

SEE YOUR OFFICE THROUGH SENIOR EYES: EIGHT WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR SURROUNDINGS.

If asked to name the *perfect* client, virtually everyone would agree it is the “senior” client. Of course! They are punctual, friendly, do what they say they are going to do, they are loyal, pay their bills on time and tell all their friends about you. Plus the 50+ population controls more than 77% of the nation’s assets. Perfect, indeed!

If these ideal clients are your *favorite*, what are you doing to make sure they can get to your office with ease and feel comfortable once they are there? Is your office and its surrounding environment designed for accessibility, convenience, and enjoyment? The senior client, even the “younger” senior, may be experiencing aging issues that need to be taken into consideration if you want to stand out. .

There are numerous ways to improve your office surroundings. Let’s talk about eight of them.

1. **Parking.** Sure, everyone has handicapped parking. But how close to your front door is your handicapped space? If it’s at the end of the sidewalk and you are in the middle of the sidewalk, you have a problem. Can you have a designated space *with your company name on it*? Be sure to tell all your senior clients to park there. Is the sidewalk leading up to your office door in good condition and clear of barriers such as bike racks, delivery trucks, newspaper boxes, etc. Is the “cut” in the curb clearly indicated and easily accessible? Is the cut near your office or down “there” with the distant handicapped parking?
2. **Location, location, location:** Are you located near other services that seniors desire: libraries, churches, public transportation, health and recreation facilities, parks? Seniors like to combine several stops in one outing. Advertise this convenience in your marketing materials if it applies to your office.
3. **Open Sesame:** A heavy door can be like a locked door to someone with minimum upper body strength or who is trying to maneuver a wheelchair or a walker and open a door at the same time. If an automatic door is not an option, at least provide a small, discreet sign (professionally made, please!) on the door offering assistance. Better yet, you know when your client will be there. Have your assistant on the look out and open the door, as he/she greets your client *by name*. Remember, round doorknobs are more difficult to maneuver than the lever type, which are not expensive and easy to install.
4. **Welcome:** Upon entering, the senior should be *greeted by name*. Make sure there is a clear distinction between the flooring, carpets and any changes in floor levels. Remove any scatter rugs. Is the reception area bright with natural light and lamps that are turned on but not glaring? When was the last time you changed the artwork on the walls? Take a hint from the retail stores; move the same items around from time to time. It makes everything look “new.” How old are the magazines in your reception area? Are they of interest to a senior or are they all about your hobby? Generic reading glasses are a nice touch as is a tasteful blanket within easy reach.

5. **Have a seat:** Is it easy to get in and out of the seating in the lobby area? Big, comfy couches look great but are too difficult to get out of and are a poor choice for senior seating. You need sturdy chairs with backs and arms that provide help when “pushing” out of the chair. Make sure the chairs are firmly “planted” so they don’t move as a person gets up. Back support can be achieved with an attractive pillow. A small writing table is appreciated if a writing surface is needed.
6. **It’s the little things:** Are restrooms clearly indicated on white signs with black letters in a block-style font? Is the pathway, clear and unobstructed? And once in the restroom is there a handicapped toilet seat, are grab bars in the stalls and are paper towels lowered for easy access from a wheelchair? Consider having a low water fountain and a counter that accommodates a wheelchair bound person. If not, make sure your “senior trained” employee knows to go around any barriers to accommodate the senior.
7. **We’ll be right with you:** Remember the senior’s time is just as valuable as yours. Don’t keep them waiting. They will be early to the appointment so plan for it. When you work with a senior, it takes a bit more of this precious commodity called *time*. They like to talk about their grandchildren (your family pictures should be hung and visible) and their careers. Be patient, kind and a good listener. Anyone can take an order for a policy, but not everyone can be a pal while they write it up. Take the time to listen, ask questions and be authentic in your responses. Treat them as you would want your own parents treated.
8. **Numerous challenges:** Senior concerns come in many forms. They can be hard of hearing (keep outside noise levels to a minimum; this includes your office phone and cell phone while they are in your office), they may have speech problems (have a pen and paper handy and offer it discreetly and with a smile,) they may have visual and mobility issues (offer to help them to their car or make a phone call.) But because you are an office that offers senior services better than anyone else in your town, none of these concerns bother you or your senior trained staff. After all, you are there to deal with this special, affluent, friendly, *perfect* client.