Can We Talk?

**QUESTION:** This economy has made it difficult to convince patients to follow through with treatment. Do you have any helpful hints about how to communicate with and motivate patients?

**ANSWER:** Communication and motivation techniques have been the subject of many articles, books, and courses—for good reason! It's sometimes difficult to promote a healthy message and help patients take action, even when they know that action is good for them. One important aspect of communication is a concept called psychographic profiling. This approach identifies a person's temperament or personality type and provides communication techniques based on each type's "hot buttons." While numerous methods exist, one widely used model determines where an individual fits in relation to four distinct profiles: dominant, interactive, steadfast, or conscientious. Most people are a combination of these four types but typically one characteristic predominates. This column focuses on dominant and interactive personality types.

**Dominant:** These individuals tend to be highly successful in their careers. They are leaders, business-like, and "take charge" people. Often impatient, they place a high value on time. They also appreciate expertise and skill above "warm and fuzzy." Dominant individuals can be rather outspoken and freely voice their opinions.

**Communication and motivation tips:** Be on time! Explain treatment options clearly, logically, and concisely. Stick to business and understand that dominant personalities do not want to be your friend. On the other hand, know that once they have confidence in your skills they will be loyal patients. In fact, they are good referrers to your practice and will recommend close friends and family members. Focus on the long-term benefits of treatment, and give them options from which to choose. Don't waste time on idle conversation or overly detailed explanations. When making treatment recommendations, be confident, competent, and knowledgeable.

**Interactive:** These patients are very sociable. They tend to be energetic, positive, and they communicate well. Often interactive types are in professions such as sales and entertainment. They place a high value on being likeable; appearance and approval are important to them. Unlike dominant types, they don't value achievement yet "image is everything."
Communication and motivation tips: Be personable and friendly. Since interactive types value emotion over logic, appeal to their feelings. When presenting information about treatment, keep explanations simple, casual, and informal—they don't like lots of confusing details. Complimenting them on their looks and relating appearance to oral health are effective.

From these two examples, you can see how certain communication styles can appeal to (or turn off) patients based on their personality types. It may be difficult to determine personality types with new patients, but it's fairly simple with patients of record. Once you've treated a patient a few times, you will likely see a predominant trait emerge. While these communication tips won't guarantee that your patients will respond with a resounding "yes" to your treatment recommendations, they can help you relate more effectively. And that is definitely a step in the right direction.

The September Tips on Technique column will focus on the steadfast and conscientious personality types.