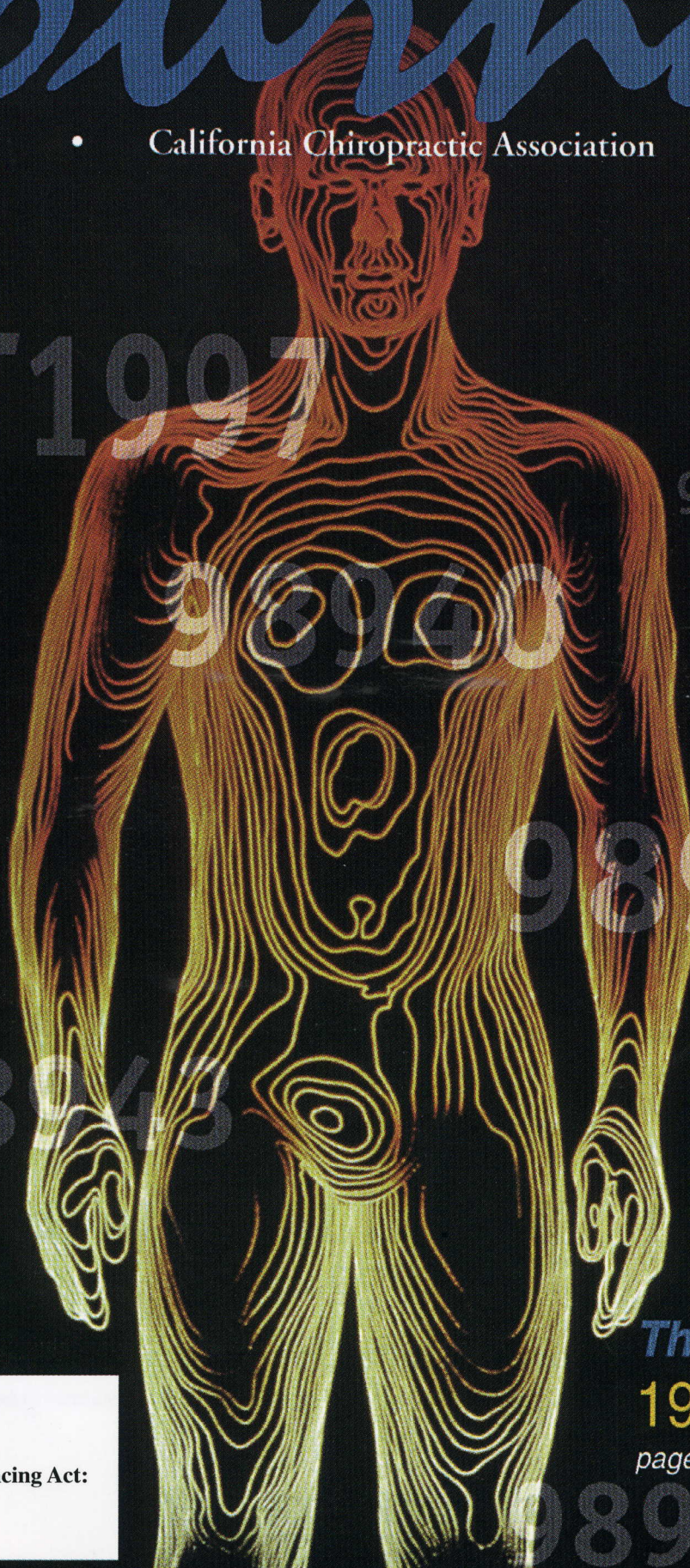


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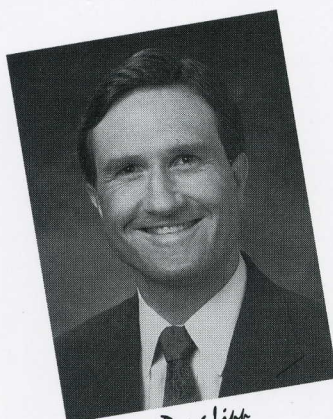
# The Customer Service Balancing Act

## *Art or Science?*

I am convinced that many service providers are unaware of the basic elements of how to be courteous, friendly or even helpful. As you are reminded daily, the healthcare field is one of the most challenging from a customer service standpoint. Your customers are your patients; they are most likely in pain and need help quickly and efficiently. There is a huge difference between a customer who is upset because a product does not work and the patient who is suffering from excruciating pain and doesn't know how or if the insurance will cover their treatment. Your practice needs a staff which can provide a balanced approach to patient care; a good "bedside manner," as well as technical competence.

