



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: What's up, what's up, how's it going, my friend? Welcome back to the podcast. How are you doing today? I am doing awesome. It's actually nighttime again, as I'm recording this. I really try not to do this very often, but really wanted to get this done for you guys.

I am going to be traveling with my little kids to a camp at the end of the week, and I wasn't able to go last year. I'm really excited to go this time. That is just eating into some of my work time this week. I wanted to make sure I get this podcast done for you.

This is something I've been thinking about for a little while now and it's time. It's time that we have a little heart to heart moment, and that's what this podcast is going to be about.

I want to talk to you about something today that comes up all of the time for my physician clients, so I know that it comes up for you, my podcast listener as well. There's really not a whole lot, I notice, that spins a lot of physicians out like getting a negative review of some sort. Maybe it's a Press Ganey score, maybe it's some other type of direct-to-patient review, maybe it's an online review like on Healthgrades or vitals.com or any number of the other Yelp's of healthcare. That's what I think of them. Maybe it's an internal review from a student or trainee. Those can tend to really spin us out.

Regardless of who has the complaint, most of us have to do some managing of our thoughts when we read these reviews. There's nothing wrong with that. I do want to mention that if you're new to the podcast, I did a whole podcast on feedback versus complaints, which I highly recommend you listen to as well, if this is any kind of an issue for you. I went back and looked, it's episode 25, Giving and Receiving Healthy and Constructive Criticism. That will be very helpful for you, and will help you to get started if this is something that you just want to get started working on.

In this episode, I want to talk about how to create patients who are raving fans of yours, and I want to point out that the reason this is relevant on a weight loss podcast, is because of what most of my clients do when they feel terrible about a negative review. What do you do? You eat to buffer your negative emotions and to try to feel better.

Sometimes alcohol is involved too. If you wonder why you overeat and you find that anytime it's time for reviews, you really struggle with them, or especially any that aren't absolutely glowing, then this for sure is the podcast for you. Actually, anybody who's listening who wants to create raving fans should be listening today. This is super, super important.

I'm going to focus on how a physician can work on creating raving fans. A lot of times, this is discussed in the business world, in terms of corporations and things like that, but this absolutely applies to medicine. I think it's something that's really being overlooked.

What is a raving fan? A raving fan is someone who isn't just a satisfied patient. This isn't someone who thought that they received some good quality care from their physician and they're pleased with how the interaction went. A raving fan is someone who tells all of their friends that they absolutely must see you. They have an interaction with you, and then they post on social media about how much they love you as their doctor, and how much they love the office, and how they feel so lucky and so blessed to be under the care of people who are so amazing.

When someone is in need of a doctor, they're the first one to pipe up and say, listen, you have got to go see my girl. She is amazing and trust me, you don't want to see anybody else. Many of you are raving fans on my podcast. So many of you tell me that you will tell anybody who will listen, about how much you love this podcast, and how much it's helped you, and how much you think that others should listen to it too.

You have that sense of raving fans. Here's what's interesting. When we think about patients like this who really, really are our raving fans, what's happened is we've often bent over backwards a bit for them. Maybe we've given them a little bit of special treatment, maybe we gave them a little extra time, or maybe we came in on the weekend for them, maybe you stayed late to fit them in. There's that, but not always.

I had patients who were raving fans, and I remember some families who literally, every single time I saw them, it didn't matter what it was for, they verbally told me how grateful they were that I was their children's doctor, and they would just go on and on about how great they thought I was. Did that mean that I was a great doctor? All it really meant was that the thoughts they had about me, were that I was a great doctor. Being or not being a great doctor is completely subjective. As many people who are my raving fans, were also probably repulsed by me. There's people who are going to think you're the best and there's going to be people who think you are the worst, no matter what.

