

# The Red Velvet Rope Policy

*He who trims himself to suit everyone will soon whittle himself away.*  
—Raymond Hull

Imagine that a friend has invited you to accompany her to an invitation-only special event. You arrive and approach the door, surprised to find a red velvet rope stretched between two shiny brass poles. A nicely dressed man asks your name, checking his invitation list. Finding your name there, he flashes a wide grin and drops one end of the rope, allowing you to pass through and enter the party. You feel like a star.

Do you have your own red velvet rope policy that allows in only the most ideal patients, the ones who energize and inspire you? If you don't, you will shortly. Why?

First, because when you work with patients you love, you'll truly enjoy the work you're doing; you'll love every minute of it. (Well, almost every minute of it. It is work, after all.) And when you love the work you do, you'll do your best work, which is essential to booking yourself solid.

Second, because you are your patients. They are an expression and an extension of you. Do you remember when you were a teenager, and your mother or father would give you a hard time about someone you were hanging out with? Your parents may have said that a particular kid was a bad influence. As a teen, you may have thought about how unfair that felt, but the truth is that you are the company you keep. The people you spend

time with make a significant impact on your state of mind and how you feel about yourself. Let this be the imperative of your business: choose your patients as carefully as you choose your friends.

The first step in building your foundation is to choose your ideal patients, the individuals or businesses with whom you do your best work, the people or environments that energize and inspire you. I'm going to help you identify specific characteristics of individuals or organizations that would make them ideal to work with. You will then develop a rigorous screening process to find more of them. I'm also going to help you prune your current patient list of less-than-ideal patients.

When Christine began her career as a chiropractor, she would work with anyone who had a pulse and a checkbook. But soon her days began with a sense of dread as she looked over the schedule. She bristled at the thought of working with certain patients whom she knew were not going to be a pleasure to work with. Some would show up late (if at all), others did not seem to value her services and support, and many more stubbornly refused to follow the prescribed recommendations. As a result, Christine would usually leave the clinic feeling drained and exhausted.

Eventually, Christine realized what was happening and began to implement her own red velvet rope policy. It was a total game changer, a complete transformation. She began her workday with hope. She was excited to see her patients and each day became more enjoyable than the last. This excitement and enthusiasm spread to her team members. They too were excited to start each day. Christine and her team were simply having more fun. Reducing the dread of working with dud clients will do that. Like Christine, you too can have the joy that comes from taking care of your ideal patients. Much more joy.

Another interesting thing happened when Christine started working only with ideal patients. Their results improved. Because she was more energized and excited about her work, she was able to spend more time performing at her best, delivering better adjustments.

Live by the red velvet rope policy of ideal patients. Doing so will increase your productivity and happiness. Plus, it enables you to do your best work, which means your patients get the best results possible, which in turn leads to more clients and referrals than you can handle by yourself.

For maximum joy, prosperity, and abundance, think about the person you are when you are performing optimally, when you are with all the

people who inspire and energize you. Now think about all of the frustration, tension, and anxiety you feel when you work with patients who are less than ideal—not so good, right?

Wouldn't it be great to spend every day working with patients who are ideal for you, patients whom you can hardly believe you get paid to work with? This ideal is completely possible once you identify whom you want to work with and determine with certainty that you will settle for nothing less. Once you do that, it's just a matter of knowing which of your existing patients qualify and how to acquire more just like them.

**1.1.1 Written Exercise:** To begin to identify the types of patients you don't want, consider which characteristics or behaviors you refuse to tolerate. What turns you off or shuts you down? What kinds of people should *not* be getting past the red velvet rope that protects you and your business?

## Dump the Duds

Let's take this a step further. It's time to dump your dud patients. We can just hear your shocked protestations and exclamations. "I thought this was a book about getting patients, not dumping them!" We're referring to the *dud* patients—not *all* of your patients. It sounds harsh but think about it. Your dud patients are those you dread interacting with, who drain the life out of you, bore you to tears, frustrate you, or worse, instill in you the desire to do them—or yourself—bodily harm, despite your loving nature and desire to serve.

The vast majority of chiropractors are servant leaders. They choose chiropractic as a profession because they want to help others. It's admirable, but over time, many of these same chiropractors experience extreme burnout from working with too many dud patients.

Christine found herself in this situation and, at first, was terrified at the thought of dumping her dud patients. She thought if she got rid of even one dud patient, her business would crumble. After all, a chiropractic practice requires many patients to be successful.

There are likely many reasons you *think* you can't dump your dud patients, and we know this can seem really scary early on, but hang in there

with us. Embrace the concept and trust that this is sound advice from loving teachers and a necessary step on the path to booking yourself solid.

