

# GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK: IT CAN BE A TRICKY BUSINESS



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*author of several books including Standard Operating Procedures for All Dentists. Ms. Freeman holds Bachelor of Arts and Masters Degrees from Antioch University in Organizational Management and Psychology.*

Giving and receiving feedback can be tricky business. Husbands have known that for years. "Honey, do I look fat in this dress?" What self-preserving male would volunteer a completely truthful, direct, unedited answer to that question? Not many. The truth is, we all tell "forgivable fibs" at one time or another to maintain harmony, make our lives easier, and to avoid hurting someone's feelings.

However, when we do not accept truthful feedback, it can dramatically impact our ability to meet our customers' expectations. In dentistry, we are concerned about standards of care, service, and performance to a third party--our patient! This tendency to "not rock the boat" can unfairly impact the efficiency and quality of care they receive and that is not acceptable!

*Space Maintainers cares about you, your patient, and your success in meeting their expectations.*

Space Maintainers Laboratory knows this and because they do, they want to hear from you--often! They want to know what they've done right (so they can keep doing it), and what they've

*Space Maintainers has created a comprehensive, dynamic, easy-to-use feedback system so they can receive ongoing crucial feedback from you.*

done wrong (so they can correct it). They know very well that they play a key role in you being able to do that consistently.

To help this process, they have created a comprehensive, dynamic, easy-to-use feedback system whereby they can receive ongoing, crucial feedback from YOU--their client, so they can take corrective action and quickly respond to your concerns.

*Why do they think this feedback is so important?*

Why do they think this feedback is so important? Let me tell you a story I shared with them when we first

started working together. It's a story about missed expectations that rings true in most dental offices and between many dentists and their lab partners.

For 21 years, the non-coffee-drinking wife arose early to brew fresh coffee for her sleeping husband. Being a night person, she hated getting up before dawn, but she enjoyed pleasing him. Truth be known, her husband hardly noticed the coffee ritual. What he did notice was that she never sorted and folded his clean socks! He hated rummaging through the laundry basket every morning searching for a matching pair.

Silly? Yes. She could have folded his socks while watching a late movie, skipped the pre-dawn coffee ritual, and both of them would have been much happier. A sign of bigger communication problems? Absolutely. During the divorce proceedings they laughed about the socks and coffee, but not about other missed expectations that led to their split up.

**FEEDBACK TO SPACE MAINTAINERS LABORATORY**

Client Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Office: \_\_\_\_\_ Client Contact: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

WHAT WAS RIGHT	WHAT WAS WRONG	CONSEQUENCES
Right color	Wrong color	Convenient
Right shape	Wrong shape	Unpleasant
Right material	Wrong material	Unpleasant
Right size	Wrong size	Unpleasant
Right texture	Wrong texture	Unpleasant
Right finish	Wrong finish	Unpleasant
Right price	Wrong price	Unpleasant
Right delivery	Wrong delivery	Unpleasant
Right customer service	Wrong customer service	Unpleasant
Right communication	Wrong communication	Unpleasant
Right attention to detail	Wrong attention to detail	Unpleasant
Right expertise	Wrong expertise	Unpleasant
Right reputation	Wrong reputation	Unpleasant
Right location	Wrong location	Unpleasant
Right hours	Wrong hours	Unpleasant
Right staff	Wrong staff	Unpleasant
Right equipment	Wrong equipment	Unpleasant
Right facilities	Wrong facilities	Unpleasant
Right products	Wrong products	Unpleasant
Right services	Wrong services	Unpleasant
Right overall	Wrong overall	Unpleasant

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

SPECIFICS: \_\_\_\_\_

ACTION REQUESTED: \_\_\_\_\_

SPACE MAINTAINERS' RESPONSE: \_\_\_\_\_

Are we committed to your concerns? \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for taking the time to share your feedback with us. We appreciate your input and will use it to improve our service to you.

SPACE MAINTAINERS LABORATORY

*We set ourselves and others up for failure when we don't clearly communicate our expectations and provide proper feedback for corrective action.*

The point is, we set ourselves and others up for failure when we don't clearly communicate our expectations and provide proper feedback for corrective action. In a marriage, in a dental office, and certainly between clinicians and their lab partner, unspoken or assumed expectations too often become missed expectations. It's impossible to unerringly read others' minds. Chaos, conflict, and inefficiency result when unstated expectations differ. In dentistry that means increased stress, less profit, higher staff turnover, and compromised patient care. Too high a price for leaving things to chance.

