Soapbox: Strengthen Your Influence and Legacy through Stories

By Wendy Lebov Ed.D., Partner & Founder; Language of Caring, LLC

My mother, Florence Lebov, passed away on December 8th 2016, sixteen days before her 99th birthday. While I am very sad, I am grateful for every year she lived and the blessing of having her as my wonderful mother all these years. My mother struggled with progressive dementia over the last three years, but she always knew me and we found ways to talk to each other right until the end.

As I crafted my mother’s eulogy, it was hard at first to think of what I could say because the last difficult years had been consuming. To help me focus on her whole life and not just the end, I pulled out my mother’s life story.

I have been enamored by people’s stories for many years, so in 1993 I asked my mother if she would allow me to interview her about her life. She said, “What could I possibly have to say?” I ended up spending three days listening to her tell me about her life! Having taken copious notes, I drafted her story (from her point of view) and asked her to fix up the draft to make sure it was accurate and felt like her own. I treasure the memory of those days. Over the years since, I asked my mother periodically to update her story, so it would cover her whole life.

This book has taken on a life of its own, because that’s what written stories do. My mother’s story will carry her life and memory forward for generations.
The Impact of My Mother’s Story

The impact on my mother: Best of all, my mother loved every second of the process. After all, her daughter was bearing witness to her stories with rapt attention. Also, while my mother initially thought she had nothing to say, when reading and re-reading her own story, she was awed and seemed to gain greater regard for herself and her life. Even as my mother’s mental faculties declined, her long-term memory remained strong, and she took even greater pleasure in reading and reliving her story. She loved sharing and sometimes reading her book aloud to her grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

The impact on our family: My mother’s children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren loved hearing and reading her story. They would ask questions to push my mother to tell even more stories. At my mother’s 97th birthday party, everyone received a copy of her story. She loved that and so did all the members of our extended family, who were amazed to learn so much about Mema that they hadn’t known. Finally, as I prepared my mother’s eulogy, I re-read her story and it lifted me up out of the painful last days with her and helped me find the words to celebrate the arc of her whole inspiring life.

My Hope For You

My experience with my mother and her story prompted me to become a fanatical advocate for story-writing and story-sharing in both my personal and professional life. We can show our caring much better if we hear our patients' stories. Most patients relish the opportunity to share them. As leaders and patient experience champions, YOU are in an influential position to promote and use story-writing and sharing to advance your aspirations to improve the patient, family and care team experience, and to make your work more gratifying.

“We learn best – and change – from hearing stories that strike a chord within us.”

John Kotter

Stories touch people. Their emotional elements make them memorable even years later. Stories demonstrate values and illustrate concretely how these values translate into everyday actions. With stories, we can call attention to acts of caring, celebrate them, and use them to invigorate further acts of caring.

As change strategists, we need to make story-writing and sharing an integral part of our plans for improvement and culture change. As I see it, it is a must-have, not a nice-to-have.

I developed a toolkit for patient experience champions to spark and spread the power of stories, including my favorite practical story-writing tips, sample stories and additional resources. Click here to download the complete toolkit: Mobilize the Power of Stories to Strengthen Your Culture of Engagement and Caring or click here for just the list of additional resources. I also encourage you and your team to attend my complimentary webinar, Harnessing the Power of Stories, to learn how you can employ and maximize the power of stories in your work.

No doubt, many of you have employed story-telling, writing and sharing successfully. Please share your methods. Let’s all help each other illustrate, advance and celebrate the transformation stories we’re living. Drop me a line with your tactics, suggestions AND STORIES, and I’ll spread them. Send them to wleebov@languageofcaring.com.
Watch this inspiring video about a special chaplaincy project bringing music to residents of a nursing home in Israel, and the power of music to elevate the spirit (in Hebrew with English subtitles).