I would always tell people who would ask me which pediatrician that they should see, that there's tons of doctors who can help your child grow up healthy. The important thing is that you find the doctor that you trust, and who you think will listen to you when you have a concern. That's the right pediatrician for you. Even though those people, those patients were so gracious with their praise on me, did that really mean that I was doing an amazing job? I wasn't really doing anything extra for them, but they were still raving fans.

This is an important point. It doesn't mean that to create raving fans, you have to go crazy, bend over backwards, do all kinds of things at the expense of yourself. Creating raving fans doesn't necessarily mean doing more for patients. This is important, because when we start thinking about this, we're like, "Oh my gosh, I can't possibly fit in anymore. I'm already so overextended. How could I possibly do more?"

That's not what I'm talking about. In fact, sometimes it means even doing less. Having a panel of raving fans doesn't mean that you're totally overextended, burnt out, feeling taken advantage of. That's what a lot of us associate with creating raving fans. It's a negative association that we have to practically sell our souls in order for our patients to be raving fans of ours.

Now, I want you to know that none of that is true. We have created this scenario where we have a bit of an adversarial relationship with many patients. This idea that now I have to go in there, and I have to take care of them, and then they're probably still going to be mad at me, they're not even going to be satisfied with how hard I worked for them. You have to think about that energy that you're bringing, as you're taking care of that person, and whether that is really what's going to create raving fans.

Now, of course, you cannot control what someone else thinks feels or does. You can't control what they write on their review form. I think we can all agree that some people are just going to complain, no matter what you do, and I'm not talking about them today. Who I'm talking about is the rest of the 95+% of people who really do want to be happy with their medical care, and how we can turn them into raving fans.

If we can't control what our patients think and feel, or how they act, how do we create raving fans? What we do becomes their circumstance. It's the neutral facts. We do some things, and that is external to them. That becomes their circumstance. Then they have thoughts about that circumstance and that thought in turn determines how they feel and what they do.

We are in control of their circumstance, in what we say, the energy behind what we do, our office environment, things like that. Most people want to really love you, but many of you are not making it very easy. You're not giving patients the chance to really love you.

I want to give you an example, a story of something that happened to someone that I know quite recently, and I do have permission to share this. I'm not going to give any information that is going to divulge anything, and I certainly don't want this to come across as any kind of Monday morning quarterbacking at all. I think that this is a really, really important thing to recognize.

This friend of mine, she has hypothyroidism, and she's been working on losing weight for a while, and she has lost a lot of weight. What she found about a year and a half ago when she went in to have her thyroid checked, was that since she'd lost a ton of weight, her dose of her thyroid medication, her Levothyroxine was actually too high.

What ended up happening was that, the doctor that she saw reduced her dose by a third, and somehow things got missed, or I don't know, again, I'm not Monday morning quarterbacking, but there was no follow-up in any kind of timely way, to make sure that this dose reduction was the proper choice. Again, I am not an adult doctor, I just go, okay, I don't know, it seems kind of weird to me, but let's see how things go.

Now a year and a half later, as we review things back and think about things, she just hasn't been the same since. Long story short, of course I feel like I want to tell you the whole story to try to convince you, but the long story is that, a little bit ago, she ended up losing both her OB/GYN and her internist, because they both retired. There at the end of their careers, and she had a really strong and connected relationship with those doctors. Both of them knew her very well, and it was just a different kind of scenario.

Now she's creating relationship with a new doctor, and she really likes the doctor, she thinks things are great. What's happened though in this time, is that she has absolutely not been able to lose any more weight. I've been working with her and I know exactly what she's doing, and I kept saying to her, I think something's not right, because it just does not make sense that you are not able to lose weight.

Then over the last few months, she has followed her plan 100% of the time and has still gained, and gained really, really easily. I was encouraging her, hey listen, you really, really, really need to get your thyroid checked again, because this is straight up hypothyroidism now. Something's off. She had gone in to see the doctor, they had checked her blood levels and her TSH was elevated. The nurse called her back and just said, "You're already on a really high dose. I think we we're just going to leave it. We're not actually going to treat it. We're not going to change anything." She was like, really? Then she said, "Hey, but you know what? I think I'd like to talk to the doctor."

