



VIEW, or Visionary Insights for Eye Care Women, is a professional club sponsored by Allergan, Inc. (Irvine, California), that is dedicated to supporting and promoting female eye care practitioners in their fields. VIEW's mission is STRONG: to Support patients with more than medicine; for practitioners to Thrive in their practices; to Relate to issues important to women; to Observe changes in patients and peers; to Nurture those under our care; and to Guide fellow eye care professionals to success.

This article marks the beginning of a series assembled from various presentations from the VIEW symposia that take place at professional meetings. This series will appear in *Cataract & Refractive Surgery Today* and its sister publication, *Advanced Ocular Care*, as well as its online publication, *Millennial EYE* (www.millennialeye.com). —Neda Shamie, MD

What Is Your Personal Brand?

BY MARSHEILA DEVAN, MBA, COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

Today's celebrities—from talk-show hosts to movie stars—have personal brands (think the Oprah Winfrey Network or Gweneth Paltrow's Goop brand). Have you thought about how patients perceive you? As an eye care practitioner, it is important to brand yourself to draw potential patients to your practice.

WHAT IS YOUR PERSONAL BRAND? WHY IS HAVING A BRAND IMPORTANT?

Branding yourself by associating yourself with a high level of quality care will draw more people to your practice. Successful practitioners in any field possess the following leadership qualities and use them to become the best care providers they can be:

- Commitment
- Communication
- Self-Belief
- Visibility
- Integrity
- Teamwork
- Focused on results
- Courage
- Vision

THE FOUR STEPS TO PERSONAL BRANDING

1. Discover who you are. When it comes to branding yourself, there are four main processes to consider. First, discover who you are, because the impressions you have about yourself is how others perceive you. What brought you to where you are today? What are your two greatest

strengths? What is one common perception others have of you? What do you want to be known for? Are you the doctor who gives cataract patients the best vision they have ever had, or are you known for fixing less-than-optimal surgical outcomes? Is yours the boutique practice with the personal touch, or the large well-known clinic with all the latest technology? The first step to crafting your public image is to know your niche. Summarize the strengths that help you to be STRONG and successful, and use those to your advantage.

2. Create your personal image. The second step in branding yourself is to create your personal image. Do you embody the role you want to play? What is your personal style? More than simply vanity, your clothes and grooming speak volumes about you before you speak a word. Patients will notice if you look disheveled, even underneath a white coat. Try to select clothing that best represents you, rather than trying trends that do not suit you. Also, your staff should reflect the same professionalism—you may want to institute a dress code (ie, no jeans or sweat pants). Finally, be aware of your nonverbal communications—slouching, frowning, nervous habits such as clearing the throat—actions we often do not notice we are doing can all convey an unintended lack of confidence.

3. Communicate your image. Third, you need to communicate your image. Make sure your marketing materials and online social media such as your Facebook page reinforce the image you want to project. Do your staff members understand and support the brand you want to create? When they talk with patients, they should communicate the strengths of your practice.

4. Maintain your image. The fourth step is to maintain your image. It is important to monitor social media and online ratings sites to protect your good name. Also, make sure that you and your staff handle any patient complaints promptly and respectfully, because unhappy patients will share their experience more readily than happy patients. Also, it is OK to toot your own horn within your practice and your marketing materials. If you have won professional recognition, if you are the first practitioner in your area to use a particular technology, or you support your local community in any way, this is information you should share with your patients, in the form of pictures on the wall, a monthly newsletter, or other strategies such as Facebook updates.

Self promotion can be daunting to some people, so do not feel as though you have to be a tech wizard or have natural marketing talent. Use an outlet that feels appropriate to you.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD COMMUNICATION

Good communication is not a matter of chance; it is a matter of choice. As with any personal interaction, the verbal and nonverbal ways in which you present yourself speak volumes about you and strongly affect how patients respond to you. Particularly in a medical setting, patients want their physicians to exude competence, confidence, calm, and friendliness. Following are my tips for delivering effective verbal and nonverbal communication.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

People often overlook the importance of good body language, but it has a strong bearing on how someone perceives your energy. For example, looking down at the floor and crossing your arms will present you as closed off and unwelcoming (perhaps even defensive), whereas constantly making eye contact and keeping your arms by your side can make you appear more open, trustworthy, and approachable (Figure 1). When talking with patients, be mindful not to communicate impatience, such as tapping your feet or rushing the conversation. Eye contact is very important, as it lets the patient know he or she has your full attention. Foremost, remember to listen to your patients, and give them the chance to explain their symptoms and ask questions. Finally, professional attire is especially important in a doctor-patient relationship, as it indicates that you take your job as a service provider seriously.

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

The tone of your voice is nearly as important as eye contact when talking with patients. Try to sound



Figure 1. Which physician's demeanor is more approachable? Body language can express a great deal to patients.

engaged in your patients' cases so that they feel your personal interest in their wellbeing. Also, do not rush the conversation. Allow natural pauses at appropriate times so your patients (especially elderly ones) can absorb and process what you are saying. Finally—and this is especially important for physicians—be natural in your speech; do not try to impress your patients with medical jargon they will not understand, because they will not appreciate being talked down to. As Leonardo Da Vinci said, "Simplicity is the ultimate form of sophistication."

CONCLUSIONS

Ultimately, professional skill is only half of the equation of a successful medical practice, and effective communication with patients is the other half. If you project yourself confidently to patients and colleagues, they will perceive you as such. Increasingly, ophthalmology is becoming a service profession—today's patients expect a positive clinical experience with high-quality care. Make your job easier by creating an image that attracts the best patients for your type of practice.

Marsheila DeVan has been a communications specialist and consultant for more than 25 years, and she has served as Senior Communication Specialist at EDC Communications International for the past 16 years. Her expertise includes work within university systems as well as the pharmaceutical and medical industries with a concentration on physician speaker development, interpersonal skills improvement, meeting moderation, curriculum development, and one-to-one coaching. For the past several years, she has been on the faculty of the AAO's Leadership Development Program and the PAAO, for which she has helped to conduct workshops in several countries of Asia Pacific. Ms. DeVan may be reached at (805) 868-9269; marsheilaann@yahoo.com.

