Persuade with a Case Acceptance Story!

How Successful Dentists Use the POWER OF STORY to Get More Referrals and Treat More Patients

PENNY REED | HENRY J. DEVRIES | MARK LEBLANC

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www.indiebooksintl.com

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[CHAPTER 1]

WHY PERSUADE WITH A CASE ACCEPTANCE STORY

Shocking statistic: Dentists are only persuading patients to move forward with treatment 61 percent of the time.

What's so disturbing about this number is that it includes cavities, a treatment that is accepted at least 95 percent of the time (2016 Dental Economics/Levin Group Practice Survey).

Here is the hard news. Many dentists might conclude the roadblock is money. Multiple surveys show the cost of treatment plays a role

in less than 50 percent of cases when a patient doesn't accept treatment [Mitch Ellingson, "Improving Case Acceptance—How to Get More Revenue (and Joy) From Your Practice," July 22, 2018, www.speareducation.com].

Here is the good news: Humans are hardwired for stories. Storytelling can persuade patients to accept treatment. That means healthier patients and wealthier dentists.

Nothing is as persuasive as storytelling with a purpose. In this little book are the keys to proven techniques for telling a great case acceptance story—techniques employed by Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and Wall Street.

In addition to humorous ways to remember the eight great metastories, this book reveals how to include must-have characters into each case acceptance story, including the hero, nemesis, and mentor (spoiler: smart dentists should not make the dumb mistake of making themselves the heroes of their own case acceptance stories).

THE SCIENCE AND ART OF STORYTELLING

In August 2008, *Scientific American Mind* published an article by Jeremy Hsu titled, "The Secrets of Storytelling: Why We Love a Good Yarn." You should read the entire article, but here is a summary.

According to Hsu, storytelling, or narrative, is a human universal, and common themes appear in tales throughout history and all over the world. The greatest stories—those retold through generations and translated into other languages—do more than simply present a believable picture. These tales captivate their audiences, whose emotions can be inextricably tied to those of the characters in the stories.

By studying narrative's power to influence beliefs, researchers are discovering how we analyze information and accept new ideas. A 2007 study by marketing researcher Jennifer Edson Escalas of Vanderbilt University found that a test audience responded more positively to advertisements in narrative

form, as compared with straightforward ads that encouraged viewers to think logically about arguments for a product.[1] Similarly, Melanie Green of the University of North Carolina coauthored a 2006 study showing that labeling information as "fact" increased critical analysis, whereas labeling information as "fiction" had the opposite effect.

People accept ideas more readily when their minds are in story mode as opposed to when they are in an analytical mindset. Telling the right stories, in the right way, can dramatically increase a dentist's case acceptance rates.

PLEASE CELEBRATE ME HOME

"If we want to create more engagement with patients regarding their current condition, they must be involved in the picture and the story of what is currently happening in their mouths."

Those were the words that helped Dr. Please (true story, but name changed) escape a downward spiral that could have doomed her practice.

This is the mess-to-success story of Dr. Please, who had a moderately successful practice in her mid-sized town in Texas. Several years earlier, Dr. Please had moved her home from that suburban town to a major metropolis about an hour away. Due to the commute time and missing the opportunity to take her young girls to and from school, she had reduced her patient schedule to three

days per week, so that she would have more time with her family. In addition, Dr. Please's practice focus is holistic, and the big city marketplace has much greater need and opportunity for a practice with her type of focus. Her goal was to sell her current practice and relocate within minutes of her new home. In addition, due to the upcoming transition, she was highly committed to reducing her debt.

The challenge was that not only had her schedule shrunk, so had her patient base and her practice revenues. This was partly due to the reduced hours the office was open. Dr. Please was also frustrated because she had been spending 5 percent of her collections on marketing, yet wasn't increasing her practice revenues. Dr. Please knew she must get her practice back on track and generate more income in order to have

her selling price after closing expenses pay off her practice debt and give her a nice start on her dream practice.

That's when Dr. Please called Penny Reed (one of the coauthors of this book). She asked Reed if they could work together remotely to get her where she needed to be and also to connect her with a right-fit company to appraise her practice and find a right-fit buyer.

"My concern is that with last year's collections, I will be upside-down in a practice sale, especially after paying broker commissions. My husband is supportive of my dream and wants me to establish a practice closer to home, yet we know we can't break the bank to do it. Is there a way to do this and what sort of coaching plans do you have? I know I need to make an investment,

yet this first phase of my new vision doesn't have the cash flow to support a comprehensive coaching plan."

"Dr. Please, we can absolutely create a right-fit plan for you that supports your goal and endgame with a practice transition that generates more money to your net sale," Reed said. "We must first evaluate your numbers to see where you are, and discover the top areas that you and your team must focus on to not only help you achieve your goal, but also to get the team motivated and believing that they could still achieve their targets even though the practice has reduced its work schedule."

And that is exactly what they did.

In the initial numbers review, they discovered the number of patients

being seen for their preventive hygiene appointments was lacking. This meant that there was a great opportunity, with the right strategies in place, to reengage these patients. A plan was put in place with the team to reactivate those patients, and in a matter of months, not only had the hygiene department production increased, this created more treatment plans for Dr. Please.

Yet, there was still a bit of barrier in the way of achieving greater treatment acceptance.

Reed asked Dr. Please, "How many intraoral cameras do you have?"

Dr. Please replied quietly, "One." That is when Reed connected her with an amazing resource, the website for the company MouthWatch: mouthwatch.com, which has great quality cameras

at an incredible fee. “If we want to create more engagement with patients regarding their current condition, they must be involved in the picture and the story of what is currently happening in their mouths.”

Dr. Please agreed and placed the order that day for two additional cameras. She also agreed to raise the standard in the office that the camera be used at each visit with every patient. This was a gamechanger.

Next, they discussed the conversations taking place in the operatory. “What questions are you and the team asking your new patients when they come in for their first visit?” Reed asked.

Dr. Please replied, “We are asking, ‘What brings you in to see us today?’”

Reed called that a great question, then asked, "Do you ask them what is most important to them regarding their oral health, or what their goals are for their smile?"

Dr. Please paused and a light bulb came on. "Wow," she said. "I know we need to do that, and that is something we used to do. We simply lost our focus and got out of the habit. That is changing tomorrow."

In addition, Reed helped the team be intentional about requesting referrals and put a plan in place to choose several patients each day to specifically ask to send their friends and family. Months later, the practice revenues were up 30 percent. In addition, they made some smart revisions to her marketing budget and cut it in half. Her new patient numbers held strong and

her value per new patient increased by 50 percent, due to her new treatment-presentation storytelling strategies.

At the end of the year Dr. Please shopped for a practice appraiser and a broker. Within hours of her practice being listed, she had a buyer. The transition took place three months later and as of this writing Dr. Please is devoting her time and focus to planning her new practice and spending extra time with her young daughters. She has found the perfect location for her dream practice and is making plans for her buildout and launch.

The moral of the story: patients are hardwired for stories and this can be key with treatment acceptance.