She told the nurse, "I'd like to speak to the doctor." Nobody called back. Then she submitted a message through the computerized system, which is how they encourage patients in their practice to do it. She did that, no response. She called the office no less than three times, leaving a message, saying that it was important and personal, because she wanted to get the doctor on the phone, she didn't want him to talk to the nurse who kept telling her and shaming her for how high her dose already was. She wanted to talk to the doctor. It's personal, I need to talk to the doctor.

The doctor did not call back. Finally she's like, okay, this is ridiculous. I'm just going to make an appointment and go in. Now, I do also want to just let you know, that she works a full-time job and it's very difficult for her to be able to get to a doctor's appointment, which is the case for a lot of people in the world.

She makes the time, she goes and gets in to see the doctor, and the doctor's like, "Oh, I didn't get any of your messages." Just, I didn't get your messages. She's at this point, and in tears, she's like, how do I get the help that I need? Of course, gladly, I'm so glad she said to her, "Listen, I know you don't know me well, but when I call, it's because I have a real problem. I'm not going to call you about every little ache and pain. Don't ignore me. I reached out to you and you're not getting back to me." "Oh, sorry. You know, this system."

Then, now, they're doing some things that should have been done a long time ago. This is someone who really wants to love her new doctor. She absolutely adored her other physicians. She wants to have that kind of relationship again with the doctor, and she's finding it so difficult, because she cannot get even the basic attention that she should be able to get from a physician, that she's a patient of.

Here's the thing. This way of treating people has become totally normal, and it's very unacceptable. If this were our parent or our sibling or our spouse, we would be up in arms. The problem is as physicians, we often get special treatment. We don't even know that this is what's going on. This, what I'm describing to you, is how good conscientious, non-annoying patients with real medical problems, are being treated. Then we wonder why we get bad reviews.

What I find is that once physicians get the bad review, they often feel very defensive. They blame the patient, they are somehow abdicating responsibility for the review. Something outside of them is to blame. It's the office staff. It's how demanding the patient is. It's how other patients dominate your time and then you're running behind. It's the system. It's the system. It's because we're employed. We don't have a say anymore. All this very victimy kind of thinking.

When I recently realized is that, it's actually quite simple to create raving fans. I read a great book called Raving Fans by Ken Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles. It's a business book. It's a short read if some of you are interested in, it may not really be, it's been around forever, 25 years. It's a classic. I read it, and then I spent a lot of time thinking about what they wrote, and observing and talking with other people about this topic. It's absolutely something that I want you to know about.

That's why we're talking about this today. What they point out in this book is that we as consumers and customers, and patients, have grown accustomed to being treated poorly. When we have bad service at a restaurant, we don't complain to the manager. We don't even fill out the comment card. We just let it go. It's just not even worth the energy, because we know nothing's going to change.

What we do is, we don't go back to the restaurant, and we definitely don't post on Facebook about the great time we had and that we highly recommend it to all our friends. The authors state that even 25 years ago, when they wrote this book, customer service was terrible, and it's even worse now.

After I read this book, I actually questioned that statement because, think about it, what is a book? It's a collection of someone else's thoughts. I thought it was worthwhile to question the author's belief that customer service is terrible. Maybe it really isn't. Maybe it's totally fine, and it's just terrible if you're looking for it through that lens.

I just decided to observe, and it was a really interesting experience. What I can tell you is that, I experienced some decent customer service and definitely some poor customer service. What I didn't experience at all, was any kind of customer service that would turn me into a raving fan.

We really do want to be raving fans, but these businesses make it hard to be one. I want to give you a couple other stories. As I was going through this process of observing, I was just paying attention. I found it so interesting.

