

Welcome to FUNsultations

FUNsultations is a somewhat regular newsletter from FUNsulting, etc. whose mission is to redefine excellence in healthcare through humor. Each edition includes fun, funny *and* practical articles and resources which will enhance the humor potential in healthcare without sacrificing the integrity of the care that is delivered. Remember, a laugh a day gathers no moss (or something like that). Enjoy!

Ronald P. Culberson, MSW, CSP
Director of Everything!
FUNsulting, etc.



News Update

We're sorry to report that our good friend and fellow humor enthusiast, Roz Trieber, died on December 31, 2009.

Roz was the feature of the November 2009 issue of *FUNsultations*. Although she is gone, her work continues to make an impact on others. You can learn more about it at: www.HumorFusion.com

From the Administrator

I'd Rather Sit Through Dexter Than Your PowerPoint® Slides

Let's compare and contrast.

I am a huge fan of the Showtime drama *Dexter*. While I'll be the first to admit that there is very little redeeming social value in the plot of this show, it is absolutely captivating television. Dexter Morgan, the main character, is a serial killer who works as a blood splatter specialist for the Miami Metro Police Department. So essentially, the focus of the show is blood and death—not dissimilar to the some aspects of healthcare.

In contrast, I am not a huge fan of PowerPoint® slides. In case the relationship between PowerPoint® and *Dexter* escapes you, let me explain. Recently, the CEO of a large healthcare association opened a conference by addressing his concerns about the industry. He discussed the challenges facing the association, the need for more advocacy on a national level, and how the association needed to address the challenges. His slides were brilliant. There were charts, graphs, and beautifully designed, multi-colored diagrams. Yet, had I not been the next speaker on the program, I would have slipped out into the hallway and shoved needles in my eyes.

So why, you may ask, would I sit glued to a show about a serial murder but would be unable to tolerate fifteen minutes listening to perfectly good healthcare data?

Well, in a weirdly random yet connected way, I believe it's all about the story—or lack thereof.

Dexter is a good story. Both the plot *and* the characters are well developed. As the show progresses, viewers begin to understand more and more about each character and ultimately, they develop a connection to both the heroes and the villains. Amidst all the gore, we're hooked by this intricate web of plot, characters, and the characters' relationships with one another.

With PowerPoint® slides, however, the story is usually missing. It seems that many healthcare leaders today have lost the ability to tell the story. The story of the patient. The story of the family. Even the story of the employee. Instead, due to pressure from regulators, boards, and third party payers, healthcare administrators have opted to focus only on the data. Along the way, they've left the stories behind.

A few years ago, I helped a healthcare CEO with his presentation skills. Several times a year, he gave a presentation for the new employee orientation. He talked about the mission, the vision, the structure of the organization, the goals for the year, and his idea of a world-class healthcare delivery system. After the presentation, he received polite applause and then the participants left the room to shove needles in their eyes (OK, not really, they shoved coffee and donuts into their mouths but you get my point).

I suggested that this CEO consider incorporating more stories and humor into his presentation. I reminded him that he was speaking primarily to clinical staff and most of them really didn't care about his flashy pie charts. Instead, they were interested in how they could make a difference in the lives of the patients they served.

So, this CEO made adjustments to his presentation. The next time he spoke to the new employees, he had removed some charts, added a few patient stories, and incorporated a funny slide showing his feeble attempt to water ski. The result was dramatic. He received substantial applause and a line of new employees who came up front to shake his hand. Ironically, his water skiing had connected where his pie chart had not. Foible defeats flashy.

The power point of the story is this: a story and a bit of humor will communicate a message far better than any chart, graph, or statistic. So, the next time you need to deliver some information, consider ditching the slides, pulling up a chair, and telling a good story.

Story-for-a-Book
Question:

What's the funniest
thing that ever happened in
your healthcare career?

Send your story to
newsletter@FUNsulting.com
and receive a complimentary,
autographed copy of Ron's book,
Is Your Glass Laugh Full?
*Some Thoughts on Seeing the
Humor in Life.* Please put
"Story for a Book" in
the subject line.

The Best Medicine— What's Hidden in the Senate Healthcare Bill?

My friend and fellow humorist, George Campbell, who portrays Joe Malarkey, The Worst Motivational Speaker in America (www.JoeMalarkey.com), sent me these ten *hidden* items in the Senate Healthcare Bill:

10. All babies will now be delivered Fed-Ex Ground.
9. Doctors will be expected to be as courteous and efficient as the Post Office.
8. Botox will be free to anyone whose name starts with a "P" and ends with an "elosi."
7. Instead of saying "Ahhhhhh," you will now be required to say, "Uh Ohhhhhh."
6. Free vaccine to eradicate malaria, swine flu, and Fox news.
5. Old Plan: Stomach stapling. New Plan: Love handles whited-out.
4. CAT scans now performed using real cats.
3. Hospital stays will be shortened by requiring patients to wear the gown with the gap in the front.
2. Good News: Doctors are required to make house calls. Bad News: You no longer have a house.
1. 3 Words: Surgeon General Kevorkian.

