

What Prosthodontists Can Learn from Starbucks' 6 Squares

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Perhaps no corporation has perfected "Systems Thinking" more than Starbucks. By approaching the coffee business in terms of "Systems," Starbucks has been able to standardize the Starbucks culture and provide a unique experience for consumers while remaining completely consistent. Whether I'm in Kansas or Iowa, I can feel confident that the quality of my experience at Starbucks will be the same.

If we take a closer look at the six small squares printed on the side of a Starbucks coffee cup, we can discover the secrets of "Systems Thinking" and how it can create the emotional attachment we want our patients to feel.



Systems Thinking Helps You Focus on What's Really Important

Recently, I stood in line at the Starbucks across from the Sprint World Headquarters in Overland Park, Kansas. It was rush hour first thing in the morning and it was a madhouse. I hung out for the next hour and marveled at the details of a process I usually pay very little attention to.

What I observed were four teenage kids serving the needs of a few hundred people for that hour. Every single customer that left with their "morning comfort" seemed to be more than satisfied with their experience of purchasing the luxury version of coffee, many of whom had incredible requests. My favorite was a woman who ordered a "decaf, grande, nonfat, two pump vanilla, two pump almond, three sweet and low, no foam, extra hot latte." The order was so complicated that I had to ask the young woman behind the counter to repeat it to me while I wrote it down on a napkin.

What's even better is that the young woman who made the drinks during that entire time

almost never said any words at all to the other teenagers who were taking the orders. Her focus was entirely on talking with the customers. While scribbling in each customer's six boxes with incredible accuracy, the order takers simply smiled and engaged with each happy customer.

How could the people who take the sophisticated orders of hundreds of people never talk to the person who was procuring the end commodity? They made it look so easy. Maybe Starbucks has just figured out how to recruit the most emotionally intelligent, technically proficient teenage coffee drink makers in the world. Maybe they have a secret that the dental industry doesn't have. I believe they do have a secret... it's designing unique systems that specifically meet the needs of their customers.

One brilliant system that Starbucks has created is their six squares located on the side of every take out cup of coffee they serve. This system is the cornerstone to delivering and customizing each customer request with incredible accuracy. Each square distinguishes a different variable to coffee making. When a customer orders a cup of "morning comfort," the Starbucks employees use this system to put the customer in control of their



Question: Can you guess what this drink is?
See the bottom of this article for the answer.

own experience and ensure the highest level of quality. And almost every time, they get it right.

These six squares are also designed to help each employee set the other one up for smashing success. It's brilliant if you think about it. It was like observing one of the most well-orchestrated classical business masterpieces of all time. Yet, all four teenagers never focused on the technical aspect of coffee making.

And here's the real value of the six square system... delivering an order of coffee was so SYSTEMS DRIVEN that the employees were able to focus on the most important component of their business... their product, which is not the brew in a coffee cup, but rather THE EMOTIONAL CONNECTION they make with each customer holding a cup.

A Good System Can Be More Addictive Than a Cup of Coffee

Flash back to a few months ago, when I was driving through Iowa with my family. I was really craving my morning mocha. I looked everywhere, but I couldn't find the comforting familiar green logo that my two-year-old daughter recognizes as the

only place to go and get coffee. Finally, out of the corner of my eye I saw this privately owned, nice gourmet coffee shop. I convinced everyone in the car that it was appropriate to stop to meet my wants. I figured I would run in, grab my mocha, and get right back on the road. So I waited in line behind two other customers. To make a long story short, the two owners that were working this coffee shop took FOREVER to serve the needs of the only three customers in the store.

Fifteen minutes later, I emerged from the gourmet coffee shop with my mocha. I could tell by the look on my wife's face that she was not pleased. We proceeded to get back on the highway. Finally, I took a sip of the coveted mocha that I was eagerly craving. It was absolutely terrible! It was so bad that I ended dumping most of it out at our next pit stop. I was really missing the comfort of the brand I love... my green logo, my white cup, my six squares, my Starbucks.

You see, I wasn't just missing my "morning comfort" mocha during this long drive... now I was dealing with an emotional void that could only be filled by the Starbucks experience that I value.

What I was experiencing is a perfect example of Michael Gerber's theory. Michael Gerber's an authority on systems and author of "The E-Myth Revisited" which states that, "The COMMODITY IS THE THING your customer actually walks out with. The PRODUCT IS WHAT YOUR CUSTOMER FEELS as he/she walks out of your business. The truth is, nobody is interested in the commodity—CUSTOMERS BUY FEELINGS. How your business anticipates the feelings of your customers and satisfies them is YOUR PRODUCT."

Starbucks has done such a great job anticipating my feelings and satisfying them that I actually feel cheated if I purchase a cup of coffee from some place other than Starbucks. In fact, I'll go out of my way, and pay more to purchase the experience that is the Starbucks "product."

As prosthodontists, are we focusing on our real product? Like Starbucks, our most valuable product is the system that helps us meet the emotional needs of our patients on a consistent basis. We're not just selling exceptional crowns, perfect veneers, or brilliantly white teeth. What our patients value is the emotional experience we provide. They value the feeling they have when they're sitting in your waiting room or when they give your prosthodontic practice a call to make an

appointment. Your systems will either help you build a positive and satisfying experience or leave patients emotionally frustrated and disappointed.

Great Prosthodontic Practices (Just Like Starbucks) Understand One Thing

As simple as they are, Starbucks' six squares create the consistency in quality that I seek comfort in when I reach into my pocket to pay five times more than a normal cup of coffee. Even though I hardly know they exist, these six simple squares allow me to relax and feel reassured that I'm getting exactly what I'm craving.

These six simple squares allow me to engage in a polite, upbeat, meaningful conversation with an energetic person in a green smock. The experience the six simple squares provide is vastly different from the emotional withdrawal I experienced when I didn't get what I truly wanted from a stressed out task-focused entrepreneur, giving me a fake smile, seemingly winging it, behind the counter in a gourmet coffee shop.

Like Starbucks, uniquely designed systems in your prosthodontic practice can consistently antic-

ipate and deliver on the emotional needs of your patients.

The next time a potential patient calls your practice, make sure that your team is working with a set of uniquely designed systems that give them the freedom to engage their talents where they're most needed. . . making emotional connections.

A very large window manufacturer was recently profiled in a Tacoma, Washington newspaper. His business had grown beyond his wildest dreams. They asked him what the key to his success was. He said, "Our business exploded when we got out of the WINDOW business and back into the PEOPLE business."

Create systems with your team that allow you to get your practice out of the DENTAL BUSINESS and back into what your patients desire the most. THE PEOPLE BUSINESS!!!

Coming soon to a Starbucks near you,

Kirk

Coffee Drink Answer: Venti, with Whip, Non-Fat, Mocha

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