I told you guys that I was in Florida a number of weeks ago, speaking, and I was staying at the Ritz Carlton where the event was, and I've stayed at various Ritz Carltons over the years. It's a very, very nice luxury hotel, known for their customer service. It was totally great. I went in there expecting to have a grand old time.

It was really interesting to observe a few things. The first thing I noticed is that, every Ritz that I've ever been to has a robe and slippers. I had a robe, but no slippers. That's interesting. I really didn't make a big deal out of it. Had that terrible cough. I had no voice. I didn't feel like calling down housekeeping. I just didn't make it a big deal.

The next day though, as I was getting ready, I used that robe, and I hung the robe up, because in hotels where they give you a robe, they don't give you a new robe every day. They have you keep your robe until the end of your stay. Hung the robe up. Then I spoke, and that night I just was coughing terribly. My voice was terrible. I really needed some tea, and I got back from dinner, and notice that their little coffee shop was closed.

I talked to the concierge and asked if there's anywhere else that I could get some tea. She was very helpful. She called over to a different hotel to see if the Starbucks was still open, and it wasn't. She said, "You can go here to the bar and get tea," but that really didn't sound attractive to me. She said, "You know what? We'll just send it up to your room. What's your room number? I'll just send it up to you."

I thought, oh, how delightful, that would be wonderful. Yes, please do that. I go up to my room and then I'm waiting. I'm waiting for the tea, because when I really want to do is get into my jammies and then put the robe on. I'm waiting for the tea to calm, so that I don't have to open the door like that with myself all half-undone.

I'm waiting and I'm waiting and I'm waiting. Then I go and I look, and the robe is gone. They'd come to service the room and they'd taken the robe and not replaced it. I thought, this is so weird. I call down to housekeeping and I said, "Hey, you know what? I had a robe. It actually got taken. Do you think you could send someone up with a robe and some slippers for me? I'd really appreciate that." "Oh yes, absolutely, Mrs. Ubell, for sure. We're going to do that." "Wonderful. Thank you so much."

Okay. Then after an hour and a half, the tea had still not come. I'm coughing, coughing, coughing like crazy. I call down to concierge. She says, "Oh, Mrs. Ubell, how are you enjoying the tea?" I said, "I would love to enjoy it, but I haven't received it yet." She said, "Oh my goodness. Okay, I'll have him send it right away." Okay, great.

Probably 20 minutes later, the tea arrives. That was great. I appreciated that. As the woman is bringing it in, I notice that all the tea that they brought for me is caffeinated, and it's 9:30 at night. It's these little things. When you think about customer service, you just think, it's see evening, maybe they don't want English breakfast, maybe they'd want some herbal tea or something decaffeinated. Luckily I caught it before she left and she didn't speak great English, but we worked it out and she understood what I needed, and so then she came back, brought me the tea. Okay, that was great.

Meanwhile, robe and slippers, nothing from them. What's also interesting is that they give you a lot of these little bottles of water because inland in Florida, people don't tend to really drink the water. The water there is kind of weird. You turn on the cold tap, it's hot coming out. It's just kind of weird.

I really appreciated that they had brought me a kettle, so that I could make as much tea as I wanted, but they didn't bring me a pitcher of water to use. I had to use the hot tap water, which I just decided to not be upset about at all, because I got to have tea and I was just so grateful to have some tea to help my cough.

I made the tea, I had the tea and that was great. The robe and slippers never came. This is the experience that you can have at an expensive luxury hotel. So interesting. They really want to try to do a good job, but then things are falling through the cracks like crazy. It's so fascinating. I also had shared with you guys recently that I was in Las Vegas for a bit. I would go to the Starbucks. Of course they have Starbucks in the casino, and I would go to Starbucks on the way to the conference. It was so interesting, watching the workers at Starbucks. If you've been to a Starbucks on a busy weekday morning, where they are just hammering out drinks right and left, it's amazing. Sometimes you get the best Starbucks customer service.