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Space Maintainers not only wants to know if you want "Socks or Coffee", if you decide on coffee, they want to know if you want latte, espresso, regular, decaffeinated, or chocolate milk instead! Was it hot enough and would you like another cup? Giving and receiving feedback may be tricky business and down right dangerous

for tactless husbands--but it's a skill that Space Maintainers is committed to mastering when it comes to communicating with you, their client!

The process begins with input from you. The more specific the information you can provide and alternative suggestions you can make, the more effective their corrective action will be and the more satisfying response they can make to you.

*Space Maintainers Laboratory is determined to make your life easier, as well as their own, by improving this two-way communication.*

They promise to accept whatever feedback you present without becoming defensive, making excuses, or rationalizing it away. They promise to respond to you promptly in whatever form you request: fax, mail, e-mail, or phone call. They are determined to make your life easier, as well as their own, by improving this two-way communication.

Let me share with you several feedback protocols already in place at Space Maintainers that will continue. Currently you receive a "report card" with every case for your immediate response to a specific item. You are also encouraged to call Space Maintainers' toll-free number anytime to ask questions, make comments, or make requests. All

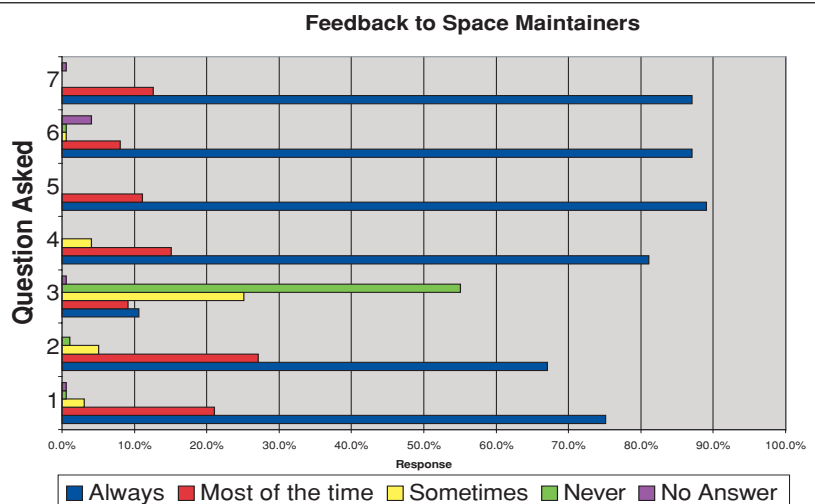
comments, concerns, complaints and requests are logged, categorized, analyzed, and acted upon by Space Maintainers' staff in weekly team meetings.

To evaluate and enhance their ongoing efforts to satisfy your needs, they hired my company, Dental Communication Unlimited, to conduct a random phone survey of their clients in January of this year to judge your satisfaction in key areas. (A special thanks to those of you who took the time to talk to us!) Their intent in doing the phone survey was to discover areas in which they needed to improve (according to you) so they could proactively update their systems, retrain staff, and do whatever else it took to improve your rating of them.

For instance, one of the comments you made to us when we called was that sometimes Space Maintainers takes too long to answer the phone and successfully connect you to the person you need to talk to. In response to that, they have dramatically updated their phone system and hired another telephone operator. There were other concerns about how the cases were being mailed or shipped to you. After extensive research, they are encouraging all of their customers to use priority mail because they have discovered it to be the most consistent and reliable method of getting your cases to you

**FEEDBACK SOUGHT BY SPACE MAINTAINERS LABORATORY**

1. Are your special requests followed by SML?
2. Do you receive your cases by the due date?
3. Do you use SML appliances and services to enhance productivity?
4. Are you satisfied with the quality of the appliances?
5. Do you have confidence in SML's clinical expertise?
6. When contacting SML by phone, are your calls handled courteously and promptly?
7. Is SML responsive to your needs?



# FEEDBACK TO SPACE MAINTAINERS LABORATORY

Doctor (Full Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone No. \_\_\_\_\_

Case No./Patient Name \_\_\_\_\_

Fax No. \_\_\_\_\_

Office Contact \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Please respond via:  Fax  Phone  E-Mail  Mail

