

Looking for Purple Cows and Leaving Red Herrings

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Seth Godin's excellent book *The Purple Cow: Transform Your Business by Being Remarkable* is about turning the ordinary into the extraordinary. Selecting a different path in marketing and branding can help your chiropractic practice stand out from the crowd and become something exceptional. But how can you apply this concept?

The chiropractic success stories of the easy 1980s, when practice reimbursement was booming, hold almost no relevance in today's marketplace. Now, it seems as if there are chiropractors on every corner, making the need to distinguish yourself absolutely vital. Herein lies the danger of picking up a red herring instead of a purple cow.

Red herrings are those hazardous obstacles that divert our attention toward fruitless tasks or distract us from our original objective. Need an example? Some chiropractors have begun to feel that competition is based on price. This is a pointless struggle for several reasons. First, someone will always "outbid" you and offer an adjustment, exam or whatever for a few dollars less. Second, patients who are willing to abandon your office for the one down the street, just to save a few dollars, probably aren't patients worth chasing. Finally, a quick check of your cost of doing business will tell you that at some point in the "price wars," you may win the battle to gain the patient, but lose the war in no longer making profit.

Driven to Distraction

Chiropractors whose practices are suffering seem to find red herrings everywhere. Consider the following example involving two chiropractors, each with their own practice. Each doctor needs to get new patients in their office, but neither can find the time to do any marketing. A closer look at DC #1 reveals that he took 650 continuing education credits last year in radiology. DC #2 has redesigned his exam forms four times this year alone. There is nothing wrong with furthering your education or refining office paperwork. However, staring endlessly at X-rays or playing around with the font on your new-patient history won't produce new patients. Diagnosis: These DCs are distracted from their objectives.

Unfortunately, there are endless variations of the "red herring" theme tempting the average chiropractor in private practice. Rather than travel down the dangerous path of distraction, continually ask yourself one question in regard to managing your time: Will this activity in some way directly contribute to building my practice or creating income? If it does not, leave your herring *immediately*. Remember the old saying, "Fish and guests stink after three days?" Well, the longer you work on that herring, the more rotten it becomes.

Finding Purple Cows

Instead, invest the time into applying "purple cow" principles and attempt to turn your ordinary practice into an extraordinary one. Find an aspect of your practice or learn a new skill that will differentiate you from the rest of the marketplace. The simplest way to think of this task is to

define why a patient would seek your services, moving from broad answers to more specific ones.

First, why would a patient seek a chiropractor? In answering this, you should have a quick (seven seconds or less) definition that explains what chiropractic does differently than other methods of healing. If you don't have a quick answer to define chiropractic, get one and commit it to memory.

Second, if the patient were to choose a chiropractor, what separates you from *most* other chiropractors? Are you an upper-cervical doctor? Certified in a particular technique? Remember, your answer must be meaningful to patients. To say, for example, that you are an ART doctor is probably meaningless. However, to explain that you utilize a technique that is popular among athletes and particularly well-suited for complex athletic injuries is understandable to the average patient. You may not be the only DC in your area with such training, but now you are especially attractive to athletes.

Your final task is to further differentiate yourself from every other office in your town or geographic area you pull from. To achieve this, your office must truly offer some unique service or combination of services that no one else does. Maybe your chiropractic office is the only one in town open until 8 p.m. Perhaps you're the only office that offers chiropractic, massage and acupuncture all in one location.

Whatever it is, you must find your "purple cow." Once you've found your cow, be sure to train your staff about it! Singing your own praises carries a lot less weight than if your staff does. Once you're all on board, market that cow to your patients and the public.

Why a Purple Cow Beats a USP

Oftentimes, you will hear the "purple cow" referred to as a "unique selling proposition" (USP). The key difference, according to Seth Godin's book, is that "purple cows" attract attention. They are not only innovative and unique (as a USP); more importantly, they are *interesting*.

This brings us back to the red herrings. Certain features of your practice may be unique for your area. For example, advertising that you have a bachelor's degree in drama may corner the market on uniqueness in your town. However, most patients do not care if you can play the role of Hamlet. Unique is not necessarily interesting. Stay focused on unique factors that will attract patients. Everything else is meaningless.

The Purple Cow in Action

Let me tell you that being a purple cow *works*. And the bigger, bolder and more purple your cow is, the better. Here's a quick example from a portion of my own practice. Over the past several years, I have attempted to implement purple cow thinking at the above three levels and my practice has grown steadily with each year. However, in 2005, I decided to consciously try to expand my services in two areas: I wanted to see more pediatric patients and I wanted to see more patients who had nonmusculoskeletal conditions - not just back pain.

We added two new purple-cow features to our office that separated us from every other office in town. We marketed them to patients, and our office grew 25 percent. In 2006, we now have six features that separate us from most other chiropractors and five purple cows that separate us from every other DC in town! The 2006 numbers just came in, and we're up 18 percent from 2005. That's a total of 43 percent increase in two years.

Think I'm worried about a chiropractor down the street who has lower fees than me? Think I have time to fiddle with my new-patient forms? Not as long as I have my purple cows. Take the time

today to think about how you can transform your practice into something extraordinary. It will make your practice both more profitable and more enjoyable. Just remember to leave the red herrings behind and pick up a purple cow (or two).

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