

Lessons From A Toothache – Part 1

By David C. Miller



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AN UNFORTUNATE BITE

It all started with a strip of bacon. I was out having breakfast with my son, Brandon. It was his birthday (June 17) – he turned 15. We celebrated by getting the Hungry Man’s breakfast at a local diner.

I took a bite out of the bacon strip and hit something hard. It turned out to be a piece of my wisdom tooth! The dentist said it had to come out – there was not much of the tooth left. In fact, he recommended pulling out all four while I was at it.

Fortunately, I was not in any pain and I started down the track of getting this problem solved. I quickly realized that you can’t just call an oral surgeon to get your wisdom teeth extracted the same day. You need to schedule a consultation and then the procedure may be weeks later.

I was nervous that I was playing with a time bomb. Sooner or later the exposed nerves were going to scream out for attention. I had to schedule everything and get through a vacation first.

In addition, I found out that this procedure wasn’t covered under health insurance – I needed dental insurance. Given the cost of extracting four wisdom teeth, dental insurance made sense here. I found one without a waiting period, but I still had to wait until August 1 for it to kick in. I scheduled the procedure for August 9.

Then it happened. Six weeks after the “bacon incident”, the exposed nerve exploded. The pain was tremendous. And, of course, this occurred in the middle of my vacation! I got antibiotics and pain relievers – downing Ibuprofen like it was candy.

There was no relief. I got home, and there were still three weeks until the date of my surgery. I never knew how brutal tooth pain could be. Finally, I cried uncle and scheduled to have the offending tooth pulled on July 27. I couldn’t wait any longer, didn’t have insurance and didn’t care how much it cost.

The relief was worth any price!

LESSON #1: NO PAIN = LACK OF URGENCY

As I recovered from the surgery I had a chance to reflect over the past six weeks. These little lessons can help you as you work to grow your business or consulting practice. They also apply if you are an executive looking at how to better sell your ideas to the C-suite.

The first thing that occurred to me was my willingness to test fate and put off the surgery. When I first broke the tooth, I was worried, but the combination of experiencing several days of no pain and learning about how much an uninsured procedure would cost me caused me to put off the surgery. I wanted to get the insurance in place and save as much money as possible.

The pain of the uninsured visit was greater than the pain (which was zero) of my broken tooth.

In the same way, if a prospect is not moving to purchase your product or service, they are not experiencing enough pain with their current situation.

LESSON #2: ACTION IS DIRECTLY PROPORTIONAL TO THE AMOUNT OF PAIN EXPERIENCED

I was willing to put off the procedure to schedule it after my vacation and after I got insurance coverage. Other variables beside the health of my tooth came into play. I was willing to roll the dice, take my time and approach the situation logically.

When the pain exploded, my priorities changed. I wanted to schedule the procedure as soon as possible and was willing to pay any price to get it taken care of. It was about action, not about the analyzing the most economic way of getting the procedure done.

This is what it takes for us to be successful selling products, services or ideas to prospects. We must find the pain the prospect is experiencing and it must be acute enough to take action if we want to be successful.

How can we apply these lessons? Here's the first way:

STRATEGY #1: FIND PROSPECTS EXPERIENCING GREAT PAIN

The easiest way to grow your business is to find prospects who are experiencing severe problems in areas where you can help them. I've worked with many professionals who provide services that are "nice to have" – but not perceived as "I must have this now."

There are a few necessary ingredients here:

- 1. Be crystal clear on your target market.** Know who your ideal prospects are. Who is having the types of problems for which you have solutions? Where is the pain the greatest? What are the demographics and psychographics of these prospects?
- 2. Craft a marketing message focused on the pain.** Most professionals' messages are generic and focus only on solutions. If this is you, your prospects will have a hard time understanding exactly what you do and if you are the right answer for them. Your message will resonate if you connect with the pain they are experiencing.

In my situation with the toothache, which do you think would have caught my eye more?

- "We perform wisdom teeth extractions." Or
- "Have tooth pain that is making you miserable? Call us to schedule immediate relief."

Make sure your marketing message causes your prospects to "raise their hand" as they read about the problems you solve. You want them to be thinking "that's me" as they hear your message.

- 3. Get your message in front of your target prospect** Don't be the "best-kept secret". You need to get your message out in front of your ideal prospects so they know you exist. We live in a big world and our reach is greater than ever before.

There are 100 times more qualified prospects than you could service in a lifetime.

So be encouraged. You simply need to choose a few marketing strategies to get in front of those prospects who are dying to work with someone like you.

First, you need to think about where your ideal prospects congregate. What association meetings do they attend? What trade journals do they read? If you are an executive with an internal prospect, how can you best get in front of them?

Some of the best strategies are:

- Speaking (live or virtual)
- Writing – articles, newsletter, white paper
- Networking
- Referrals
- Direct invitation – invite them to have lunch, for example

The key with Strategy #1 is that we are looking for prospects who are ready to buy. They just need to connect their pain with our solution. This is the fastest way to grow your business, because there is little selling or persuasion involved. Their urgency is great and they are ready to take action now.

In the next issue of *The Stepping Stone*, I will share two other strategies to non-manipulatively utilize the concept of "pain" to grow your business and influence. ●

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