Why have patients, or anyone for that matter, in your life who zap your energy and leave you feeling empty? You might decide to dump 10 dud clients in one week or you may decide to dump one per month over the next year. The red velvet rope policy may be provocative. It might not feel like an easy thing to do. It requires a leap of faith (faith in yourself), but the emotional and financial rewards will be transformational. Within a few weeks of dumping your duds, you may add a dozen or more delightful patients. Sure, you'll increase your revenue if you add more ideal patients to your roster, but you'll also feel at peace and at ease as a business owner and chiropractor. You'll enjoy your work more. It may not happen overnight. But over time, your red velvet rope policy will serve as a protective moat around your castle. It'll keep the duds away and ensure you choose your ideal patients. People who inspire and energize you and, more important, enable you to do your best work.

Ask yourself the following: "Would I rather spend my days working with incredibly amazing, exciting, super cool, awesome people who are both patients and friends, or spend one more agonizing, excruciating minute working with barely tolerable patients who suck the life out of me?" Any initial discomfort or loss you may feel when dumping your duds will pay off in the long run.

Using the phrase "dump your dud patients" suggests that there is something wrong with them. But that's not necessarily the case. Well, in some cases you may have a real nut job on your hands, but most of the time, they're just not right for *you*. Patients who are not ideal for you could be ideal for someone else. Keep in mind that you don't need to create conflict and fire patients. You just need to help them find a better fit. You can be tactful, diplomatic, and loving. You can even attempt, when appropriate, to refer them to a colleague who might be a better fit. Whenever possible, keep it simple. Try "I'm not the best person to serve you." Or "I don't think we'd be a good fit."

Are you always going to get a positive response when dumping your dud patients? Maybe not. If the first thing that comes to mind is "I don't want anyone out there thinking badly of me" we're with you. We love helping people, and we want people to think well of us. But living life fully can require difficult conversations and you can't please everyone. To even try is an exercise in futility, as the following Aesop fable demonstrates.

## The Old Man, the Little Boy, and the Donkey

An old man, a little boy, and a donkey were going to town. The little boy rode on the donkey and the old man walked beside him. As they went along, they passed some people who remarked it was a shame the old man was walking, and the little boy was riding. The man and boy thought maybe the critics were right, so they changed positions.

Later, they passed some people who remarked, “What a shame! He makes that little boy walk.” They then decided they both would walk.

Soon they passed some more people who thought they were stupid to walk when they had a decent donkey to ride. So, they both rode the donkey. Later, they passed some people who shamed them by saying how awful to put such a load on a poor donkey. The boy and man said they were probably right, so they decided to carry the donkey. As they crossed the bridge, they lost their grip on the animal. He fell into the river and drowned.

The moral of the story? *If you try to please everyone, you might as well kiss your ass goodbye.*

When considering whom you want to work with, look for qualities in a person with whom you resonate; don’t limit yourself to just thinking about the patients you don’t yet have. Your red velvet rope policy is a filtration system that lets in ideal patients. However, you can choose to loosen or tighten the rope at will. We’re not (necessarily) asking you to turn away your very first patients. We understand what you’re up against. When you start your business, if you feel that you’d like to keep your red velvet rope a little looser so you can work with more patients, go right ahead.

For example, a recent graduate who is just venturing into practice for the first time should have some non-negotiable traits built into their red velvet rope policy, but it could make sense for them to keep their red velvet rope closer to the ground so they can build a patient base and, critically, generate the revenue necessary to ensure profitability for the practice.

Just make sure you know what is ideal and what isn’t ideal about the people you’re letting into the VIP room. As you become booked solid, you’ll tighten your red velvet rope and become even more exclusive so as to work only with those who energize and inspire you—and most important—enable you to do your best work.

**1.1.2 Written Exercise:** Now take a good, hard look at your current patients. Be absolutely honest with yourself. Who among your current patients fits the profile you've just created of people who should *not* have gotten past the red velvet rope that protects you and your business?

**1.1.3 Booked Solid Action Step:** Dump the dud patients you've just listed in the preceding exercise. It may be just one patient, or you may need another two pages to write them all down. Is your heart pounding? Is your stomach churning at just the thought? Have you broken out in a cold sweat? Or are you jumping up and down with excitement now that you've been given permission to dump your duds? Maybe you're experiencing both sensations at the same time; that's totally normal. Do it and you'll feel better.

Taking a Booked Solid action step is a bold action and requires courage. And courage is not about being fearless—it's about owning your fear and using it to move you forward, to give you strength. There is no more rewarding feeling than the pride you'll feel once you've moved past the fear to do what you set out to do. Maybe you'll find it easier to take it one step at a time. Start by dismissing just one of those dud patients. The feeling of empowerment you'll have once you've done it will motivate you to continue pruning your list of patients until the duds have all been removed.

