



MARKETING / OFFICE / STAFF

## Creating Good Business Buzz

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What do patients really think about working with you? Rarely do you hear the whole truth. Those who improve may be candid in their gratitude. However, if a patient doesn't like something about your work, staff or clinic, he or she will be less enthusiastic and more likely to leave your practice without your knowing why.

### What Patients Are Saying About You

Wouldn't it be helpful to know about mistakes you or your staff have made, things that are done or said that lower your stature in the patients' eyes or your success with their health? Not every patient leaves because of an experience with you, but if you could eliminate mistakes, wouldn't your practice be better off?

We all hope to build positive reputations in our communities. As our profession grows and more patients "try out" our work — privately held opinions increase. Some even become public, and then the buzz around acupuncture gets louder. So, don't we want that buzz to be good buzz?

### Reasons They Leave

My patients who don't complete treatment with other acupuncturists tell me why, whether I ask or not. Their myriad complaints inspired me to ask colleagues, who have also been in practice for several decades, what negative feedback they have heard about other acupuncturists.



Hopefully this *joint list* will inspire you to improve the buzz coming out of your office.

Insufficient results. I have found this happens for two primary reasons. *First*, rather than having done a thorough TCM diagnosis, many practitioners use a symptomatic model.

I have treated, for example, many adults with asthma. If the asthma was part of their childhoods as well as adulthoods, Kidney and Jing issues, are causes worthy of consideration. Without having done an authentic TCM diagnostic work up, many acupuncturists treat asthma as a lung condition. This fails the patient and under utilizes the genius of Chinese medicine.

*Second*, the treatments may have been working but patient expectations weren't met. You must set expectations (at the outset of care) regarding the speed at which results will manifest.

At the initial evaluation I give new patients the option to consider coming for six treatments before determining if there is progress from the work, or to find a practitioner who will handle things differently. I used to offer the their money back after six sessions if there were no results.

I never ended up paying anybody because even a deep stagnation problem in an 80-year-old will begin moving in six weeks' time.

When a patient is uninformed and believes results should have happened quicker they leave believing acupuncture doesn't work or that you aren't very good at it.

Unrealistic expectations. Patients come believing they are going to have a restful experience and aren't satisfied unless they do. This problem can be resolved with good communication.

For some patients, especially those who do not have endorphin responses with needling, treatments aren't necessarily blissful. If they know this in advance they can prepare for whatever the experience turns out to be.

Attitude. The staff was rude, unprofessional, judgmental or belittling. It only takes one negative comment to taint a patient's experience and the comment doesn't have to be about them.

If, while sitting in the waiting room unnoticed, they overhear an irritable staff member, say something bad about anyone, the reputation of the office goes down and the patient feels less safe.

Professionalism. The acupuncturist dressed too informally or presented a manor that was not professional. This can mean improper professional boundaries — acting like they wanted to be "friends" or worse, being flirtatious. On the flip side ... you don't want to be rigidly formal, technical and not warm or personable.

Insurance woes. Insurance doesn't cover the work. You can research becoming a preferred provider for insurance companies that cover people and companies in your community.

Appearance. The practitioner doesn't look healthy and the patient doesn't believe an unhealthy person knows how to heal them.

Confidentiality. The patient saw another patient's file out and worried that their privacy was also going to be compromised.

Privacy. Patients could hear what was going on in other treatment rooms and were concerned for their own privacy.

Be all "ears." Patients didn't feel understood. Your listening skills and compassion weren't sufficient.

No one likes a salesperson. The practitioner was too interested in up-selling products, herbs, supplements, etc., too early in the relationship to be trustworthy.

Homework assignment. The acupuncturist gave homework the patient wasn't comfortable doing. Either too much (quantity) or too difficult, (quality) like major dietary changes, or giving up cigarettes.

Focus on the task-at-hand. The practitioner wanted to treat conditions different from what the patient came in for. For example, a guy with liver disease may only want help with his tennis elbow.

Jargon. The acupuncturist used jargon the patient didn't understand. One of my patients told me that if he wanted to learn TCM language he would go to school. All he wanted was pain relief.

Tardiness. The acupuncturist ran late and then didn't deliver the quality of attention needed to compensate for the patient's frustrating waste of time.

"Phew."The acupuncturist had bad breath, smelled like garlic or had body odor.

Communication. The acupuncturist didn't explain what they were doing and why, or spoke too quickly and rushed through the session. Also, don't be a "Chatty Kathy," gauge the interest the client has in the "small talk" and make appropriate adjustments.

Ambiance. The waiting room wasn't a pleasant place to be. It was unattractive, too small, too full, too cold, etcetera.

To-Do list. The acupuncturist gave too many post-treatment "things to do" without in-depth instruction so the patient forgot why he was doing what.

Oops. The last acupuncturist left a needle in and the patient found it after the session ended.

Thank you goes a long way. There was no follow up phone call to see how the patient responded to the initial treatment. (Make that follow up call. It is important and builds loyalty!)

Practice humility. Practitioners who were egotistical and too busy bragging about how they were going to get the patient well to actually pay attention.

Patients are people too. Patients can sometimes feel that they are viewed as a condition, disease, or challenge, but not as a person.

Leaving them stranded. No one responded when the patient couldn't move during a treatment but needed help.

Common courtesy. The acupuncturist allowed interns into the room without receiving prior permission from the patient.

Be mindful of your actions. Cold hands might equal a warm heart, but they can make a session uncomfortable.

#### Final Points

Lastly, although these need "less" explaining, a reminder is still vital.

- Cost of treatment is too high.
- The face cradle or treatment table is uncomfortable.
- The practitioner forgot to show up.
- The practitioner was overweight or emaciated.
- The office was dirty or dusty.
- It was hard getting an appointment.
- Treatment rooms were too cold/hot.
- The acupuncturist seemed bored or burned out.
- The acupuncturist didn't make eye contact.
- Needling is painful.
- The office is too noisy.
- Parking was difficult.
- Patients felt judged.

These are just *some* of the reasons why patients lose respect, leave, and never return. This is negative "buzz." Can you add something to this list? If so, please email me at [felice@felicedunas.com](mailto:felice@felicedunas.com).

Do you see anything you are guilty of? Well then make changes, lower your desertion rate and become more successful. Create better buzz in your practice and we will all become more successful.

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