There's been a few times where I had to wait just a few extra minutes, and then the manager comes up with a gift card for a free drink. It's like, "Hey, I'm so sorry for your wait." I'm like, "I barely even noticed that I was waiting. What are we talking about right now?" It's just so nice. It's one reason that I'm a raving fan of Starbucks. They certainly don't have the best coffee, but they are the best in terms of taking care of people and making it very, very easy to get the drinks that you want.

I had to wait in a massively long line every single time in Vegas to get a drink, and I just decided that was fine. It was just really interesting, watching the workers and just, they were in no rush, they were just going at a very leisurely pace. Didn't matter how long the line was. Okay, interesting. That's how we roll in Vegas.

I had gotten the drink once or twice and then I am there again, standing in line. My drink at home that I usually get is about, I think it's about \$3.45-ish, something like that. In Vegas, it's \$6.33, because everything's so marked up there. I get up in line and I order my drink, and she tells me that the price is almost \$8. I just was like, "Oh, I don't think it's probably that. I've gotten this a few times here and it's usually \$6.33."

She just looked at me and I was like, "Yeah, I don't know. Are you maybe steaming the cream? I'm not sure what's ... It's usually, it's not that." Not one word back to me. Just looked at the screen, punched a whole bunch of different things, then looked at me at me and said, \$6.33. So interesting. She was totally overcharging me. No apology. No, "Oh, sorry, got confused." No nothing. "Sorry. I was trying to overcharge you. Something that's already massively overpriced." Just nothing. I thought, that's so interesting. Here we go again.

This is taking away from my raving fandom of Starbucks. Then two days later, it happened again with a different person who was trying to charge me again that same, almost \$8 fee. I said, "No, I don't think so. I had this issue before, it's \$6.33." She's like, "No, it's not." Now she's arguing with me. I was like, "No, it really, it's \$6.33, I think somehow you have it in entered wrong." She brings her manager over. The manager is like, "Oh, okay. Oh yeah, it should be like this. Okay." And then leaves. no apology to me. No, "Oh, sorry. We got mixed up." Nothing at all.

That's what I'm talking about. It's just, people are just in general, not making much of an effort. Here's the thing, we want to be raving fans of our doctors too, but so often, we're treated in a way that makes it really hard. Think about my friend. She wants to love her doctor, but what she's getting is the palm to her face, anytime she tries to get some legitimate help.

I want to share with you one of the main tips from the Raving Fans book, because I'm telling you, if you implement this, it will make a huge difference in the experience your patients have of coming to see you. Now, that experience is of course, what they will then choose thoughts about, they will have feelings about, and then their actions will be different than if they have an experience where they don't feel like they're being well taken care of at all.

Before I start though, I want to address all of you who are already thinking that this won't work for you, because you're employed, and you don't have any say over anything that's done in your office, or who you work with, et cetera. This still totally applies to you, so keep listening. Stay with me, okay?

Now, if there's nothing else that you get out of this podcast, this is what I want you to hear. The main way you create raving fans is by doing what you say you're going to do. That's simply it. You do what you're saying you're going to do, and you create raving fans. Now, your brain might be going straight to, oh, this doesn't apply. I already do that, and people still get upset, but listen here. How often do you tell a patient that you'll call them later with an update or a test result, knowing full well that it's probably going to be your nurse or MA who'll call them back.

It may seem like a minor thing, but you said, "I'll call you later," and then you didn't call. Someone else did. How often do you tell a patient that you'll research something for them, but then you forget and you never follow up, or that you'll call someone, you'll get some information for them. That doesn't make them feel like you care about them.

How often is your brain already in the next patient's room, because you're so worried about how behind you are, that you forget what you said you'd do for the patient that you're in the room with. Maybe your documentation isn't even accurate, because your brain is so ahead of yourself.