## **What to Do When You Don't (Yet) Have Patients**

*But, Michael, what if I just started my business and don't yet have patients, let alone dud patients?* Ah, yes, excellent point. Consider yourself lucky. You'll never have to worry about dud patients because you'll put your red velvet rope policy in place on day one.

In just a moment, you'll begin to create your red velvet rope policy. If you're starting a new business, and don't yet have many, or any, patients to speak of at this point, as you're working through the exercises, think about

current or former coworkers, friends, or even service providers whom you've hired in the past. To create your future red velvet rope policy, you'll be able to draw on your past experiences—who inspired you and who made you want to do them bodily harm. Refrain. Rewind. Remember: love and kindness. Love and kindness.

## **Pruning Your Patient List**

If you're struggling with the idea of pruning your patient list, keep in mind that it's for your patient's benefit as much as it is for yours. If you're feeling empty and drained, or frustrated and dreading the interaction with the patient, you're giving that patient far less than your best, and it's both of you who are suffering for it. You owe it to these patients to refer them to someone who can, and will, do their best work with them. If you are working with people with whom you do not do your best work, you are out of integrity. And as we discussed, you *are* your patients. When your patients go out into the world and speak of you to others, they are representing you.

With whom do you want to be associated—the duds or the ideal patients? It's also the ideal patients, those who are wildly happy with you and your services, who are most likely to go out and talk about you to others, to refer other patients like themselves, more ideal patients. The fewer duds you allow to hang around, the more ideal patients you have room for, the more referrals you'll get, and so on.

Patients are like family, so we know this can be hard and can cause a period of intense and painful negative energy worrying about those challenging patient relationships. It's exhausting and takes away from providing the best chiropractic care for your patients. It is impossible to be your most effective, most attentive, and most precise self when working with less-than-ideal patients.

Christine admits that she has been a less-than-ideal patient herself. For a variety of reasons, she and her acupuncturist (let's call him Mark) were not a good fit for each other. One reason was that every so often Christine would have a last-minute travel obligation requiring her to reschedule her acupuncture appointment with just a few days' notice. It turns out that Mark really didn't like that. He knew Christine wasn't his ideal patient,

but rather than tell her so, Mark continued to work with Christine while getting more and more annoyed until he became so upset that he blew up, sending Christine a hostile email. More than likely, Mark didn't feel comfortable dumping his dud patients, or the idea had never even crossed his mind. Had Mark not allowed the situation to deteriorate and end on such a bad note, Christine might have been able to refer other patients to him who would have been ideal for him. This acupuncturist's inability to take the Booked Solid action step of letting his less-than-ideal patients go respectfully left both him and Christine dissatisfied with the situation, jeopardizing her reputation in the process.

This is what can happen when you work with patients who are not ideal for you. At some point, you're going to create a conflict, whether intentionally or not, because you're going to be frustrated with those patients. Those patients will think you're not providing them with good service, or even worse, good care, and they'll be right. It doesn't serve you or the patient when you stay in a less-than-ideal situation. Please don't make the same mistake my landscaper did. If you do, you'll have former patients going out into the world telling anyone who will listen that you're the worst person to work with.

## **Creating Your Red Velvet Rope Policy**

The benefits of working with ideal patients are many and meaningful:

- You'll get to do your best work.
- You'll feel invigorated and inspired.
- You'll connect with patients on a deeper level.
- You'll feel successful and confident.
- You'll know your work matters and is changing lives.
- You'll feel fully self-expressed.

My ideal patients have these qualities:

- Bright (quick thinkers)
- Resilient (don't give up when it really matters)
- Punctual (value their time as well as mine)

- Open-minded (to alternative health care)
- Reliable (make and keep appointments)
- Committed (to themselves and their care)
- Positive (naturally optimistic)

Your list might look completely different.

Take heed: how much money a patient has or doesn't have is not what this is about. Your red velvet rope policy considers *what kind of person* you're dealing with, not how much this person has or doesn't have. People with fat wallets are often the primary consideration for many chiropractors who wind up working with patients who are less than ideal. Notice that my list considers the *qualities* of my ideal patients first—who they *are* rather than what they *have* or the circumstances they're in.

**1.1.4 Written Exercise:** Define your ideal patient. What type of people do you love being around? What do they like to do? What do they talk about? With whom do they associate? What ethical standards do they follow? How do they learn? How do they contribute to society? Are they smiling, outgoing, or creative? What kind of environment do you want to create in your life? And who will get past the red velvet rope policy that protects you? List the *qualities, values, or personal characteristics* you'd like your ideal patients to possess.