### **Disneyland: A Look Backstage**

What is the secret of Disney success? One of the secrets is consistency. The message spoken is the same one lived by every employee. Too many companies talk about the importance of "our human resources" without supporting them. At Disneyland, we constantly reminded all employees that every function was important. Any position could make or break the experience of the customer. If maintenance did a poor job, then rides could suffer breakdowns. Equally damaging could be the on-stage employee who, tired at the end of a long day, barks at a customer to "hurry it up when leaving the parking lot." To back this up,



*Doug Lipp  
President, G. Douglas Lipp &  
Associates*

all new employees had a thorough orientation to the company and their job before ever going out on-stage. No one ever was sent out to the front lines of their respective specialties without being totally prepared. No excuses allowed; every employee passed through the doors of the Disneyland University before doing anything else. Employees were told they were the organization's most important asset, and Disney backed it up by investing in them. Consistent message, consistent action.

### **Excuses, Excuses**

The sad truth in many companies is that there are a lot of convenient excuses for not preparing employees for their jobs. "There isn't time for training, too much work," "to remain competitive, we must downsize, no time to think about that." Regardless of the scenario, employees today are handling much more responsibility than ever before and are

overloaded. You cannot afford to cut back on employee preparation and training.

Each of you have customers. Some of you may interact more directly with patients, by giving advice or providing treatment. Others of you might be in support positions and have limited interaction with patients who visit or call in. Regardless, each is vitally important to the on-going success of your practice. I invite you to get together with the others in your office and conduct a quick check of the state of your customer service.

### **The Balancing Act:**

The ability to provide outstanding customer service is as much an art as it is a science. The "art" of customer service appeals to the emotional needs and ego of the customer. The "scientific" side is more task oriented and takes care of their informational or procedural needs. Both are important, and we need to have knowledge and skills in both areas in order to be effective with customers. A balanced approach takes care of both the informational and emotional needs of the customer. For example, a receptionist who knows everything there is to know about the products and services of the office but cannot smile or look people in the eye can be perceived as uncaring and mechanical. On the other hand, the receptionist who is courteous and friendly, yet cannot answer clients' questions will be seen as incompetent.



## Art vs. Science

The "scientific" or task-oriented side includes knowledge of these fundamentals:

*\* Product Knowledge:* Is the employee familiar with the products the company offers? For example: A) Does the staff of the hotel front desk know which rooms are the quietest? or, B) Is the wait staff of the restaurant familiar with the options of how a meal can be cooked and aware of available substitutions for that meal?

*\* Job/Company Knowledge:* Is the employee familiar with the standard operating procedures of the office or store? For example: A) Does the sales person know the return policy and the appropriate response if the customer doesn't have a receipt? or, B) Do employees have a clear understanding of how much management will support them in providing dissatisfied customers with credits, discounts or refunds?

The "artistic" or emotional side of customer service includes abilities in these critical areas:

*\* Active/Empathetic Listening:* Does the employee really listen to the customer and try to put himself/herself in the customer's shoes? For example, when reacting to an upset, confused, or frustrated customer, when was the last time you heard a service provider respond with something similar to the following: A) "I can see that you are really upset and I would like to help you" or, B) "It sounds like a mistake was made on your order, can I get more information so I can help you?"

*\* Ability to Apologize:* In American culture, when we say, "I'm sorry or I apologize", it generally means we are admitting our guilt or are personally at fault. As a result, these words rarely pass

the lips of most service providers. This is unfortunate, for the power of the apology cannot be overemphasized when it comes to customer service, regardless of who causes the problem. A sincere apology has magical powers to help diffuse tense situations and help calm down the customer. Phrases such as: "I am sorry you had



to wait so long, how can I help you?"

or, "I apologize for the confusion, let me help" are extremely effective. The attitude of "don't fight, just make it right" is one we can all use with our customers.

