

The Power of Stories

by Sara Holtz, ClientFocus

I recently received the Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award. The award was presented at a luncheon at which each of the five recipients gave a presentation on a topic of her choosing – something she felt passionate about.

After the luncheon, I asked several attendees what they thought of the presentations. To a person, they identified their favorite remarks by a story the presenter told.

Those who liked Senator Hirono's speech recalled how she spoke about her mother's leaving an abusive marriage in Japan and courageously taking her children to Hawaii as a single parent. Those who admired Marygold Shire Melli's comments mentioned how astonished they were that she wasn't allowed to sign up for law school interviews because no firms then would hire a woman. Everyone who complimented my speech mentioned how they liked my story about how I had lectured to my dolls as a little girl.

The stories – each of which took only a small fraction of each presentation – were what stood out for the audience. The stories were what connected the listeners to the speaker.

If you want your accomplishments to “stick” with those you are marketing to, develop compelling stories that connect with the listeners and illustrate why you should be hired.

The same is true in your marketing. You may have sterling academic credentials, an impressive list of legal victories, an extensive list of published articles, even significant honors like a first-tier Chambers rating. But what will likely “stick” with those considering hiring you are the stories you tell about how you were able to help a client achieve his or her goals – stories about your results, your dedication to client service, or your creativity in solving tough problems.

Studies show that if you share a story, people are more likely to be persuaded. In fact, research shows that in a presentation, stories are 22 times more likely to be remembered than are facts alone.

So how do you develop memorable stories to use in your marketing?

First, you need to decide what your goal is in telling the story. What do you want the listeners to take away from the story? What do you want them to be convinced of? That you have a lot of experience in handling FCPA compliance matters? That you connect well with jurors? That you have credibility with the electric utility regulators? What do you want them to think, feel, or do as a result of the story you tell?

Then you need to craft your story. I suggest using this three-part template.

1. Describe the situation:

- “I had a client who ...”

2. Describe what you did:

- “I recommended ...”
- “I argued that ...”
- “I negotiated ...”

3. Describe how the client benefited from what you did. (After all, people hire lawyers to solve their problems, not to rack up legal victories.)

- “I was able to settle the case for the cost of defense.”
- “I worked around the clock to close the deal before year-end. Because of that, the client saved a lot in taxes.”
- “I convinced the regulators to allow my client to offer a financial product that turned out to be its most profitable product that year.”

A word of advice: Make the description of what you did as succinct as possible. Too often, lawyers’ stories go into excruciating detail about what they did, describing all the steps they took, all the arguments they made, or all the pitfalls they encountered. The story goes on too long and people lose interest.

A recent experience I had illustrates this. I met a lawyer at a conference who told me about how she was able to settle a contentious dispute between a U.S. and a Japanese company. Owing to her years of experience dealing with Japanese companies, she realized early on that this lawsuit was not going to be resolved with one company writing a check to the other. Rather, settling the case was going to require that her client acknowledge personal responsibility for causing the financial loss. The story was an impressive example of her creativity and expertise. But it went on too long – with a detailed description of the players involved, the background of the dispute, and the “he said and then I said” of the negotiations. I found myself eager to take my leave and make my way to the bar.

If you want your accomplishments to “stick” with those you are marketing to, develop compelling stories that connect with the listeners and illustrate why you should be hired. As my experience at the Brent Award luncheon proves, stories are powerful and memorable.

For some resources to help you craft your stories:

1. Watch some TED talks – ted.com. They are filled with compelling stories.
2. Read “How to Give a Killer Presentation” by Chris Anderson in the June 2013 *Harvard Business Review*.

Happy storytelling!



About Sara Holtz

ClientFocus Founder and CEO Sara Holtz is the author of **Bringin’ in the Rain: A Woman Lawyer’s Guide to Business Development**. Sara helps successful women lawyers become rainmakers. She created the Women Rainmakers Roundtable, which has helped more than 500 women partners develop substantial books of business.

She is the recipient of the American Bar Association’s prestigious Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award.

Before founding ClientFocus, Sara was General Counsel for Nestlé Beverage Company and was the first woman chairman of the Association of Corporate Counsel. She graduated from Yale College and Harvard Law School.

She can be reached at holtz@clientfocus.net. For more information about the Women Rainmakers Roundtable, visit www.clientfocus.net/roundtableinfo.