



Vision Source® TRUSTED COLLEAGUE

Brent Segeleon, OD

seg.eye@gmail.com

Lessons Learned Early Help Practice Grow Quickly

Since opening his practice five years ago, Brent Segeleon, OD, of Williamsburg, Va., has learned some lessons the hard way. He had a vision to provide excellent customer service and personalized attention, but he realized his standards weren't always being met.

"At the beginning, I didn't know how to hire staff," he recalls. "There was one painful week where I had to shut down because I didn't have any staff. That was emotionally difficult," he says.

But out of that experience, Dr. Segeleon came back smarter. He learned how to ask better questions during the interview process to find candidates who understood his mission. He stopped hoping that someone without that mindset would somehow adapt to the environment. And he began providing five-minute personality tests that identify individuals as a lion, otter, golden retriever, or beaver. "I share the results with everyone. It's a fun event, and no one is put down. It just teaches us to understand each other and how to communicate better," he says.

"Once I figured out how to hire, then so much fell into place," he says. The staff follows his lead on how to speak to and treat patients. "We talk about it during staff meetings and make sure we're all living up to our mission statement."

In short, Dr. Segeleon's attitude is that the customer is always right. "As part of our customer service, I'm not afraid to refund a patient's money," he says. He uses quality products from Essilor and Vision Source® elite contact lens vendors. "Our fees are higher, and we're using the best products. The result is that patient costs are higher, too, but we can do that as long as patients have confidence that we stand behind the products," he says. "I tell patients that we have developed what we believe is the best prescription, but if it doesn't feel exactly right, we're willing to work with them." He offers a two-year warranty on all frames and lenses, too, and provides his patients with little extras such as a T-shirt, cleaning cloths, and a spray bottle of lens cleaner. "We're really trying to make the experience and atmosphere top-notch."

For new staff members from other optical or optometric offices, that policy seems unusual. "I had an optician who told me I was going to lose a lot of money," Dr. Segeleon recalls. "I had to tell her I was more concerned about losing the patient than the money. I'll make the money back in future transactions. With the great relationships I have with vendors, the costs to me for a remake are very low, and the benefits in building patient relationship are huge." Now the optician is a fan of the strategy because it makes sales much easier. Patients are more willing to accept recommendations by her and Dr. Segeleon because they feel their investment isn't risky.

"We try to work hard to understand each patient," Dr. Segeleon continues. "We offer a customized solution, and I prescribe from the chair. I prescribe the product, and the optician will communicate the benefits. The patient hears it twice."

He offers a money-back guarantee for his contact lens patients, too. "If they buy an annual supply of a premium contact lens or a multifocal contact lens, I'll offer to refit them and apply the credit," he says. He's been able to convert many emerging presbyopes who might not otherwise have said "yes" to a contact lens fitting. "I even tell them that I'll credit the fitting fee toward a pair of eyeglasses if they don't like the contact lenses," he says.

Those policies help his reputation to travel among patients. But even among other practitioners in the area, word is spreading. His practice has a reputation for providing low vision services, and he receives many referrals from optometrists and ophthalmologists. "I'm a big proponent for saying if you don't feel confident in your skills, hire someone who is," he says. His internships were in low vision, and he mentored in an office with a low vision provider.

Dr. Segeleon's reputation is also helped by his Vision Source® membership, he says. He joined Vision Source® even before he opened his practice, and says that he appreciates the guidance and support he's received from his colleagues. He also says that he appreciates the savings on products and the introduction to services from a wide variety of vendors.

"We use Demandforce for our social media," he says. The company has helped him build his Internet presence, and patient reviews are posted on his website. Indeed, more than 98 percent of patients who have responded to practice surveys said that they would refer friends and family to the practice.

"If we ever have a negative review, we try to correct it. We don't respond online, but we do use the critiques for staff training," he says. That's because learning from your past mistakes is one of the best motivators to improve performance.

