



How To Avoid Boring Testimonials (And Get 1000-1500 Word Stories Instead)

Three Month Vacation Podcast

Sean D'Souza: This is the Three Month Vacation. I'm Sean D'Souza. It's August 13, 2008. The time? It's 9:56 AM. Olympic champion Michael Phelps is standing behind his starting block. He bounces. He bounces lightly on his toes. Then the announcer calls his name and he steps onto the block. Michael always waves his hands thrice; he's done that since he was a kid. He then steps on the block again. He gets his position, and then the gun goes off and he jumps into the pool.

The moment he's in the water he realizes something is wrong. He doesn't know what is wrong but the moisture seems to fill up the goggles. By the second turn, everything's blurry. By the third lap, his goggles are full of water. But Michael is no longer in Beijing; he's back in Michigan. The pool is a familiar practice pool, not Olympic pool. There's no roar of the crowd. It's just Bob Bowman, his coach. Bob has turned off all the lights off in the Michigan pool just so Michael can learn to swim blind, just in case something like this were to happen, something's that's happening right now at the Olympic finals.

Winners always plan, and this is the difference between winners and those that struggle. The ones that struggle don't seem to have a plan in place. For something as minor as a testimonial you might think well, I don't really have to do that much planning. After all, the testimonial is about the client, isn't it? You just ask them the questions or you ask for a testimonial and they give you the testimonial.

That's not true. The greatest testimonial is not some sugary-coated "I like your stuff. Your stuff is so great." The restaurant testimonial is a journey. It's a journey of how the customer bought your product or service, the trials and tribulations they went through, and finally, how they came out at the end. It's more like a movie than just a little Twitter feed.

As you'd expect, there are three steps to get there, and we will take those itty bitty steps and we'll get there, and then we'll have our action plan, just one thing you can do, as always. What are the three things that you have to do to ensure that your testimonial is really good? This doesn't matter whether you're doing a course or you're a consultant or you have a product like a book or anything other product. You have to go through these three steps. These three steps don't work in every single instance, but in most instances you'll find that it's very, very useful.

What are the three steps? Step number one is to make an appointment. What is an appointment? Let's find out. The second thing is not having examples. Why do examples matter in the first place? The third, and probably the most important, is not having the requisite questions. What are the questions? What questions do we need to ask and how do we get the answers out of the client?

This is what a journey is all about. It's about planning. It's about storyboarding. It's not just about showing up for your testimonial and then hoping that the client will give you a great testimonial. We'll take this journey and we'll figure out how we get this great testimonial. When you finish this journey, go back to episode number 37. At 37 you learn the specific points where you can ask for testimonials and get those testimonials long before your project is completed. Not after the project, but before the project is completed. Now we're on episode number 39, and let's find out the three steps that you have to take to make sure that you get these amazing journey-like testimonials.

What's the first step that you have to take? The first step that you have to take is making the appointment. Most of us make the appointment at the wrong spot. The spot is usually after the job is done. The appointment needs to be made before the job is done. I explained to you in episode number 37 how we do this in our workshops. On day one there are people that give testimonials, on day two there are people that give testimonials, and day three there are people that give testimonials. What we're doing is we're making appointments. Renuka will go ahead of time, meet these people, make sure that they're ready at a specific point in time. They're seated somewhere. We have the equipment ready. It is an appointment.

The same thing applies to your business. Even if you're a consultant, or you're selling a product, you want to make an appointment with a client. You have to be there most of the time. Even if you can't physically be there, you have to make an appointment with the client so that they know this testimonial is coming up. It's not something you just spring on them. They know exactly on this week at this time there's going to be a testimonial. We do this on our courses as well. Before the course ends, as

part of the course, clients are asked for their testimonial. They're also asked for their feedback, and we get feedback before testimonials because it helps them get everything out of their system before they give a testimonial. But there is an appointment.

This is the part of the planning that a lot of people miss out on. They just send an email to someone expecting that the someone, that client, is going to respond whenever you feel like it, but the client is not going to respond. They need an appointment. It's best to get a testimonial by video because obviously you can get the video and the audio and the transcript. But even an audio testimonial, get on the phone, speak to the client, record the call, and that's an appointment. If you are live at an event, you've got the video, but even if you've got a course and you've got 20 or 30 or even 100 people in your course, you can allocate a certain section of the course where they come in, they know that that's testimonial time. That's an appointment. It's fixed. Then you get your testimonial. The first thing you got to realize is I've got to make an appointment and I've got to stick to that appointment.

The second part of the planning process is where a lot of stuff goes wrong. You may do everything right. You may fix the appointment, ask the right questions, but you won't get a testimonial like you expected. That's because you haven't recreated that actual moment. You know the point when Michael Phelps jumped into that pool and was kind of blind? He'd already lived that moment. It was something he could call upon on demand. He was just going back to Michigan, not swimming in that pool in Beijing. To get your clients back to Michigan, what you have to understand is that they have to have something, some form that they can see, something they can refer to so they can give you something that looks exactly the same or very similar.

This is not what most of us do. Most of us just show up and ask a bunch of questions. The client needs to see great testimonials in the first instance. When we're doing a course, what we do is we get them to look at examples of two or three testimonial in advance, the testimonials that we've thought are good testimonials. We get them to read it, and they read it because they want to do a good job. They want to give you a good testimonial so they read the earlier testimonial.

Now some of our existing testimonials, in fact, a lot of our existing testimonials, are between 800 hundreds to 1,500 words long. When you look at a template like that, when you look at a situation like that, what are you're going to do?