**1.1.5 Written Exercise:** Now let's look at your current patient base. Whom do you love interacting with the most? Whom do you look forward to seeing? Who are the patients who don't feel like work to you? *Who is it you sometimes just can't believe you get paid to work with?* Write down the names of patients or people you've worked with whom you love to be around.

**1.1.6 Written Exercise:** Get a clear picture of these people in your head. Write down the top five reasons that you love working with them. What about working with them turns you on?

**1.1.7 Written Exercise:** Now go deeper. If you were working only with ideal patients, what qualities would they absolutely need to possess for you to do your best work with them? Be honest and don't worry about excluding people. Be selfish. Think about yourself. For this exercise, assume you will work only with the best of the best. Be brave and bold and write without thinking or filtering your thoughts.

How different were the last two lists? You may have nailed it the first time. Maybe you're right on track, or maybe you have some perfect patient opportunities to uncover.

By knowing who your ideal patients are and selecting only those who have at least 75% of the qualities you identified, you will have more fun, accomplish greater results, and experience incredible joy and fulfillment in your business.

This is beneficial because you'll be able to identify other ideal patients you'd love to work with. People enjoy knowing how important they are to you, and if they know you do your best work with, and for, people like them, they are much more inclined to work with you. It raises the stakes for them.

Look at these requirements and think about how you can start to turn them into filters. As for me, I'm like a giant generator—the more gas (meaning projects or patients) I take in, the more power I create. But the wrong kind of fuel causes me to sputter and conk out. Think about a hot sports car running on diesel fuel—not pretty. Neither is this roadster when he gets the wrong kind of energy. Every engine needs a filtration system to keep the system running smoothly and cleanly, just as you need a red velvet rope policy that will filter out the imperfections.

Christine's patient filters include these considerations:

- She feels more energized and excited after working with her patients.
- Her patients seek her feedback and recommendations, and better yet, they take action when they get it.
- Her patients have faith in the process that leaves some people bewildered and astonished.

- Her patients are not victims. They hold themselves accountable on their journey to improve their health.
- Her patients make their care a priority and are committed to showing up for their appointments.
- Her patients love the office environment and get along well with her team.
- Her patients are naturally optimistic and do not complain (much).

**1.1.8 Written Exercise:** What filters do you want to run your perfect patients through?

### **Ideal Patients, the Duds, and Everyone Else**

As you eliminate the duds, you'll open up room for ideal patients. As you use the Book Yourself Solid system to attract more and more ideal patients, you'll discover that you're happier, more vibrant, more energetic, and more productive. You'll be on fire. You'll be giving your patients the best of yourself and your services, and you'll love every minute of it.

**1.1.9 Written Exercise:** Draw a simple table with three columns. Label the first column "Ideal Patients," the second "Duds," and the third "Everyone Else." Now divide your patients into these three groups. Don't hold back or leave anyone out.

As if that weren't enough, you may begin to notice that many of your mid-range patients, those who made neither the ideal patient nor the dud list, are undergoing a transformation. Why? While you were working with dud patients, you weren't performing at your best. If you think that wasn't affecting your other patients, think again. The renewed energy and the more positive environment you'll create as a result of letting go of the duds will most likely rejuvenate the relationships between you and some of your mid-range patients, turning many of them into ideal patients.

**1.1.10 Written Exercise:** Brainstorm your own ideas for reigniting these mid-range patients. Contemplate the ways in which you may, even inadvertently, have contributed to some of your patients being less than ideal patients. Are there ways in which you can light a new fire or elicit greater passion for the work you do together? Do you need to set and manage expectations more clearly right from the beginning? Can you enrich the dynamics between you by challenging or inspiring your patients in new ways? Go ahead—turn off your left brain logical mind for a moment and let your right brain creativity go wild.

Carefully observe the ways in which your relationships with your patients begin to shift as you embrace the Book Yourself Solid way. Some of your mid-range patients may fall away. Others may step up their game and slide into the ideal patient category.

*When you're fully self-expressed, fully demonstrating your values and your views, you'll naturally attract and draw to yourself those you're best suited to work with, and you'll push away those you're not meant to work with.*

## A Perpetual Process

The process we've just worked through is one that you must do on a regular basis. Pruning your patient list is a perpetual process because all relationships naturally cycle. The positive and dynamic relationships you have now with your ideal patients may at some point reach a plateau, and the time may come to go your separate ways. You'll get more comfortable with the process over time. It's one that has so many rewards that it's well worth the effort.

Working with your ideal patients is one of the best and smartest business and life decisions you can make. It's crucial to your success and your happiness. Prune regularly and before you know it, you'll be booked solid with patients you love working with.