



Marketing Matters

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Every once in a while I run into someone who says “We don’t believe in Marketing,” and it never ceases to dumbfound me. For a moment or two I just stare with incredulity, much like a deer staring at ominously approaching headlights on the highway. I’m not quite sure what it means to “not believe in Marketing”. Is it possible they mean they don’t believe Marketing is useful or constructive? That’s not unlike saying “We don’t believe in telephones. Instead of making a giant phone company richer, we support a local farmer who raises carrier pigeons, and just use those to stay in touch with patients and referral sources.” No, it’s really not a far-fetched example. Marketing, just like phones, is a tool that makes you more efficient and more effective at what you do. It allows you to serve more people, and serve them better. Making a conscious decision to put Marketing on the back burner simply makes you your own worst enemy, because it ensures your competitors will eat you alive.

If Marketing is a dirty word to absolutely anyone in your organization, it’s because they don’t understand what it is. Isn’t Marketing the same thing that makes us buy things we don’t need, or puts profits ahead of people, or employs misleading ads and dishonest salespeople who will say anything to close a deal? Yes, that’s the one. It’s also what raises awareness about what hospice care is among people who desperately need it; it’s what helps raise money for hospice organizations, it’s what helps recruit great staff, measure patient satisfaction, and establish relationships with referral sources. You can use a baseball bat to score a home run at a little league game or you can use one to rob a liquor store: The bat is no assault rifle; it wasn’t built with a destructive purpose in mind. If used as intended, it will help your kids have a good time on a summer afternoon; if misused, it can be the instrument of a crime. As a tool, Marketing can also be used in ways that are constructive and noble—or it can be misused. *How* you use it is up to you. Whether or not you use it, though, is not up for discussion.

That may sound absolute, but it’s a fact that using Marketing is absolutely unavoidable. If your hospice has a brochure or a web site; if you send out letters to prospective donors or hold a fundraising event; if you look for new ways to establish relationships with doctors, hospitals, nursing homes, or other organizations that can refer patients to you, then without question you’re using some form of Marketing. So every organization uses some form of Marketing, but using it well is something you can still opt out of. The issue then becomes whether you want to use Marketing in a strategic, cohesive, deliberate manner, or use it reluctantly and apprehensively. Which do you think will contribute to making your hospice more competitive?

When you care for patients, you strive to be extraordinary; you use all your experience and expertise, all your resources, towards serving them and their families in the best possible way. When you use Marketing, you should strive to be extraordinary too. Achieving that is not always easy, but it’s definitely always worthwhile. Future columns will explore a multitude of ways in which you can use

Marketing more effectively to achieve virtually every goal your hospice has, from caring for patients and families to recruiting staff, fundraising, getting referrals, increasing awareness—and more. For now, let's agree on one thing: "We don't believe in Marketing" is a statement that will, in fact, cause active harm to your hospice organization.

Educate your staff about Marketing; eradicate their fears and apprehensions about it, help them embrace it and seek out ways to use it expertly in order to serve people better! Marketing Matters: Case closed!