The answer is very simple. You're going to try and match that as far as possible. When you don't give the client the example, they don't know what to shoot for, but having read that 1,200 word testimonial, they know what to shoot for. That's why we don't get one-line answers. Because once you get one-line answers to your testimonials, say you ask ten questions and you get ten lines as answers, technically it's not a journey. It's a terrible testimonial. You can't really use it. You have to trash it the moment you get it. There's nothing there. You have to have the journey, and the journey consists of 600, 800, 1,200 words. Clients will write that out.

Now, not all clients will sit down and write it out, so that's where the phone comes in or the video comes in. We speak at three words a second, so how many words do you get in a minute? Yep, that's 180 words, which means that in ten minutes you can get 1,800 words. That's a pretty big testimonial, isn't it? But the client needs to see the testimonial, and when they do, they get a good feel for it and they give you an equally good testimonial.

In a live situation you think, how am I going to do this? What we do is we take a client who has already been through the testimonial process before and we get them to answer the questions. We get the rest of the audience to look at us asking the questions and look at the response that we're getting from the client. Of course they follow through. They follow exactly what the previous client has done, so we get video testimonials that are just as long - five, ten minutes long. Then you have a wealth of information and you have a journey, and you don't have this crappy testimonial that you have to throw out right away.

This takes us to the third part, which is asking the right questions. When many of us ask for a testimonial we usually say something like "Can you give me a testimonial?" Then you wait and you wait, and you wait. You don't exactly get a testimonial because the other person doesn't know what to answer. In The Brain Audit we have six questions. You can find them on the internet, or email if you like. I can send you those six questions.

However, in courses like the article course we have 17 questions, and that is to get a much richer experience out of the clients. Every situation is going to require a different set of questions, and you're going to have to play with those questions a little bit, not too much. You don't want to really get that creative with your questions. What you're really trying to achieve is a journey. You're trying to achieve a situation which is a before, a midway point, and then the final. What has been the result?

We've put together some really cool templates, but [The Brain Audit](#) is a very good start. The six questions in The Brain Audit, you get an amazing testimonial from those questions alone. If you've done any of our courses, or if you want the questions, just email me at sean@psychotactics.com, and I will send the questions to you. That's just a thank you for listening to this podcast.

Anyway, to get back, the point is very simple. You have to ask the right questions if you're going to get the right answers. Let's just summarize what we've learned so far. The three things that we covered today were first, we need to make an appointment. We can't just send something to someone and hope that something happens. We want to get the journey. We want to get the story. We want the details. We want the starting, the middle, the end. So an appointment is necessary.

The second is we have to have examples. If a client doesn't see those examples, they don't know what to shoot for, they don't know what length to shoot for, but mostly they are not motivated to give you more detail. They'll give you one-line answers and then you think that was pretty useless.

The third thing is not having the questions. As I said, just the six questions that you get in [The Brain Audit](#), they're amazing. However, if you want more questions then you have to ask me for it. The only point about the additional questions is that a client has to go through a journey for a while with you, because otherwise those questions become too much. The six questions, they're pretty good for most stuff. The 16 or 17 questions that we ask, that's when a client goes through a three-day workshop with us or a three-month course with us. That's when they're ready to answer a lot more questions. It depends where you're going to ask those questions. Don't just throw all the questions at everybody.

Are you still going to get bad testimonials? Are you still going to get one-liners? Of course. Some people will give you a single line. They won't give you a paragraph; they won't give you two paragraphs; they're not going to give you 800-word testimonials. These testimonials are pretty useless. A single-line testimonial; five, six, seven line testimonials: they don't really give you a sense of the journey.

The other kind of testimonial that you really don't want is this rambling testimonial where someone goes on and on and on and on and editing the whole process becomes a nightmare. You need to make sure that these kind of testimonials, the very short ones and the rambling ones, they're out of the system. Unfortunately, but it's true. The client needs to understand that those two types of testimonials are completely worthless. It's a waste of their time and your time. Still, you take your chances, and 95% of the time you get great testimonials.

This brings us to the end of this episode, but what's the one thing that you can do today? The one thing that you can do today is to make sure that you get examples. You want to get a great testimonial in the first place.

Of course you have to have the questions for this so get those six questions from The Brain Audit. Get on the phone with the client, especially someone who's a good client, and ask them the questions. Get the testimonial, and when you have that example, that's when you can pass it on to the next client and the next client. You can see what's happening here, right? It's self-replicating. A great testimonial is getting another great testimonial is getting another great testimonial. If you get a crappy one, just drop it. Don't put that in. Don't be tempted.

Yes, we've come to the end of episode number 38, but remember, episode number 36 is about your three points, the points where you can get those testimonials. You want to go back to that episode and listen to it several times, and then take action. It's 5:09 PM here in Auckland and it's very hot. It's already autumn but it's pretty hot here. It's not usually the time that I record a testimonial. What am I saying? Not usually the time I record a podcast. It's usually 4:00 in the morning or some other ridiculous time when I wake up. However, this is a busy week. We're headed to the US and we're going to do the info products workshop in Washington D.C.. You probably missed that, and you should get us on the next time, but we do workshops so infrequently that the next time we announce a workshop, or an online course, you should jump for it. Because we do them infrequently.

After that, we get on the flight, go to Denver. We're speaking at the Opera House at the Copyblogger Conference.

Finally, we get to Sardinia, Italy, where we eat, drink, and sleep. Some of

you have asked me if I check email or I do any work while on vacation. No, that's the whole point about vacations. You're supposed to do nothing, as in N-O-T-H-I-N-G. I am looking forward to that.

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Useful Resources

(click on the links below)

The Brain Audit: [Why Customers Buy \(And Why They Don't\)](#)

Get all the earlier episodes of [The Three Month Vacation \(Audio and transcript\)](#)

Testimonial Secrets: [How to use the power of the 'six critical questions' to get incredible testimonials.](#)

Chaos Planning: [How 'Irregular' Folks Get Things Done](#)