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HOW TO TELL A GOOD STORY

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My regular readers know that I am constantly trying to hone in on what you want to know, in addition to what you need to know. Feedback is important to that process.

I often insert offers to request copies of past articles or a resource. The number of people who take me up on the offer helps me gauge the level of interest in the topic.

My past two articles were on marketing. They are simple concepts, really, but it's good to be reminded of the basics. People often forget about the basics amid the hustle of practice and busy personal lives.

I always get a certain level of feedback. When it's particularly high or low, it catches my attention.

And these past two relatively unremarkable articles turned out to be home runs. I say that because quite a number of members reacted by scheduling hotline discussions with me to review and improve their strategies. When I get people to press that call-to-action button, it's as good as it gets.

I sense that a lot more of you have twitchy fingers, ready to act with a bit more provocation. So, for your reading pleasure, I present you with yet another marketing article.

Every one of my hotline calls about marketing is unique. Every caller has their own subset of practice areas or, maybe, a niche. Some are solos and many are not. Geography and clientele varied widely.

In addition, individuals vary greatly in terms of what activities fall within their comfort zone. Individuals likewise differ in how much time they are willing and/or able to invest.

Sometimes, I have to admonish that they are not devoting sufficient time to be effective. We may temporarily digress to other aspects of practice to see where we can make something more efficient, so we have more time to invest in this aspect of building the practice.

So, although there may be a given number of known strategies to employ, my job is to help members find the best ones, and help them create a clear action plan of realistic steps to take to continue making progress on their own. Often that involves discussing the "how" of some steps. I never assume someone just "knows" how to do things.

Often, discussion includes pointing out specific places where hiring someone to assist makes sense, and making recommendations. This always must be done in the context of the available funds a firm has to invest. I want to make sure that your money is being spent wisely, where it will generate the most bang for the buck.

One particular strategy that is frequently discussed is the use of vignettes. Once this concept is thoroughly understood, it is something an attorney can create and use on her or his own, and it costs nothing. And vignettes can be particularly effective strategic tools.

A vignette is a short, conversational story that should be told in such a way as to sound unrehearsed and conversational. It should take no more than two to five minutes to tell. It must be sufficiently interesting to hold the attention of the listener to the end.

Note that the vignette is not the same as the "elevator speech."

[To learn more about the elevator speech, members should send an email request for a copy of "Who You Are in 60 Seconds or Less" to lawpractice@pabar.org. Be sure to include your PBA member ID and county in your request.]

Rather, the vignette is designed to illustrate your expertise in a relatable manner to prospects or even to relate different skill sets to current clients. Think of the vignette as a very low-key way to blow your own horn.

Here are the important steps to building one or more vignettes:

- **What is the particular skill area that you want to illustrate?** Hopefully, it is a differentiator from your competitors. Better, it is both a differentiator, and of particular importance to prospects. Was it a particularly creative solution? Your ability to unravel extremely complex issues? Your superior negotiating skills? Your extensive connections? Make a list, because hopefully there will be many possibilities.

- **Think through your varied accomplishments that demonstrate use of the skill(s).** Again, under each skill, list as many accomplishments as possible.

- **The hard part is finding a way to reduce these points to a short educational and conversational story that can be spoken like a contemporaneous memory**. Be sure to keep Rule 1.6 firmly in mind when creating your story. Don't get mired down in details about particular matters. You just want to convey enough general information to convey the skill.

  Try to put your "client hat" on when doing this part. What issues and concerns do they have? What type of story will demonstrate you have the familiarity and tools to adequately address them?

Once you have your vignettes created and committed to memory, you just need to have your antennae up for the right opportunities to use them. The more "formal" the event (like meeting with a client prospect), the easier it is to segue into one of your vignettes to illustrate a point.

However, at a cocktail party, it takes a bit more finesse to engage in the necessary small talk first. The important takeaway is that vignettes can be used during casual conversations at literally any event.

The best attorney conversationalists I've ever met are absolutely artists at asking simple questions of others, which result in flowing responses. These in turn provide fodder for the next friendly question.

Getting others to talk about themselves simply requires that you demonstrate you are interested in knowing their story.

So no, you should not be displaying your attorney muscles by interrogating! Again, with antennae fully extended, you will frequently find an opportunity to share a vignette which relates to something shared.

As famed psychologist Maslow said, "If the only tool you have is a hammer, everything appears to be a nail."

Make sure you have as many tools in your marketing toolkit as possible. That way you're prepared for every opportunity.

A version of this article originally appeared in the January 16, 2023 issue of the Pennsylvania Bar News.

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