



J. WHITE AND ASSOCIATES, LTD.

Helping Professional Practices Create and Sustain Growth

DRESSED FOR SUCCESS: YOU AND YOUR OFFICE

Have you ever seen your office through a prospective client's eye? Probably not since you came in for an interview and that may have been a few years.

Walk in the front door. Is the entryway clean and uncluttered? Sit down in the reception room. Is the future in good condition and unsoiled? Are the magazines current, untattered, and orderly?

It may be time for a little early spring cleaning, starting with you:

1. Project the image of the practice through your own appearance. Dress in the office so you are comfortable with your appearance. You can't project confidence to clients if your clothes make you feel awkward.

Make sure each team member feels comfortable enough to tell another team member (including the doctor) if they have bad breath, dandruff, food between the teeth, a stain on their shirt, etc. You must have a relationship with everyone in the office in which they feel they can tell each other how to improve their appearance if something is wrong. It's better to learn from each other than from a client.

Don't contradict your image. Do you think an overweight physician who smokes takes his own prevention advice seriously? Would you think any professional who dresses as if s/he was on vacation takes his/her work seriously? On the other hand, would you think a well-dressed attorney could represent you well in court and make a good impression on jurists?

2. Design your office to appeal to patients. Furnish your office as least as well as your clients furnish their homes. People like to feel that their dentist, a professional, is at least as successful as they are, if not more so.

Plan your office for the clients you serve. Practices that cater to children are usually furnished differently than those that cater to adults. Practices that attract primarily older clients usually use calm, quiet colors and chairs with sturdy arms and firm backs that are easy to get out of.

3. Amuse your clients in interesting ways. Most offices stock popular magazines and these should not be overlooked. However, go beyond the obvious and make yourself special. Here are some suggestions:

Subscribe to unusual magazines on special topics: art, wildlife, music, science, gourmet foods, cars, photography, computers, tennis. Keep current issues only. It's a poor reflection on you to have issues more than a few months old.

Subscribe to newsletters. Clients waiting may enjoy reading newsletters on tax avoidance, pets, antiques, literature, management, crafts, cooking, boating, skiing, scuba diving, and public speaking. Find the appropriate newsletters on-line or at your local library.

Picture books on subjects like animals, cities, movies, and celebrities.

Subscribe to a foreign newspaper or periodical.

Some practices keep recipe books in the reception area along with blank recipe cards and pens so clients can copy their favorites.

Consider large print books if you have elderly clients.

Play music. Many studies have suggested playing soothing music in your reception area can help relax clients. Music also projects your image. Consider the different images that could be projected by an office that plays Bach or Mozart versus one that plays current popular music. Or an office that plays country and western versus one that plays jazz. Whatever music you play:

Play it softly as background music.

Turn off the music from time to time to give everyone a rest.

Consider letting clients choose their own music.

4. Design the lighting to project your image. Some suggestions:

Use soft, warm, incandescent lighting in areas where client comfort is crucial – the reception area, the doctor's office, the client coordinator's office.

Use fluorescent lighting where strong light is needed – the lab, work stations, etc. It is colder than incandescent lighting but provides more uniform light.

Combine fluorescent and incandescent lights in your business area. Use the incandescent general lighting to give warmth and fluorescent task lighting at workstations.

Use colors to improve team productivity and client comfort. The most successful office color scheme is at least two colors and not more than four.

Repeat one color or combination of colors throughout all the rooms. This will make your office feel coordinated and harmonious.

Choose low maintenance colors. For walls, medium tones of any light colors are easiest to keep looking clean. The hardest wall color to maintain is flat white. It scuffs and soils fast.

Choose commercial quality carpet in multicolors such as tweeds or small patterns to mask stains. Use tile for heavy traffic areas.

Consider the emotions various colors elicit:

Blue is soothing, relaxing and good for high stress office areas such as treatment or examination rooms.

Red is warm, stimulating and effective as an accent.

Yellow is uplifting and cheerful. Don't use too much yellow in your business area – overuse can cause eyestrain.

Orange stimulates some people but depresses others. It is best when combined with calm colors such as beige or brown.

Green is cheerful and cool. Caution: some tones of green provide negative reactions and should be avoided. Pale green may induce fear as it is thought of as institutional because it is used in hospitals, schools, and government buildings.

Brown is conservative and overuse may depress clients. Best used with stimulating colors such as orange.

Purple is exciting and often makes you feel you're creative and different.

Tan/beige is calm and quiet. It is a versatile color that can project a formal, informal, traditional, or modern image depending on how you use it and with what other colors.

Gray is cool, quiet, urbane, but can seem austere if used alone. Good when combined with red, orange, purple, and other stimulating colors.

The following combinations of color have psychological effects:

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| A. | Tan, brown, rust | warm, soothing, contemporary |
| B. | Red, orange, yellow | very stimulating |

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| C. | Black, gray, white | cool, sophisticated, modern |
| D. | Blue, turquoise, beige | calm |
| E. | Purple, pink | warm, stimulating, feminine |
| F. | Green, white | cheerful, cool |
| G. | Burgundy, white | legal, crisp, rich |

Suppose the office looks good and only needs a bit of sprucing up. Or maybe your team and clients just need a little something different. Following is a potpourri of ideas:

Rearrange the furniture in your reception area from time to time to give it a fresh look. Try changing paintings, photos, and posters.

Decorate the office with seasonal decorations. The team can work on this collectively or trade off on the various holidays or seasons.

Wrap prizes for children or hang them from a “goodie tree” and let the child pick the package they like best. You could do this for adults as well.

Have a supply of plastic, disposable (and colorful!) rain coats, hats, and/or umbrellas to offer clients on a rainy day.

Display team photos or family photos of your recent happenings, vacations, and trips to enhance the human touch in the reception area. The key word here is *recent*; be sure to change the photos periodically.

Make your office relaxed and welcoming keeping your clients in mind and you’ll enjoy coming to work every day as well.