

If I had a dollar for every time someone told a marketing team, “We need to make a video” or “We need more white papers,” I’d have a respectable pile of dollars by now.

There is nothing wrong with videos or white papers. I’ve helped make plenty of both. The problem is the order of operations. Someone has already decided what we’re going to make before we’ve established what we’re trying to accomplish.

What problem are we solving? Who are we trying to reach? What do we need them to think, feel, or do differently? Why might they make that change?

Those questions require considerably more work than deciding we need a video.

Too busy to think

Sloth is a slightly odd sin to apply to marketers because most marketing teams I know are anything but idle. They’re managing campaigns, meeting with service lines, reviewing creative, building reports, fielding requests, managing media, responding to leadership, and trying to find fifteen minutes to eat lunch.

That pace can actually make Sloth easier to miss. Execution creates visible signs of progress as briefs move into creative development, media plans take shape, and projects advance across the calendar. In an environment where everyone is under pressure to keep things moving, stopping to ask whether we’re solving the right problem can feel like an act of bravery. Nobody wants to be accused of being an obstacle.

The problem often starts before marketing is even involved. Someone outside the team has seen something they like, read that a particular type of content performs well, or simply has a strong idea about what marketing

should make. They may also be bringing assumptions about the audience, the problem, or what will work that nobody has examined or even discussed. Requests like this always need follow-up questions. What are you trying to accomplish? What assumptions are we making, and what evidence supports them? Even when asking them risks making marketing look less responsive.

Sometimes we create the problem ourselves when we're moving quickly. We know we need to do *something*, so we start developing the campaign or content with the assumption that we'll sharpen the strategy along the way. By then, momentum has taken over. We've scheduled the time, people have started working, and changing direction becomes considerably harder than defining the direction in the first place.

We define Sloth as profound apathy and willful negligence. Willful negligence, in this case skipping the strategic thinking, can be tempting. We're busy. We'll get to it later. We need to deliver something rather than nothing. Each excuse sounds reasonable on its own, but together they allow execution to outrun the thinking that should guide it.

From business objective to marketing objective

The corresponding virtue is Diligence, intentional effort guided by clear objectives and accountability.

One of the most important things marketing teams can do is connect an organizational objective to something marketing can actually influence. Suppose the organization wants to grow orthopedics. That's a legitimate business objective, but it isn't a marketing strategy.

We need to understand where the growth should come from. Perhaps the organization has capacity for joint replacements in a particular market. Perhaps patients are leaking to a competitor. Perhaps people with persistent joint pain are delaying care because they assume surgery is inevitable. Perhaps awareness really is low. Each diagnosis creates a different marketing problem.

This is why marketers need access to more than the request that arrives in the brief. Strategy, operations, finance, clinical leadership, analytics, and marketing may each hold a different piece of the answer. Capacity affects whether generating demand makes sense. Economics help us understand which growth creates value. Market research tells us what people currently believe. Behavioral data may show where the journey breaks down.

Then marketing has to decide what it can reasonably influence. The marketer's job is to translate the organizational need into a specific change in a specific group of people.

That's where one of my favorite strategic frameworks becomes useful.

Get / To / By

I've used **Get / To / By** for years because it forces three decisions into a remarkably small amount of space.

Get *this audience*
To *think, feel, or do this*
By *giving them this compelling reason*

Take heart screening. We might begin with an organizational objective around increasing appropriate screenings, but that still leaves marketing with some work to do.

Get forces us to identify the people whose behavior needs to change. Perhaps research shows that men over 50 with particular risk factors are less likely than they should be to complete a recommended screening. That's considerably more useful than "adults in our service area."

To defines the change we want to create. In this case, perhaps we want them to schedule the screening rather than continue putting it off.

Then comes **By**, where we begin thinking about what might actually motivate that change.

There may be several possibilities. We could make an emotional connection to the people who want them around for a long time. We could remind them of the things they still want to do with their lives. We might find that straightforward information about risk, early detection, or the benefits of screening is more persuasive.

Research can help us understand which route has the greatest potential. Creative teams can then explore how to make that idea engaging, memorable, and persuasive.

Notice that we still haven't decided whether we need a video. That decision comes later, when we understand the audience, the change, and the idea we're trying to communicate. Video may be exactly right. So might paid search, social content, direct outreach, outdoor, or a combination of channels.

Get / To / By gives the people doing the work clarity about who they're trying to reach, what they're trying to change, and the strategic territory available to them. That clarity saves time, saves money, and gives the work a better chance of producing the outcome we wanted in the first place.

Everyone can work very hard on the wrong thing

Poorly defined objectives don't necessarily produce poor execution, which is what makes them dangerous. A talented creative team can produce a beautiful campaign against an unclear objective. A media team can optimize efficiently toward an audience we never had a strategic reason to prioritize. An analytics team can build a sophisticated dashboard full of metrics nobody established as meaningful.

We can become remarkably efficient at doing something we never had a good reason to do. The technology we discussed under Lust can help us do it faster, personalize it more precisely, and automate more of the process. Restraint asked whether those capabilities served a real need. Diligence asks us to define that need clearly enough that the capability has somewhere useful to go.

All that execution also consumes money, time, technology, talent, and attention. Once those resources start moving, they become harder to redirect. That's where Diligence and Stewardship meet. A clear objective gives us a basis for deciding whether the problem deserves those resources or whether they could create more value somewhere else.

We can become remarkably efficient at doing something we never had a good reason to do.

Accountability begins before launch

Clear objectives give us something meaningful to measure. If we're trying to increase preference, we need a way to understand whether preference changed. If we're trying to generate qualified demand, we need to follow that demand toward appointments and downstream outcomes as far as our data

reasonably allows. If we're trying to change a behavior, we should decide what evidence would indicate that the behavior changed. Without that connection, we tend to report what happens to be available.

Specific objectives can be uncomfortable because they create the possibility that the work might fail. If we've committed to changing preference among a defined audience by a defined amount, someone can eventually ask whether we did it. "Build awareness" leaves considerably more room to find something encouraging in the results.

Diligence accepts that accountability. Decide what you're trying to accomplish before you know whether you'll accomplish it, then measure the work against that intention.

Clarity makes better work

A clear objective helps everyone downstream do their job better. Creative teams know who they're trying to persuade and what needs to change. Media planners know who they need to reach. Analytics teams know which signals deserve attention. Those teams can spend their time solving the problem rather than trying to infer what the problem was supposed to be.

Clarity also makes the creative conversation better. Get / To / By may give us several possible routes for motivating someone to complete a heart screening. The creative team can explore them, research can help us evaluate them, and we can debate which idea is most likely to create the desired response instead of which execution somebody happens to like best.

This is where Discipline returns in a useful way. A clear objective gives the work boundaries and permission to leave other perfectly reasonable messages, audiences, and objectives for another time. The result is a better brief, less wasted effort, and a better chance that the work will accomplish something meaningful.

Keep this in your pocket

For your next significant marketing request, resist opening the brief with the deliverable. Start with four questions instead.

What organizational objective are we supporting?

Who needs to think, feel, or behave differently?

What change do we need to create?

What compelling reason might cause that change?

Then decide what to make.

If the answer turns out to be a video, excellent. You can even make two.

Specific objectives can be uncomfortable because they create the possibility that the work might fail.

What comes next

Congratulations, you've made it through all seven sins. Or perhaps you've sidestepped Gregory's preferred order and read them according to your own interests. If so, I'll anoint you with the virtue of Courage. Go ahead. Chart your own course.

Either way, we've arrived at the more important question. What does the sum total of all these sins and virtues mean for the way you practice healthcare marketing?

That's where we're going next.