*\* Since* The sum total of the words we use, the tone of our voice and our body language equals sincerity or lack of

sincerity. Sincerity means our words, tone of voice and body language are all sending the same, positive message. A sincere approach to a customer separates outstanding service providers from the rest. We have all experienced the "robot worker". This is the type who is looking down while working on something, talking on the telephone or talking with another employee. Without looking up, this type may give a half-hearted greeting or say nothing, then merely complete the transaction

...No greeting, no eye contact, no smile, no "thank you's"

...no sincerity. Given the choice, many of us would avoid that establishment in the future even if the product itself is good.

## The Next Step Is Yours!

In reviewing these examples, have you identified your own customer service approach? Have you identified the approach of your staff or fellow team members? Are you or the employees you work with more comfortable with the task issues or the emotional issues or, is your approach a balance of both?

Conduct this simple survey for the next 48 hours to get a better feel for the information/emotion balance:

*First:* Listen carefully to the responses you or other customers receive from a variety of service providers. In the supermarket, hardware store, bank, restaurant, hotel or other establishment categorize the types of responses you receive as either "informational" (science) or "emotional" (art), based upon the definition given earlier. It is common to hear more

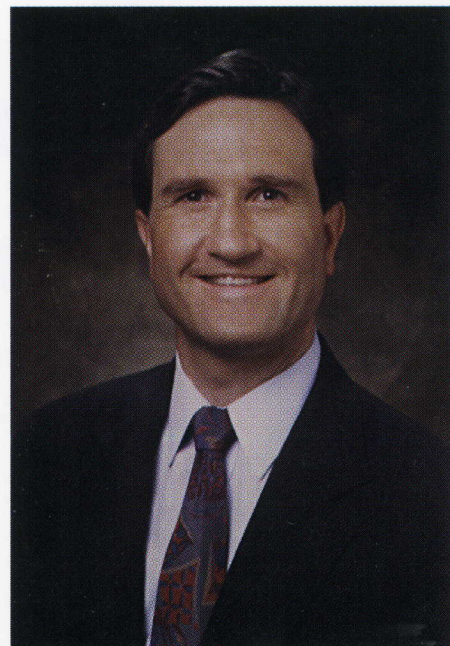


information-related than emotion-related responses. However, the real test is whether the responses are appropriate for the situation. Does the service provider become defensive and start reciting policy and procedure (task) when a customer is concerned or voices frustration? Or, is the service provider only able to apologize (emotion) but take no action?

*Second:* Once you are used to listening with both your "emotion ear" and your "information ear", apply the same approach at your office. Are you and your fellow employees providing your customers a good balance of information and emotion related responses? If you were your own customer, would you be satisfied with the types of responses you are hearing? The information you gather during this second step can be a useful assessment tool when determining the state customer service in your organization.

There is no room for inconsistent or poor service in the competitive world in which we now live. Many companies sell similar products for similar prices. Hence, the only "edge" available for most of us is the quality of customer service we offer. So, whether we provide service locally or globally, via telephone or in person, all of us need to take a critical look at the service we provide and continually ask the question: "How can we provide or improve exceptional customer service and maintain a balance?"

*Doug Lipp is President of  
G. Douglas Lipp & Associates,  
3927 Edgevale Court,  
Fair Oaks, CA 95628 USA  
Tel. (916) 962-1231.  
Fax (916) 962-0424.  
E-Mail: [doug@doughlipp.com](mailto:doug@doughlipp.com)  
web: [www: doughlipp.com](http://www.doughlipp.com)*



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## Testimonials

*"Doug has a unique ability to captivate an audience with his delivery and humor while also communicating pertinent and relevant information"*

**Andrea Heckenlively, La Salle Advisors**

*"The approaches you shared will undoubtedly help our business communicate more effectively around the globe, ensuring the best service to customers worldwide"*

**John Drews, IBM**

*"Your program has truly broadened our employees professional understanding and expertise in the field of service and exceeding customer satisfaction."*

**Susan Merfeld, The Pebble Beach Co.**

*"His presentation was relevant to how we conduct day-to-day business and in an informative and entertaining package, motivated the attendees to excel."*

**Michael Cox, United States Air Force**

*"Evaluations from the program were 100% unanimous that you were wonderful. The adjectives ranged from great, sensational, superb and motivational to list just a few. We would like to commend you on your pre-event research and the skillful way you meshed ow company culture, vocabulary and methods into your own presentation"*

**Andrew Hauser and Evelyn Woodward, Remedy Temp.**

*"The examples and stories you shared were funny, yet carried a strong message"*

**Sharon Locke, Wells Fargo**