How often are you running between patients, popping in and out, and not really making a concerted effort to connect with them, human-to-human, for a minute or two? How often do you have the best of intentions, but when things get busy, that amazing, courteous and caring part of you takes a backseat to the get-her-done part of you, where it is just like a machine, churning out patients who've been taken care of.

Even the best doctors fall prey to this at times. I know I definitely did, but as a patient, all I want is for the doctor and her staff to do what they say they're going to do. If you say that there's a certain way for a patient to reach you, and the message doesn't get to you through that method, the answer is to find a way for your patients to reliably reach out to you. Don't blame the system, or how big the whole hospital system is. Don't immediately go into victim mode by creating a villain of the phone system, or your front desk receptionist. When you do that, you are completely disempowering yourself to make any meaningful changes. You're stunting your ability to serve your patients, in the way that every human being should be. The way you would want to be treated or a loved one of yours would be treated.

Notice that I'm not telling you to spend more time with your patients. I'm not asking you to stay later. I'm not asking you to do anything, except what you tell them you're going to do. If you get a complaint about a staff member, and you tell the patient that you'll handle it, then make sure you handle it, and don't let yourself get down thinking that you can't make any changes, that you're not in charge, or any of that. I see that all the time. As soon as you believe that you can't make any changes, guess how many changes you make? That's right. None. A big fat goose egg.

I suggest that you talk to your staff or your team about this as well. A core value of your practice could be, we do what we say we're going to do.

Now, here's what's really, actually very interesting about this. What so many of my physician weight loss clients struggle with is not doing what they say they're going to do when it comes to themselves. Often, what happens is that, they're looking to the way their patients think and feel about them, to determine how they can think and feel about themselves. This is classic people pleasing actions. I'm going to do all of these things, and then when you feel a certain way about me, then I can feel that way about me.

Here's the rub. When this is how you roll, you ignore yourself, and you don't do what you say you're going to do with food, or any other thing that serves you. Because, what you think about you does it factor into the equation here. It doesn't help you to determine how you feel about yourself. When you're treating your patients from a people pleasing place, you aren't just doing what you said you would do.

You're trying to go above and beyond. The overextending part, not because you think it's the right thing to do, but because you hope that by doing so, they will have a higher opinion of you. When they think highly of you, then you can think highly of you.

If you're overworking, if you're burning yourself out, trying to get your patients to think positively about you, that is not the right way of going about this. Now, what they talk about in the book is, once you're doing what you say you're going to do, then you want to work to improve that by over-delivering, but you only want to improve by 1% at a time. You don't want to be like, we want to be massively better, even though that might ultimately be the goal. You want to improve by 1%. What's a small minor thing that you can do, to be even better, to make it even better, to serve your patients that much better, to make their experience of coming to the doctor that much better for them. Really, get in touch with what they want, and then work on figuring out how to offer it to them.

I do want to end this episode talking about why you would even want to have raving fans. Kind of like, what's the point? Why even bother? I know some of you will get a financial bonus if your scores are at a certain level. Some of you just don't want to get into trouble, if there's enough negative reviews, then you get told in to speak to your chairman or whoever.

I think that raving fans is one of the best ways to measure the value that you provide, the value that you bring to the world. It's a reflection of how you show up as a human being, not overdoing it at the expense of yourself and your wellbeing, but in a way that's sustainable, and ultimately is the way you want to show up as a doctor, so that you can look back after a day at work, a year at work or your whole career, and honestly believe, yep, I slayed that. I did what I said I was going to do and I still had a great life and took care of myself.

Think about what needs to change so that you do what you say you're going to do for your patients, and while you're at it, extrapolate that skill to yourself when it comes to your weight loss. Work on doing 1% better at work, and then 1% better on yourself personally as well. Keep improving, keep growing, take responsibility for everything in your life, and watch your life get better and better. Stay away from that victim mentality, because it will never produce anything good for you.

On that note, I want to wish you a wonderful week and I will talk to you next time. Take care, bye bye.