Our major work, as psychiatric nurses, is persuasion. We encourage our clients, their families, our colleagues, and even our friends to try different lenses, to trade in one belief for another, or to see the world in a different way. This work is often accomplished by telling stories. In ancient times, these stories were called parables.

Stories are accounts of things that happened, sometimes embellished so the original event takes on fictional properties. Whether the story is real or not does not really matter when one is trying to persuade. However, when stories become actual lies, that is an entirely different story. Newspapers carry stories of events, often with interpretations of why the event, disaster, discovery, or unexpected outcome happened. Many stories that survive telling and retelling become history or legend.

Parables are a special kind of story, with the intent of imparting ethical positions or religious or moral values. Socrates used parables extensively in his philosophical teachings but was not an author. Plato, one of his most famous pupils, captured these, and this approach became known as the Socratic method, where the parables were mixed with heavy questioning.

Memorable lessons learned have often been hooked to compelling stories. You might take a moment or two to recall your own personal, cherished lessons. Who told you the stories? What was the context? How did you learn the lesson? How did you teach others?

Some stories are long and others are short. When they are delivered well, the main point sticks and is easy to recall.

Years ago, Howard Leventhal, a social psychologist at Rutgers University, told about how one of his graduate students used stories in an experiment to see how young children could be persuaded to never start smoking cigarettes. The student invited the participants, ages 7 and 8, to tell a story about how they had been warned by a parent not to do something but ignored the advice and the outcome was bad. For example, one child was told, “Be sure to keep the door closed so the puppy doesn’t run out.” The child ignored this, and the puppy ran out of the house and was killed by a car. Another child was told, “Be careful. Don’t touch the railing because there is fresh paint.” Ignoring this advice resulted in ruining her new dress with paint.

When these stories were told, collected, and shared with other children, the graduate student coupled his message with the lesson learned. The message was: “Never smoke. Never agree to try a cigarette. Do not do this, because bad things will happen to your lungs.” The experiment was a success in the short term, but unfortunately there are no long-term data to document the sustainability of the intervention, and the study was never published (H. Leventhal, personal communication, September 6, 2012).

Since I have been a psychiatric nurse for many decades, I have many stories I have told and have received wonderful feedback from clients, colleagues, and former students. For example, the son of a divorcing couple still carries in his wallet a let-
Our goal is that each of the published articles is useful to our readers by providing new ideas or new ways to practice in various clinical areas.

REFERENCE


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