



Ray of Light

The Power of Reciprocity

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My wife and I just returned from an extended RV tour of the Southeast, escaping the latter part of the Maine winter, and visiting people and places in a warmer climate. One of the things we most enjoy in this kind of travel is not having a set itinerary or schedule. Not knowing where we will be day-to-day, means we may have to find places to spend the night on short notice, which is becoming increasingly difficult due to the explosion in the number of Americans taking to the road in RVs.

A relatively new service called Harvest Hosts is addressing this need. It is a membership organization that puts RV travelers together with small family businesses such as wineries, farms or other family-owned businesses that are able to offer free overnight parking for RVs. RV owners pay only a small annual membership fee to Harvest Hosts, and get unlimited stays at the literally thousands of Harvest Hosts locations nationwide. The host business pays nothing to join, and receives visitors referred through the reservation website.



In three years as members, we've stayed at wineries, breweries, working farms, an auto museum, an RV museum, a llama farm, a gourd farm, a mushroom farm, a blueberry farm, an apple orchard, and a few places that defy description...for free. We find these varied experiences and the hospitality of the hosts to be far superior to a crowded and increasingly expensive campground; plus they add a degree of adventure to our travel.

So why would thousands of small family businesses want to have strangers showing up on their property to spend a night in their RV...for free!? I think it has a lot to do with the principle of reciprocity, one of the six 'weapons of influence' identified by Cialdini. At each host's business there are products that visitors can purchase. Members are encouraged to make a purchase but it is optional, and rarely have we felt pressured to buy. At the same time, we've never failed to buy something. The sales made by the business to their visitors are what makes the system work for the host business. Clearly, it is working well: Harvest Hosts is growing fast.

It's easy to see why Harvest Hosts is thriving. They have put a simple but unique system together to fill a growing need. Their system doesn't obligate the host or the RV owner. It is like being a guest for an overnight stay. Yet, reciprocity makes the visitor receiving a free parking spot *feel* grateful – and, yes, maybe a little bit obligated - to give back, in the form of a purchase. The simple genius of this system is that it makes the RV owner, the host, and Harvest Hosts itself all winners by applying the power of reciprocity.



By now you might see the parallels to DenVantage. As a DenVantage provider, you are the host. The offer you make to your patient is an opportunity to create cost savings for your practice which you share with them in the form of reduced fees. A patient who joins DenVantage gets authentic savings, not an arbitrary discount. It is a members-only benefit, like insider privileges (or a free parking space). Patients must understand that the reduced fees are *earned* and they become eligible by signing the agreement and keeping the commitments. While people are suspicious of arbitrary something-for-nothing discounts and generally don't value them, they are very

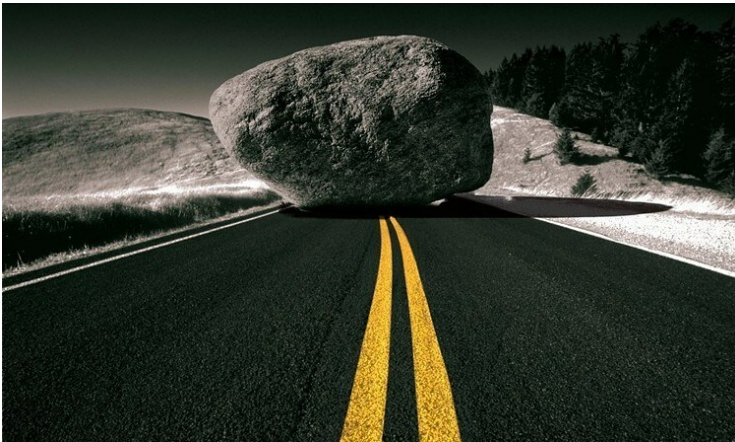
appreciative of an opportunity to actively participate in lowering their costs. They understand that the arrangement is for the mutual benefit of both them and the practice: it's reciprocal.

What happens in practices that truly understand and fully implement this powerful principle, is transformative. Statistical analysis shows us that member patients accept, on average, double and triple the amount of treatment, compared to both insured and uninsured non-member patients. But the effects of reciprocity built in to DenVantage go way beyond just exchanging lowered fees for better case acceptance and a higher level of compliance. In addition to those, we see increased patient referrals, increased loyalty and generally happier patients. In short, it produces more ideal patients. In turn, having more compliant, ideal, loyal patients in the practice creates improved team morale and a better culture in the practice, and the business, the practice, increases in value as a result.

Since all those effects are confirmed by experience in a variety of dental practices in a variety of locations, it's hard to understand why some DenVantage offices are still not making full use of this; why they don't continually build their membership numbers. I've got to think it's because they haven't experienced the power of reciprocity inherent in a fully implemented DenVantage plan, that creates those effects. With all the potential good that can come from having a robust DenVantage plan, if there were something

holding your practice back from getting it, it would be tragic, wouldn't it?

A simple way to know if your practice has such a blockage is this: what percentage of uninsured patients in your patient population are not DenVantage members? DenVantage is such a clear "no-brainer" for any patient without insurance that refusing membership is so rare that the percentage will be tiny, unless there is a blockage.



If you sense a blockage to growing your membership, start looking at your own attitude and your team's. Do you see DenVantage membership as *the* best means to connect your patients to your practice? Do you see it as a great deal for you, for the patient and for the practice? Do you think of getting a patient to join as selling; or as offering to do a great favor for the patient (employing reciprocity)? Are you reminding every non-member patient at the

time of presenting treatment, quoting fees, or making payments that they can save money by being a member and showing them the exact amount they will save? Have you set your fees along with your DenVantage benefits so that you are *most* profitable when you are working on DenVantage members because they pay in advance, keep their appointments and don't eat up admin time with insurance? Does everyone on your team understand the power of reciprocity and the role of DenVantage in putting that power to work in your practice?

We at DenVantage are strong advocates for independent dental practice, and we want each of our provider practices to enjoy practice without the crushing burden of insurance dependence. Growing your membership plan by employing reciprocity will move your practice steadily toward a greater degree of freedom!