

GMP Training Systems, Inc.

Creators of the GMP Ready-to-Use Training System™

Using Stories, Anecdotes, and Metaphors to Make your GMP Training Come Alive

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“A picture is worth a thousand words.”

As a consultant and trainer with over three decades experience in the FDA regulated industries, I know that this proverb is true. I have helped numerous companies improve their communications with their employees by helping them express ideas and concepts through stories and word pictures.

Likewise, my trainings are full of stories, anecdotes and metaphors. These visualization techniques help people remember and help people better understand what can be complex issues and situations.

If you've ever attended a technical conference, convention, or symposium, you've likely encountered a presenter who is in love with his/her data. They use slides with tiny numbers and lots of them. They put these slides up on the screen for everyone to see and wait for the “oohs and

aaahs.” Usually the presenter is the only one oohing and aahing while the people in the audience are squinting trying to figure out what's on the screen. These presentations often result in a forgettable experience. People rarely learn and very rarely remember what was discussed in these boring sessions. It's too bad, since many of these presenters have good things to say. They just don't know HOW to say them.

Face it, GMP and related compliance topics can be dry, dull, and boring. The content itself is just not exciting. So if we want people to learn and remember, it is our responsibility as presenters/trainers/teachers to make the content interesting and a memorable experience.

One proven way to make GMP topics interesting is by using Stories, Anecdotes, and Metaphors. Here are three tips on how you can use stories, anecdotes, and metaphors to

make your training sessions memorable and meaningful.

MAKE IT PERSONAL

When opening a GMP training session, I use a visual (PowerPoint slide) with a picture of me and my family. I point out that this is a picture of customers of the pharmaceutical and medical device industries. I take a prescription drug daily to help manage my cholesterol level because genetics has blessed me with a natural cholesterol level on the upper side of normal. I point out that my father, in his late 80's, has two artificial knees to help him stay ambulatory, and that my mother has a stent in one of her coronary arteries.

The message is that this is a personal business. What we do in our industry is either save lives or improve the quality of life. This sets the framework that what we will discuss in this training session is serious business. Regular people – people you know – depend on us to do our jobs properly all the time. Often I add another picture of me with little children. Who can resist the trusting smiles of children? And their lives are also affected by what we do. As parents we trust that the people who manufactured the drugs or medical devices we administer or use with our

children did their job right all the time. This sets the tone for the training we are engaged in. It becomes personal.

CAPA - CORRECTIVE AND PREVENTIVE ACTION

Here's where one can use the metaphor of the fire department. Most people employed by the fire department are firefighters. They ride the red (or yellow or green or white) trucks with lights flashing and sirens blaring careening their way through traffic to put out a fire. There's a lot of drama there – a lot of adrenaline coursing through the veins of the firefighters as they work to put out a fire.

But there are others employed by the fire department who don't ride on the trucks and don't wear the pounds of protective gear. They drive cars and carry clipboards. They conduct inspections of public facilities. Their responsibility is to help prevent fires. There is little drama and no adrenaline in this aspect of the fire department's work.

Now if you're a Hollywood film maker and want to make a movie about the fire department, who would you choose to base your story on? Of course all movies made about the fire department have

featured the firefighters. That's where the drama is.

But in our industry, we strive for little drama in operations. Smooth and consistent systems and processes are our aim. There is where the PA in CAPA comes in. Preventive Action should be stressed. Sure, CA (Corrective Action) is necessary when things go wrong. But the more we invest in PA (Preventive Action), the less CA will be necessary. The aim is to build robust systems and processes.

Here's where the drama builds however. We fall into the loop of CA followed by CA followed by CA. The excuse or rationalization we give is that there is no time or no resources available to do the PA. So our CAPA program becomes CA-CA-CA. This situation will certainly invite a Warning Letter from FDA. After all, this condition is frequently cited by FDA in Warning Letters issued.¹

One way to emphasize the importance of PA is to use the following abbreviation for Corrective and Preventive Action – **caPA**. Using caPA instead of CAPA sends the signal about the relative importance of Preventive Action to Corrective Action. Start using **caPA** in your company. It's a good step in creating awareness that PA

should be high on our list of priorities.

CHECKING AND DOUBLE CHECKING

Checking and double checking is a critically important aspect of GMP. The impact of a mistake, mix-up, or error can be monumental. Everyone knows how important checking and double checking can be. Here's a tip on making it understandable and keeping the awareness level up.

In my trainings I often ask people if they have ever driven to work, pulled into a parking space and have no memory of the trip in. Everyone raises their hand. At this time I usually say something like, "Aren't you glad your car knows the way?"

So here's the point. Driving a car is a skill that is fairly easily mastered, and for most of us, a skill we learned and mastered a long time ago. Driving a car is a fairly routine, repetitive, redundant task. It really doesn't require much thinking. Most of us navigate our way through city traffic every day without really paying close attention to what we're doing.

Then I ask how many jobs or tasks in a company can be characterized as fairly routine, repetitive, and redundant. The answer – lots of them. These

tasks or jobs are breeding grounds for complacency.

Just as many traffic accidents are the result of complacency, many mix-ups and errors in our operations are the result of complacency.

Checking and Double Checking is an effective tool to guard against complacency. Effective Checking and Double Checking requires discipline. Many places in our documents require a second signature. This is independent verification, not just a second signature. The second signature is the Double Check. The person performing the Double Check (Independent Verification) must understand the importance of their role and the consequences if they do not

perform this task accurately and thoroughly.

CREATE YOUR OWN STORIES, ANECDOTES, AND METAPHORS

You should be able to develop additional ways to use stories, anecdotes, and metaphors to make your GMP training come alive.

The objective in using these techniques is to create word pictures in the minds of the participants. These pictures stay with people long after the words are gone. Need proof? While asleep do people dream in pictures or text?

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¹ FDA Warning Letters www.fda.gov/ICECI/EnforcementActions/WarningLetters/default.htm