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# What To Say to Patients and Parents —

**A Monthly Article on Practice Management**  
*Presented by Dr. Roger P. Levin and Ortho Technology, Inc.*

## Scripting for the Ortho Team

The ortho team spends significantly more time with patients and parents than does the orthodontist. Effective scripts empower the staff, increase their perceived professionalism and reduce stress for everyone in the practice. Scripting improves communication by establishing a dialogue for every important conversation that takes place in the practice.

Scripts help the team build better relationships with patients/parents and create greater perceived value for the practice. Many of the best businesses in the world understand the power of scripting. At highly successful businesses such as the Ritz Carlton Hotels, certain words or phrases are used by all employees during every guest conversation. Many retail customer service departments and manufacturers have trained their teams to utilize value creation scripts in conversations with customers.

Using the right language has an enormous impact on case acceptance, scheduling, patient compliance, customer satisfaction and patient referrals. Scripts provide this ideal language, while allowing the team freedom to phrase concepts in their own words.

## The Cycle of Positive Communication

Highly successful ortho practices achieve exceptional performance by developing an excellent ability to consistently communicate with patients. However, these communication skills must be exhibited by every team member, not just the orthodontist. All team members must be experts at educating and motivating patients to seek good oral health through appropriate orthodontic treatment.

The art of effective communication is not easy. However, the good news is that anyone can learn to improve his or her verbal skills, which is almost a guarantee of personal and professional success. Not only do strong verbal skills help create and maintain a superior positive attitude, but those same skills will change the way patients and parents view the professionalism of your team.

People are generally attracted to positive people. Even better, the behavior of positive people is contagious. Not only will the ortho team have a greater positive impact on patients/parents, but they will also be perceived as more positive toward the other team members in the practice. When you use positive language, patients tend to respond in a positive manner. In short, you have begun a cycle of positive communication. Creating a cycle of positive communication is an incredible achievement—far more remarkable than you might think.

## It's Too Easy to Be Negative

In many situations, people engage in far more negative language than positive. In general, I find that most people use three times more negative words than positive ones. This is hardly surprising. In life, it's generally easier to be negative, complain and generally tear things down.

I challenge you and your team to turn every negative thought or comment into a positive one before verbalizing it, and you'll see the difference. This simple exercise will make everyone keenly aware of the impact of negative language in the workplace.

## An Example of Turning a Negative into a Positive

"Can't" is a negative word that frequently turns up in the everyday language of ortho team members. What do you mean you can't? Sure, you can. After all, you want the ortho practice to be perceived as a patient-friendly office. If you cannot do something, you are implying that a particular request or service is not important.

The solution is to tell patients what you can do. Never use the word can't in a sentence. Always talk about what you can do for the patient/parent. Avoid saying, "We can't see you in the afternoon." You might say, "We can see you in the morning."

Can't is an extremely dangerous word that immediately impacts the communication between two people and causes many persons to become unhappy. The first reaction from patients/parents who hear the word can't is that you are simply unwilling to cooperate. They believe you can if you really want to and that you are just being obstinate and difficult.

While ortho practices have to set policies that allow the practice to function efficiently, this should be invisible to patients/parents. You want to be certain that patients/parents perceive you and your team in the most positive manner and the staff's ability to communicate is key to that perception.

## The Power of Yes

"Yes" is perhaps the most beautiful word in the English language. Think about it. Yes means that I am getting what I want. Yes means I am healthy, happy, and prosperous. Yes means whoever I am talking to is going to do his or her best to make my life easier, better or more convenient (or, if I'm extremely lucky, all three).

Patients/parents love to hear the word Yes. They love cooperation and convenience. Remember that patients and

parents really don't want to have to spend their money on orthodontics. Providing them with the most positive experience possible will go a long way to ensuring patient satisfaction and practice success.

Patients who hear Yes frequently begin to feel extremely positive about the practice and perceive that they

are getting the very best care. Therefore, find ways to answer questions with Yes. For example:

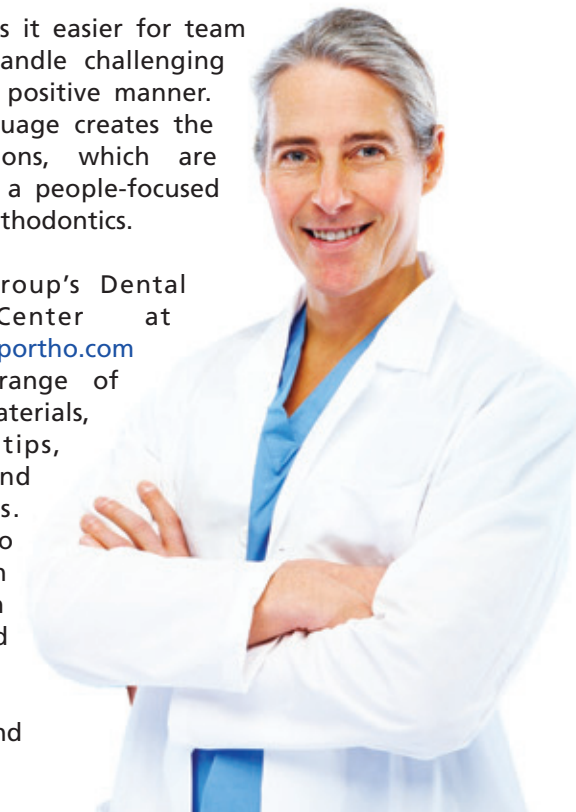
- Yes, we can see you on Tuesday.*
- Yes, we will find an appointment for you.*
- Yes, you can have different color bands.*

Say Yes whenever you can. Making the patient experience as positive as you can leads to happier patients/parents, more word-of-mouth referrals and greater production.

## Conclusion

Scripting makes it easier for team members to handle challenging situations in a positive manner. The right language creates the right perceptions, which are crucial in such a people-focused profession as orthodontics.

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- Continually increasing profit
- Continually increasing referrals
- A low stress practice environment
- High levels of professional satisfaction
- Reaching financial independence sooner

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