

Learning from Limbaugh

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Today the chiropractic communicator has a distinct advantage over any other health care provider, provided the chiropractic communicator knows the research supporting chiropractic, and has the skill to communicate them in a manner that creates an impact with the audience. Knowing the facts and having them at your fingertips, and being able to rattle them off, is only half of the battle. The other half is to present them in a manner which provokes thinking and gets the audience to react in the desired way.

Regardless of your political views, or whether or not you like Rush Limbaugh, we can agree that he is successful at his trade. We can listen and learn from his techniques. He holds himself out as a "harmless little puff ball," but nonetheless heaps scorn on those issues and politicians counter to his beliefs, chuckling or reacting with incredulity. Some view him as the Will Rogers of the '90s, which is a fair comparison.

Will Rogers said he never met a man he didn't like. He would spin his lariat, and in his small town, folksy drawl, would satirize the politicians of his day with humor, a powerful weapon in skilled hands.

Limbaugh has a daily audience larger than Will could have imagined. Limbaugh is heard on 660 radio stations in the US, plus on armed forces radio overseas, not to mention hundreds of television stations. Tens of millions hear him, and millions read his books. If we want to learn about communicating chiropractic, we might as well learn from the most successful in the trade.

Limbaugh's time is spent being critical of people with opposing views. By using humor and keeping his dialogue interesting, and demonstrating a very strong commitment to his beliefs, he not only exploits the weakness of opposing views, but entertains the audience in the process. After attacking some opposing view, he smiles a big toothy smile and says outrageous things like, "Having more fun than any human should have -- how dare I!"

We can't all be Rush Limbaughs using tongue in cheek humor to present our case for chiropractic, but we don't have to be so deadpan serious when getting on talk shows. We can present our supporting material in an enthusiastic and interesting manner. The subject need not be dry. It can be provocative, stimulating, educational, well-documented, objective, and understandable. These are extremely important points to remember.

If you give yourself a chance when listening to Rush, you will note that he puts his message above himself. He'll be the first to tell you that you can't take yourself seriously. It is not an ego thing. We all have egos, and certainly so does Limbaugh, but his is not as outrageous as he implies with his tongue in cheek humor. What he does not do, and no chiropractic spokesperson should ever fall into this trap, is thinking that they are more important than their cause or their message. If they allow this to happen they are finished. Chiropractic is an outstanding profession inhabited by ordinary people who accomplish outstanding health care results. It's not that we are that great, it's because chiropractic is that great. We have simply been fortunate enough to have been able to fall into this great profession; we need to keep our assessment of ourselves and these facts in proper

perspective.

There are things happening in health care field, from the ridiculous to the absurd, and we can use these instances, much in the same manner as Rush Limbaugh. With enough of us doing it, we could cause a revolution in health care toward chiropractic.

There are several pitfalls to avoid. One is to never exhibit prejudice against medicine. Rather, embrace it as a valid profession, but as not the only profession. Always stress the need to work together in the interest of patient welfare. Another is to keep your cool even though you may be tempted to explode. We've all seen examples of angry people shouting and carrying on, and most of us agree that they look foolish. Take a deep breath and smile, then set the record straight.

Never use weak facts that don't have solid documentation to support your position. Be ready to do some name dropping of solid studies that have supportable facts. Don't use jargon that only chiropractors use, and avoid terminology that implies mystical or spiritual overtones. Phrases like "innate intelligence" simply give a wrong impression. When we say, "the natural recuperative ability of our body," it communicates better. And don't try to impress people with scientific terminology which may be appropriate before a group of doctors, but simply doesn't translate well for homemakers, truck drivers, or salespersons.

Strive to make your subject matter not only entertaining but keep it light and highly informative. You want people responding, "Gosh, I didn't know that!" There are any number of amazing facts about the human body (e.g., all the blood vessels and capillaries in the body would circle the world three times); there are all kinds of similar and amazing anecdotes that serve to make people realize that our bodies are very sophisticated machines and that we chiropractors simply try to work with them -- not against them -- with our modes of therapy.

Another pitfall is to go off on tangents and miss the very basic information: what chiropractic is; how it works; why it is safer and more rational within its scopes of therapy; and how the US government and chiropractic are on the same treatment page when it comes to appropriate spinal manipulation. Know the facts about Dr. Mead's British study, the RAND study, Dr. Manga's report from the University of Ottawa, the various worker's compensation studies, Dr. Freitag's hospital study in Chicago, the AVMED study, the University of Saskatchewan study, to name but a few. Don't even think about going on a talk show without having a thorough understanding of these studies and their implications. Properly used they are absolutely devastating to anyone who would attempt to discredit our profession.

Even so, we can be hit with questions for which we don't have answers. Instead of going into a panic or faking it (a disastrous thing to do), simply smile and say, "I don't have the answer to that question, but I can find out." No one can ever condemn you if you don't know all the answers and are honest and open about it.

Earlier I said to be provocative, not controversial. There's a big difference. Controversy requires at least two sides to an issue: ours is so solid and reasonable that there is no controversy. Our position that both medicine and chiropractic have reasonable merit, and must be utilized without bias or vested interest is an open and shut issue. But because of the naivete and public ignorance that still exists, setting the record straight with powerful, well documented facts, and showing the foolishness of doing anything less, is very provocative. It will make people talk about that interview after the show is over. Hence, that makes it an ideal subject matter for talk shows.

When you have such an outstanding and exciting message to give you should radiate that enthusiasm: it's contagious. When you go to a talk show, see yourself as planning to excite and

enthuse your listening audience with your message. If you go in thinking, "I hope I don't bore them with my message," then you are dead before you start.

Form a chiropractic speakers' bureau program in your state if you don't have one already. Remember, you can get some big time free exposure that has more credibility than a paid advertisement. You become the main focus of that talk show, not a paid commercial, which is like a signal to the viewer to visit the refrigerator.

And finally study and practice, practice and practice. It doesn't come easy for anyone. It's like the story of a woman who admiringly approached the maestro and gushed, "I'd give half my life to be able to play like that!" The maestro simply replied, "Madam, I did!"

We clearly have the greatest profession in the world which works in harmony with the patient, but we need to become more assertive. If only two percent of our profession choose to become media-oriented (and that's not asking much), we'd have 1,000 chiropractic communicators capable of converging on virtually every radio, TV and newspaper in the country with our powerful message. Imagine the impact it would have on chiropractic and those individuals willing to get on these talk shows. Let's stop talking about it and do it. I'd be more than happy to assist any state group in establishing a speakers' bureau program. It's there, let's take advantage of it.

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