WHAT WAS RIGHT	✓	WHAT WAS WRONG	✓	CONSEQUENCES	✓
right design		wrong design		rescheduled patient	
right color		wrong color		lost chair time	
case arrived on time		case arrived late		longer chair time	
good construction		poor construction		patient unhappy	
easy chairside delivery		adjustment needed at chair		patient angry	
special instructions followed		special instructions ignored		doctor unhappy	
billed correctly		statement error		doctor angry	
feel like a partner with the lab		adversarial relationship		had to start case over	
great clinical support		poor clinical support		too many phone calls	
kept me informed of delays		status of case unknown		waste of time	
cheerfully answered the phone		rude greeting		additional expenses	
responsive to my needs		had to argue for what I wanted		embarrassed	
promptly returned my call		delayed calling me back		lost patient	
took care of my needs		left me hanging		had to refund fee	
offered solutions		"Oh well" attitude		stressed	
user-friendly lab slips		confusing lab slips		ran behind schedule	
cutting-edge information		Out-of-date clinically		waste of staff time	
( ) was especially nice		( ) was quite rude		harried and hassled	

## COMMENTS

<b>SPECIFICS</b>	
<b>ACTION REQUESTED</b>	
<b>SPACE MAINTAINERS' RESPONSE</b>	<b>We are committed to respond to your concerns!</b>

**FAX TO: (818) 407-5445**  
**TOLL FREE: 800-423-3270**  
**P.O. Box 4184,**  
**Van Nuys, CA 91409**  
**www.smldent.com**

**Instructions for using this form:** Please utilize this form often, even on a case-by-case basis. Be as specific as possible and fax, phone, mail, or e-mail to the numbers/addresses listed at the left.

on time. In response, that your special instructions were not always followed, they are adding another designer to their team so that each case can receive even more individualized attention. This action will also improve the promptness of phone calls to you when further clinical clarification is needed from you.

The phone survey also disclosed to Space Maintainers that the majority of you are unaware of the comprehensive library they have that is available to you for the asking. Therein lies a wealth of information that will help you expand the current services you provide your patients to increase the quality of care they receive and secondarily add to your practice profits! Hence, you will see more promotion of that service in the practice bulletins you receive.

Space Maintainers wants to increase their chance of pleasing you by being clear with what they need from you to meet your prescriptions. They are committed to continual improvement of their service handbook, Practice Bulletins, and by personally calling you when they need additional information to process your case. If they are unable to meet a due date or special request, their standard operating procedure dictates that they call to inform you and to do whatever it takes to accommodate you.

They also spent the last four months of 1999 editing, updating, and enhancing their Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for everything they do in the lab--from answering the phone to pouring up models, to shipping a case. They've left no stone unturned.

*When something is not right, the most constructive action one can take is to inform the necessary person of the shortcoming.*

Now they want to hear from you again. How are they doing? That's why the "feedback" cycle becomes so critical. When something is not right, the most constructive action one can take is to inform the necessary person of the shortcoming. How many patients do you lose every year without knowing why they left? It's easier for them to be angry and go elsewhere than to let you know how they were displeased. They may even tell you one of those "forgivable fibs" to avoid what they see as a confrontation. If, however, we can avoid that fear of confrontation by creating a collaborative feedback system, everyone wins.

And that's been my assigned task--to create a quick, dynamic, easy-to-use feedback form that is straightforward, objective, always available to you, that you will want to use. You are promised a response via phone, e-mail, fax, or mail--whatever way you choose. (See insert)

The form is almost self-explanatory. You simply review each column and check each word or phrase that applies to a particular case of incident. There is also a space for free comments regarding specifics, another for suggestions and requests for making things right, and a third area for Space Maintainers to let you know what corrective action has been taken. Anonymous forms will be valued and considered; however, the hope is that you will find this system non-threatening and a means to improve communication and your relationship with the lab.

You may have noticed that a similar form could be created to obtain feedback from your patients about your service and care! You're right! In the next practice bulletin, I will

give you guidelines to duplicate Space Maintainers' customer service enhancement program for use in your own practice.

*Space Maintainers' goal is not just to meet your expectations, but to surpass them!*

In the mean time! Don't hold back, tell fibs, or keep Space Maintainers in the dark about their service to you. It's easier than answering those sticky questions we get from spouses, friends, and family! All you are risking here is getting your next case done better! Space Maintainers' goal is not just to meet your expectations, but to surpass them! I'll leave you with the closing thought I heard voiced countless times in my work with them: "We care about our clients, and we want them to know it."

The Practice Building Bulletin is a special service of Space Maintainers Laboratory produced solely for the private use of our clients. It is designed to help expand and enhance your ability to provide comprehensive patient care. As an active client, you will continue to receive all future editions at no charge. Subscriptions are available for \$98.50 for 10 bulletins and includes a free three-ring binder with all back issues to date. Information included is the opinion of the author and may not be reproduced in any form without written consent.

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