



Personal Perspective

Kravitz Orthodontics' Kristi Donnelly calls on personal experience to wear her many hats

BY BRITTAN WEST

An orthodontist wears at least two hats on any given day: clinician and small business owner. And often, staff members wear just as many hats or more.

When Kristi Donnelly joined Virginia-based Kravitz Orthodontics, headed by Neal D. Kravitz, DMD, MS, in January 2013, she was hired as a treatment technician, working in the back of the clinic during all appointments. But within 2 years, she was asked to don a different hat, or rather two, and take her experience working with patients in the chair in back to working with parents and the rest of the clinic staff in the front of the office.

As treatment coordinator and office manager, Donnelly is now responsible for everything from treatment presentation and making braces easy and affordable for patients and parents, to staff and patient scheduling and hiring and payroll.

In her role as treatment coordinator, Donnelly is there at the consult, ensuring that the practice's commitment to ethical, patient-first customer service is firmly conveyed to the patient and/or parent from the get-go. This "customer-first" focus was instilled in Donnelly early in her career, when she worked as an assistant manager at Enterprise Rental Car. The company's management program rested on the notion that "everything is about customer service and good ethics"—a value set that she saw mirrored at Kravitz Orthodontics.

"Being honest and up front with everything," says Donnelly, "is something Dr Kravitz has really strived [for]—to be very ethical, have the best customer service, and just put the patient first."

During the patient consult, Donnelly believes communication and transparency are key with patients and parents. Many patients and parents do question

whether treatment is really necessary. That's where Donnelly steps in to offer a comparison of the benefits of beginning treatment immediately versus waiting.

"We bring back old-fashioned integrity," says Donnelly of the way Kravitz Orthodontics operates. "We are honest with our pre-adolescent patients about whether treatment is really needed. We don't make up stories of doomsday scenarios of families who do not pursue orthodontics."

Donnelly reviews everything from treatment options to how the teeth are prepared for braces and how impressions are taken for expanders. No detail is too small if it will help the patient and parent feel more comfortable.

"Some parents do get nervous about their child [being] in treatment. So I'm there as [someone] to hold their hand through the process," Donnelly explains. "My job is not to 'close the case' per se; but rather to make proceeding with treatment easy and affordable."

And as for that financial discussion with patients and/or parents, Kravitz Orthodontics strives to offer reasonable treatment fees, as well as multiple payment options, including interest-free options, to help ease the financial burden. And when it comes to appointments, the practice offers before- and after-school office hours. As Donnelly puts it, "Nothing is more important than the experience of our patients."

Donnelly brings an important perspective to her interactions with patients and parents. Yes, she knows first hand what happens in the treatment chair; but she also knows what it's like to be a patient and to be the parent of a patient. She understands the treatment process and the fears that both a patient and a parent can experience during it. Sharing her own experiences and having this perspective "creates a little bit of extra security with the families," Donnelly says.

And that unique perspective helps her identify better with patients, parents, and fellow staff in the front of the office in her role as office manager. "I feel I look at things from every standpoint in the office because I've been in the shoes of everybody here," says Donnelly. "I know what it's like to be in the back, dealing with patients and demands of a busy schedule. At the same time, I know what it's like to be up front, and having to deal with the demands of the patients and families."

With multiple offices and a steady stream of new patients, Donnelly's biggest challenge on any given day is just getting everything done in the time allotted. This time crunch has taught Donnelly her biggest career lesson: the importance of delegating. Becoming comfortable with delegating certain facets of her job and teaching staff to do these tasks in a timely and efficient way has been key. Another time-saver is automating where possible. For example, the office uses autopay to manage payments more efficiently.

But when it comes down to it, whatever hat Donnelly is wearing, the cliché is true: communication is everything. Whether dealing with patients, parents, or staff, that is what helps Donnelly do her job successfully. As she puts it, open communication tells people you are "being honest and up front." And in a practice that doesn't believe in the "pressure close," honesty and forthrightness are invaluable.

"Families know we are simply an affordable, hardworking place. We will do anything and everything. And we will care for them well beyond the doors to our practice," says Donnelly. "We are in the business of not being in business." **OP**

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