The Portrait as Part of Aesthetic Dentistry

The visual appeal of the portrait is the critical link to the emotional side of the brain, where patients make choices. Cosmetic dental services are discretionary treatments that patients choose because they want a certain result. The portrait can act as a link to create a desire, and dialogue to generate and increase case acceptance of cosmetic dental treatments. The ability to create exquisite portraiture comes after understanding and controlling the basics of photography. It is then, and only then, that truly impactful portraits can be used to increase success of aesthetic dental cases.

This is the best time in history to be in the practice of dentistry. The dental materials and techniques for the creation and restoration of aesthetic, healthy dentition have never been better. We live in an age of wonderful technology advancements and a general population that is living longer and longer. The demand for aesthetic dentistry is as high as ever, with an aging population that expects health services to maintain or improve the quality of their lives. Patients in your community want to improve their oral health, general health and self-esteem. Once you have the ability to show your patients the value of this kind of dentistry, and master the skills to deliver the desired results in an efficient and enjoyable matter, your practice can prosper and grow in ways that are pleasantly unexpected.

The emotional side of the brain is where we make our decisions of choice. It is here that needs become wants. A picture is worth a thousand words, and nothing speaks more profoundly to your prospective patients than a beautiful photograph that projects happiness, health, vitality, sexiness and success. When that photograph connects to the inner psyche, it can create a desire that drives patients to act. Many of us find the concept of “selling” our services unappealing. Great photographs can become a silent sales force that continually sells for you and your practice, especially when you don't want to be pushy.

The photographs are really visual stories. They are proven to be a very effective way to enter the emotional side of the brain. That’s where your patient makes decisions about whether to proceed with some type of treatment or not. We are in the business of enhancing lives, and patients should at the very least have the choice. Photographs carry a message to your patients that no amount of words can convey; they will become the centerpiece of your marketing, both internally and externally. The real power of the portrait is that each one of the photos tells a story that is almost universally understood. The story builds up the emotional relationship that creates the bridge of trust so critical to treatment acceptance.

The basics of photography include learning to control your camera, giving you the ability to produce the best final image. Modern digital cameras are remarkable tools that
enable you to respond visually to the world around you. With your eyes, you usually focus only passively, without emotion, intellectual thought or physical response. Taking a photograph, on the other hand, requires decisions about the images you want to create and how you want others to see them. The emotion of a photograph starts with seeing the photograph before it is taken. In the end, a really great and memorable photograph is more about the photographer (and a little luck) than the equipment you are using. Persistence can be as important as skill.

Many individuals attracted to dentistry really like the technical aspects of the profession. Yet, as much as we like to talk about the technical aspects of equipment, ultimately photography is more art than technique—if the goal is to produce an exquisite portrait. A photographer can take exceptional photographs with a low-quality camera, and low-quality photographs with an exceptional camera. You can and should use artistic flair and license in your portrait sessions. It is critical to master the photographic equipment so you can ascend from the level of a technician to the level of an artist. The only way you will ever learn to do that is to experiment—and just use the camera, often. Take a lot of photos; digital storage space on a card is cheap, but the opportunities only come along once in a great while. Ask any successful photographer; all will tell you that they take a lot more bad photos than good.

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