

## Stories Make Your Message Stick

One day I observed a new-patient exam with Marlene. She, like many of your patients, was strapped for money and time. She wanted to get the work done and in a timely manner.

As research for an upcoming speech to a dental association, I asked Marlene, "How did you find this practice?"

She replied, "On the Internet. I researched many different cosmetic practices and was impressed with this office."

I asked her to continue, interested to learn what she saw on this practice's Web site that caused her to make an appointment.

She told me, "I liked the amount of information provided — not too much and not too little. I don't need to see video clips of surgery. But here was the test: The Web site touted excellent customer service. Instead of calling the office, I decided to just email them from their Web site. If they responded within 24 hours, I'd make the appointment. If not, I would go elsewhere."

The front-office manager did email Marlene within that one day, and she decided to get \$17,000 worth of dentistry done in this office.

The purpose of relaying this story is not to educate you about Web sites and emailing. Rather, it's an opportunity to consider the art of storytelling. I could have written an article about returning emails and phone calls in a timely manner, or about how vital every member of your team is in creating success for you. But you already know this, and you'd get bored. But telling you this true story reinforces these points in your mind.

Tell more stories, rather than do data dumps. You'll have more fun, and your patients and team will retain your principles.

You might ask, "Where do I find these stories?" Look around. Develop funnier eyes. Observe with purpose. The idiom that truth is stranger than fiction applies to all of us! When a story with an "aha" happens to you, jot it down. Use the story in a morning huddle to make a point, or with patients to further their treatment, or with your children to reinforce one of your values.



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Ms. Reisman teaches organizations how to communicate in a compelling way. She is a visiting faculty presenter at The Pankey Institute, a speaker at dental meetings, and has been president of Speak for Yourself® for 14 years. To get Karen's Top Ten list on how to tell memorable stories, send a fax to (972) 385-7652. Contact Ms. Reisman at [www.SpeakForYourself.com](http://www.SpeakForYourself.com).

The trick to storytelling is two-pronged. First, your story must make some point that relates to your message. Second, it must be brief with just enough detail; otherwise, your verbiage will become tedious and make patients like Marlene itchy to leave.

Your stories don't have to be just dental-related. Barbara, the receptionist at the Dallas Holocaust Memorial Center, communicates like a genius. She greets guests at the front desk of the museum, takes incoming calls, hands out the audiotape tour, and answers questions. She is busy, as you are.

Even with her varied responsibilities, Barbara always answers the phone as if it were the most important thing she will do all day. One day, she spent 20 minutes on the phone with a retired English schoolteacher who was physically unable to visit the museum.

Barbara asked, "Where did you teach English?"

"Thomas Jefferson High School," the teacher responded. "In fact," she continued, "I vividly recall the story of one of my students. Her mom survived the Holocaust. It's one of the reasons I'm interested in your museum." The teacher concluded, "Do you have any donation envelopes you could send me?"

"Of course!" Barbara enthusiastically replied.

The Holocaust Museum received a \$10,000 check from this retired schoolteacher.

The retired teacher had remembered my story. I was her student at Thomas Jefferson High School, and my mother's story had stuck in her mind for more than 30 years.

I could have written this article about the importance of being authentic and present while fielding phone calls at the front desk. But you already know this. By telling the story, though, you are reminded about the importance of having "Barbaras" on your team, and it validates how memorable stories can be.

Use stories to make your message stick! Storytelling reinforces the message and makes your information come alive. People will want to keep listening to you, and they'll remember what you say.

**Tips on storytelling**

- \* Observe with purpose.
- \* Develop funnier eyes; find the humor in the realities around you.
- \* Keep a story journal.
- \* Think about how a story can embellish your point.
- \* Become a storyteller.

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