



10:30 AM | SCARLET OAK

“Why did I get a bill? I thought I paid in full”

and Other Awkward Conversations Mediated by a Hostage Negotiator

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No matter how incredible your team, processes, and systems may be, dentistry will never be able to avoid uncomfortable situations and potentially angry patients.

Dr. Gupta presents concepts from a former FBI hostage negotiator that will defuse and create calm even during the most stressful situations in the office

AWKWARD CONVERSATIONS

What causes stress in the office

- Rushed schedule
- Unexpected difficult procedures
- Difficult people
- **Difficult conversations**

During any contentious interaction:

- Person A wants something
- Person B wants something
- Both people believe that they completely deserve that something
- They believe that, If they don't get that something, they have been cheated
- This feeling of unfairness creates resentment and hostility towards the other person
- Both parties imagine the worst, creating anxiety, which affects their communication and rationality

The problem is:

Those emotions totally precede the actual interaction

And thus:

Those emotions can ruin a potentially positive and mutually beneficial reaction

THE STEPS

1. Silence and a quiet breath
2. Tactical empathy
3. Sincere apology
4. Late-night FM DJ voice
5. Mirroring
6. Labeling
7. Accusation audit
8. Achieve "NO"
9. "That's right"
10. Summarize, and ask, "how am I going to do that?"



SILENCE

- Take a quiet breath
- Look at them in the eye
- Smile



TACTICAL EMPATHY

- Imagine yourself in their shoes
- Say, "I am imagining myself in your shoes, and I..."
- Examples:
 - "If I put myself in your shoes, I'd think, 'I really want to get this work done, but I'm not sure exactly how I would pay for it.'"
 - "If I came to the dentist regularly like you have, and was never told about any of this 'periodontal disease' stuff, and now all of a sudden someone just sprung this one me, I'd be really frustrated, and not sure who to trust"



SINCERE APOLOGY

- "And really, I am so sorry"
- "I wish it didn't get to this point"
- "I really like and respect you, and am so disappointed about this"



LATE NIGHT FM DJ VOICE

- Lower your pitch, get sexy
 - "These are our prices"
 - "These pockets aren't going away"
 - "This is our soonest appointment"



MIRRORING

- Repeating back to the patient the last few words of what they said
- If you are building rapport, simply repeat with a **positive** inflection
- If you want to challenge them, simply repeat with an **inquisitive** inflection



LABELING

- A combination of tactical empathy and mirroring
- Always start with:
 - "It seems like"
 - "It sounds like"
- Don't say, "I feel like" or "you seem"
- Keep it in the 3rd person

The goal is to get to "that's right," and never "you're right"

When things are really at the contentious phase:



ACCUSATION AUDIT

- Use tactical empathy to create a concise list of names they might call you
 - "You're going to think that we are just in it for the money"
 - "You're not going to like to hear this"
 - "I have the feeling you're going to be pretty upset about this"
 - "You're going to think we are just the big bad dental office trying to nickel and dime you"



START WITH NO

- Mislabel their emotions, and ask if that is correct
 - "Would you like your money back and for us to help you find another office?"
 - "Would you prefer a hygienist who doesn't check for disease?"
 - "Would you prefer we just charge you our regular fee, and not get insurance involved, so that we don't run into this in the future?"



AND AT THE END

- Don't offer a solution
- Ask, "how do you think we can do this?"
- Never be mean. Constantly compliment and apologize.
- "This is really a tough situation. We really love you and love having you as a patient. I completely understand your frustration and am truly sorry. What do you think is the best way for us to move forward?"

NOTES
