employees and patients.

Respect your patients’ time by keeping their wait to a minimum. Provide chairs that invite relaxed positions and redecorate the reception area and treatment rooms before they become tired looking. Run down and neglected work areas send a message of general neglect. Consider the seating arrangement for those who enjoy people-watching. Nature related artwork,

living plants, landscapes/seascapes, fish tanks and the sound of trickling water is relaxing to view and hear. Studies indicate that they can also reduce stress levels.

Having addressed the office image, a receptionist and team members with a friendly manner, appropriate eye contact, a warm smile and a pleasant voice are worth gold. Excellent interpersonal communications cannot be overstressed. Also, health-related professions need impeccable grooming habits – neat hair, well applied makeup and clean, well-cared for clothing. Careless grooming habits can also send a message that the care and cleaning of equipment may be haphazard.

Here are some of the personal image messages that relate to your perceived competency level. Securing and keeping a good job may depend on understanding the significance of these visual communication skills. Have you:

- had a professional hair colour and style assessment in the past twelve months
- learned how to highlight your best facial features with face mapping, makeup application
- updated the colours and/or application method of your makeup in the past two years
- checked out your body type to see what styles emphasize your best and camouflage the rest
- found out how specific colours enhance a healthy appearance and highlight your skin, hair and eyes
- learned how to plan a small but effective wardrobe to perfectly fit your work and social life
- discovered how accessories stretch your wardrobe and inexpensively create new looks

A warm, personal presence will create a thriving climate for your patients’ sense of well-being. These positive interpersonal skills reinforce that the patient is important. When taking the patient to the treatment room, clearly announce his/her name, wait for her/him to reach you, make eye contact, smile, then invite her/him to follow you. Making small talk projects interest and can divert attention from the sound of the whining drill in

other treatment rooms.

As your patient relationship continues, more is learned about his/her feelings and fears. Make notes on the chart so at each visit you can demonstrate your interest which increases trust and develops stronger bonds. Find out if your patients like to be told what’s happening as the work is progressing.

Learn to read your patient’s body language and to send your own articulate body language. Your arm, hand and especially your facial expressions send instant messages. If you don’t know what messages you are sending, ask someone on your team to observe you with your patients for a couple of days and give you feedback. Have them watch for positive and negative messages.

Here are some of the interpersonal people skills that contribute to trusting, caring relationships:

- use effective eye contact
- smile often
- use inclusive and open body language
- keep your voice well modulated
- say your patient’s name
- maintain a respectful manner
- be pleasant toward other team members
- demonstrate kindness, courtesy
- positive energy increases productivity
- positive energy adds to work enjoyment

A kind and caring attitude generates behaviours that enhance our image communication. If you genuinely care for the comfort of others and can actively and consistently demonstrate that, dentistry is a great career choice. ➤

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