

The Performance of Medicine: Techniques from the Stage to Optimize the Patient Experience and Restore the Joy of Practicing Medicine

Bob Baker

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A ventriloquist walks into a doctor's office. No, it's not the setup for a great joke. Bob Baker's wonderful, funny, friendly book *The Performance of Medicine: Techniques from the Stage to Optimize the Patient Experience and Restore the Joy of Practicing Medicine* delivers practical techniques for bringing humor to high-stress practice.

With over thirty years of medical experience, plus another fifty as a performer, Baker is a warm, amusing, and extremely informative narrator. He points out, "When any health practitioner interacts with a patient, it's a performance. Not a show, but a performance." Yet, the "performance" aspect of patient care doesn't make the interaction artificial; knowing how to go through the motions and perform the doctor-patient ritual well is a critical part of the healing process. Baker recommends a combination of listening, responding, and "acting as if" to improve patient outcomes.

The Performance of Medicine emphasizes that getting better patient feedback isn't just good for a clinic's Yelp ratings. It's also beneficial for patient health, makes office visits more efficient, and supports doctors who may feel overwhelmed. The performance of the "doctor" role is a vital ingredient. It's not brain surgery, Baker explains, it's basic *rachmones* (Yiddish for "compassion").

The Performance of Medicine is peppered with personal anecdotes, performance tips from luminaries like Michael Caine and Meryl Streep, and pragmatic takeaways on showmanship. Baker addresses every conceivable concern, from "I'm an introvert!" to "Why should I listen to a ventriloquist?" The book's useful, easy-to-learn techniques are delivered with levity. Many of the suggestions are transferable to other professions as well. After all, public speaking, presentation, and earning an audience's trust are all transferable skills. Baker knows his material, and he shares it in an extremely enjoyable, laugh-out-loud format.

The book's thirteen chapters are divided into three well-organized sections that give perspective on changes in the medical industry and expectations for doctors, strategies for performance, and how to apply acting techniques in real-world situations. Throughout, Baker offers incentives for learning better bedside manners, points out common pitfalls for overworked medical workers, and recommends ways to cope with anger, stress, and grief.

The book includes four appendices. The first three give a straight script for doctor-patient interactions, plus suggestions on handling anger and reading body language. The fourth is an account of what *really* happened when Baker performed his ventriloquist act on *America's Got Talent*. The balance of playfulness and serious insights is *Performance's* greatest strength. Baker delivers profoundly valuable guidance in a fun-to-read format.

The Performance of Medicine is a remarkable book. Wonderful, warm, and entertaining, it suggests ways for practitioners to bring out the best in themselves and their patients with a little bit of “performance.”

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