“Sometimes music gives us therapeutic tools that medicine can’t offer.”
--Mila Karchovnik, Occupational Therapist

“One resident who used to just sit all day long broke out singing in an operatic voice.”--Tziona Achishena, chaplain and musician

Ah, kindness. What a simple way to tell another struggling soul that there is love to be found in this world.

a.a.malee

Interview with Jeremy Blanchard, M.D., MMM, CPE, Chief Medical Officer & Senior Physician Coach, Language of Caring

Dr. John Jurica, founder of The VITAL Physician Executive, interviews Dr. Jeremy Blanchard. Blanchard shares his journey from a boy who dreamed of being a doctor to a respected physician serving in key leadership roles. He also provides advice to physicians who aspire to be in management roles. Click here to read this powerful interview.
Elicit and Share Patient Stories with Your Team

Tips for eliciting patients’ stories

• Explain and emphasize the importance and benefits of hearing patients’ stories to your team.

• Ask team members to describe a time they heard a patient’s story, and how it affected the caregiver-patient relationship.

• Before interviewing patients, in pairs, practice interviewing one another, with one team member playing the patient. Switch roles so each partner has a chance to interview.

Interview recommendations

• Ask patients to tell you whatever they think you need to know about their situation. “Tell me your story” is a great opener.

• Listen without interrupting.

• Pay attention not only to content but also to non-verbal communication.

• Show your appreciation both verbally and nonverbally.

Action Steps

• Ask caregivers to elicit at least one patient story in the coming month, and to share the experience of doing so at your next staff meeting.

• Discuss ways your organization can help patients share their stories with caregivers and with one another.

Let’s connect at this upcoming conference!

Language of Caring at The Beryl Institute Patient Experience Conference
March 20-22, 2017; Hyatt Regency Denver; Denver, Colorado

This pre-conference workshop Leading Your Patient Experience Strategy to the Next Level originally offered by Language of Caring Partners Wendy Leebov, Jill Golde, and Dorothy Sisneros in 2016, is being offered again due to overwhelming positive feedback.

This session will guide you in assessing your current patient experience effort and identifying the critical steps that will lead your strategy to the next level. The result: strengthened and sustained impact on HCAHPS scores, patient outcomes and employee and physician engagement.

Connect with us in Denver:
Visit our exhibit to chat with us and access great resources.

To schedule a private meeting, contact Jill Golde at: jgolde@languageofcaring.com or 314-571-9607.
By using stories, you can be more influential, supportive, and effective in advancing your objectives. Stories are power tools. When you tell a story, people slow down and listen. Stories engage. Stories teach. Stories illustrate, making the abstract concrete. Stories persuade and move people to action, and their emotional elements make them memorable. And, stories help team members feel more connected, respectful and compassionate. In this webinar, Wendy Leebov, Partner and Founder of Language of Caring, will illustrate how you can more intentionally employ and maximize the power of stories in your important work.

**Highlights:**
- The illustrative power of stories
- Research highlights on the power of stories
- How to engage others in generating fuller, more complex stories
- How to facilitate story-sharing
- How to facilitate discussion of stories for maximum learning

**WHO SHOULD ATTEND?**
- Leaders responsible for influencing individual performance and shaping organizational stories
- Patient experience champions, coaches, facilitators, and other change agents
- Educators
- Physicians and other healthcare professionals intent on being effective communicators

**WEBINAR FACULTY**
Presented by Wendy Leebov, Ed.D – Partner and Founder, Language of Caring, a passionate advocate, speaker and consultant for creating healing environments for patients, families, and the entire healthcare team for over 30 years and author of more than 12 books about healthcare,
Achieve Communication Excellence with Our Patient Experience Solutions

- Web-based training programs that **hardwire** best practice communication skills
- **Proven** CAHPS and patient experience breakthroughs
- Engages and fulfills Staff and Physicians

**TO LEARN MORE**

**Attend a Live Webinar Overview** on March 14 or March 28 or **Contact Us**

Join the 200+ organizations who are transforming their cultures with the Language of Caring

**Contact Us!**

314 300 7701

Jill Golde, MS, Dorothy Sisneros, MS, MBA and Wendy Lebov, EdD—partners at Language of Caring

**Spread the Resources**

- Forward this month’s HeartBeat email to others.
- Share and tweet the following link:
  
  Strengthen Your Influence and Legacy through Stories
  

Join our LinkedIn Group “Quality Patient Experience and HCAHPS Improvement” and add to the rich discussions.

**PLEASE FOLLOW US!**

Language of Caring

Achieving an unparalleled patient experience and a culture of caring through exceptional communication.