Positive Results

My mom, a Baptist preacher's wife, was checking on one of the elderly women in her congregation who had recently had a mastectomy. My mom asked how she was doing. The woman said that it had been going rough and that after the surgery, she was fired from her job. Just as my mom was about to express sympathy, the elderly woman said, "I guess Hooters doesn't have any use for me anymore."

—Jim Holley

HumorReferrals

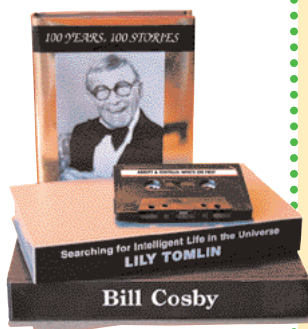
📌 Making Presentations Funnier

Ron Culberson and David Glickman have founded **Funnier Speeches**, a humor writing service for speakers, executives and others who want to make their presentations funnier. As their tagline says: They "**Put (funny) Words in Your Mouth.**" Check them out on www.FunnierSpeeches.com

📌 Humor and Healthcare Resources

Here are a couple of resources to improve your storytelling.

- *The Story Factor* (2nd Revised Edition) by Annette Simmons. Basic Books.
- *The Leaders Guide to Storytelling* by Stephen Denning. August House.
- *The Power of Personal Storytelling* by Jack Maguire. Tarcher.



Discharge Plans

You Are What You Speak

Check out our **Humor Injections** blog at www.FUNsulting.com/wordpress for humor, comments and links related to humor in healthcare. New posts every week!

I'm not sure what the "worst" day in my life has been but a good candidate has to be the day that my daughter, Leah, got lost at the beach. She was about 3 years old and while I was engaged in renting a bicycle to take her for a ride, she proceeded to wander away.

This is how Knox Singleton, CEO of Inova Health System, started one of his "Inova Family Letters." The letters are a tradition going back to the late 90's when Knox was diagnosed with lymphoma. He realized that he needed to explain his frequent absences during treatment without alarming the more than 16,000 staff when their health system was temporarily without a CEO. What evolved was a caring innovative way to connect with the employees by using stories and humor to disclose a bit about Knox and the organization's goals.

Most CEO's, even in healthcare, want to discuss infection rates, third party deficits, or staffing shortages. However, with a largely clinical audience, this information is often deleted from the mental hard drive because the link to quality patient care is often missing. This is where Knox's technique has been more successful than he ever imagined.

The story about his lost daughter is really a metaphor. In his attempt to find her, he was doing a lot of work but not getting any results. He likened this to an Inova effort to improve safety during which staff were doing all the right things but the safety statistics were not improving. By using a story, the staff could relate to the frustration he felt when his daughter went missing. A chart showing the safety statistics would not have connected on the same level.

Knox's use of stories and small-town Southern humor make for a very enjoyable read. The tone of the letters is lighthearted but they make a serious point that

needs to be addressed. Knox says that the staff understand the points much better than if he used his typical "turgid prose" (which, I believe, can be treated with antibiotics).

What this amounts to is relational leadership. In other words, it's not about directing the staff but building relationships that lead to trust and likeability. Once that's established, change can occur in the context of the relationship. In healthcare, where interpersonal relationships are the key to success, this type of leadership is critical.

Knox's letters have been well received. While there are certainly a few left-brain analysts who will always just want the facts, this type of approach works well in a caregiving environment. In fact, other leaders have adopted this style as well.

Similar to stories, humor works in the same way. A bit of self-directed humor can help a leader connect with staff by appearing less stuffy and more personable. I've found that the best leaders I encounter don't take themselves too seriously.

Now, back to the story. Eventually, Knox sought help from the lifeguard to look for his daughter. Turns out they had a system, using radios to communicate along the entire beach, to find lost kids. In just a few minutes, his daughter was found. But not without another point. Knox recognized that the lifeguards had worked together to cover more ground. He suggested his staff consider that as well.

Information is powerful. Stories and humor are engaging. Stories and humor that connect to the important information are life changing.

“ If I were two-faced, would I be wearing this one? ”

—Abraham Lincoln

Your new issue of
FUNsultations!

—Cullen Hightower

“Laughing at our mistakes can
lengthen our own life. Laughing at
someone else’s can shorten it.”

Collectable Quotes from
FUNsulting, etc.

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Credentials

Ronald P. (Ron) Culbertson, MSW, CSP is a former hospice social worker, middle manager and senior manager whose mission is to help healthcare staff and leaders use **Humor as a Path to Excellence**. As a speaker, humorist and author of *Is Your Glass Laugh Full?*, Ron can offer your organization the following:

- Hilarious **PRESENTATIONS** and workshops
- **EMCEE**ing for special events
- Presentation skills **COACHING**
- **Humor WRITING** for written and verbal communications

To find out more, visit www.FUNsulting.com or call (703) 742-8812. To change your address, email us at newsletter@FUNsulting.com

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