

## **The First 15 Seconds—Moments to Shine!**

In 1987, Jan Carlzon's wrote a book Moments of Truth which became a best seller and impacted the way businesses created their management structures. The transformation of organizational management structures was so successful, Carlzon created workshops and manuals for business leaders to engage in creating their own businesses anew.

Carlzon was then the President of Scandinavian Airlines. When he took that position in 1981, SAS was showing a loss of \$20 million. In one year, Carlzon's ideas in action earned \$54 million for SAS. The "secret" was that he inverted the traditional management structure of top-down to bottom-up. In other words, the then traditional management model for corporations was the Board of Directors told the President who told the Vice Presidents who told the middle management people who told the frontline people what the policies of the company were and how they were to interact with customers. So essentially, the people who had the least amount of contact with the customer were designing the policies of how the people who had the most amount of contact on how to treat the customer!

The title of the book was the motto Carlzon adopted for SAS. What he said was the typical customer makes a long-lasting assessment of the entire company during the first 15 seconds of contact that the customer has with anyone from the company. i.e., a moment of truth. With that axiom at hand, he inverted the SAS management structure and gave the frontline personnel the power to make decisions regarding the customer's concerns without having to revert to the policy manual.

His first example cited in the book was of a businessman who showed up at the airport without his airline ticket, having left it on the dresser in his airport hotel. (Remember, this was during the time of paper tickets...technology has now made this specific problem non-existent.) Normally, that businessman would have had to either purchase a new ticket or go back to the hotel to get the ticket and risk missing his flight. Instead, and to the utter delight of the traveler, he was told by the ticket agent "no problem sir," who then issued the man a temporary ticket, arranged for a SAS employee to go the hotel, retrieve the ticket and bring it to the airport in time for the traveler to board his flight. You can be sure that the traveler didn't stop raving about SAS that day, and for days afterward. And it was this kind of trust and empowerment of frontline employees that produced breakthrough results for SAS; and in 1984 SAS was named "best airline for the year."

Carlzon's book is as relevant today as it was 25 years ago. While the orthodontic practice has a much less complex management structure, the essential truths in Carlson book, namely empowering the frontline employees to operate with more autonomy, especially in dealing with service issues with patients, are critical to supporting patient referrals. In fact, because practices don't have complex management systems as corporations do, implementing change is easier.

As with all memorable campaigns, there is a slogan that anchors employees to the mission or the big picture. For Carlzon, it was Moments of Truth. I also think of the first 15 seconds as Moments to Shine. You and your team can come up with one that suits you; and whatever you choose it should put an emphasis on making the patients' experience be one that they naturally brag about. David Kelly, founder and CEO of Ideo says, "It's not rocket science, it's empathy...being empathetic to the customers' needs...try to understand what they really value."

And what most really value are actually "the little things" in life...such as being greeted by name and with a smile; having someone really interested in them and really listening when they are speaking; when they have a problem, having the person they are talking with listen from their point of view rather than explain to them why they have a problem. I recall a doctor sharing how proud he was of one of his receptionist

whom he “caught” running out to a car with an umbrella for a patient and mom who were unprepared for a sudden afternoon downpour...definitely a shining moment!

What’s also important is when these shining moments occur that they be acknowledged. For instance, have the team members track their own and other team members’ shining moments, and post them on a special bulletin board. Invite your patients to take note of shining moments and post those as well.

Keeping a focus on the patient and demonstrating empathy for the patient’s experience will stimulate the kinds of posts on your Facebook page that will be the best advertisement for your practice. It’s what Carlzon says is “managing the dickens out of those unique, never-to-be-repeated opportunities to distinguish ourselves in a memorable fashion from each and every one of our competitors.”

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