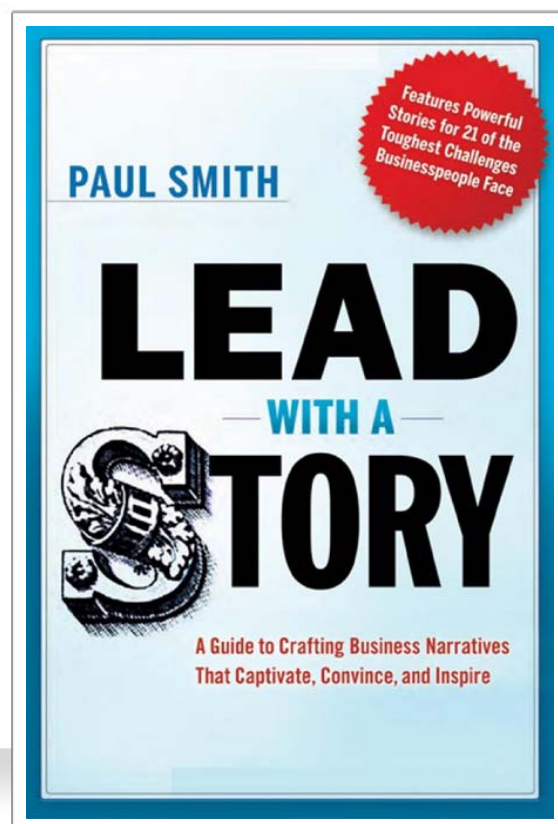


A Guide to Crafting Business
Narratives That Captivate,
Convince, and Inspire

LEAD WITH A STORY



(Paul Smith/AMACOM/August 2012/288 pages/\$24.95)



국내 미출간 세계 베스트셀러(NBS) 서비스는 (주)네오넷코리아가 해외에서 저작권자와의 저작권 계약을 통해, 영미권, 일본, 중국의 경제, 경영 및 정치 서적의 베스트셀러, 스테디셀러의 핵심 내용을 간략하게 정리한 요약(Summary) 정보입니다. 저작권법에 의하여 (주)네오넷코리아의 정식인가 없이 무단전재, 무단복제 및 전송을 할 수 없으며, 모든 출판권과 전송권은 저작권자에게 있음을 알려드립니다.

LEAD WITH A STORY

A Guide to Crafting Business Narratives That Captivate, Convince, and Inspire

MAIN IDEA

The art of story telling in business has been underutilized for far too long. Stories in a business setting are compelling because:

- They are simple to tell – anyone can do it.
- Storytelling is timeless – they have always worked for leaders trying to make a point and they always will.
- Stories appeal to everyone – irrespective of their age, race, gender or demographic classification.
- Stories are contagious – a good story will spread through an organization like wildfire.
- Stories are easier to remember than facts and figures – memorable stories will linger for long periods and get repeated.
- Stories move and inspire much more powerfully than a PowerPoint presentation ever will.
- Stories work equally well with kinesthetic learners (who learn by doing), visual learners and auditory learners.
- Stories work exceptionally well in informal learning situations – which is where the bulk of workplace learning occurs.
- Stories naturally put people into learning mode – they stop worrying about facts and get caught up in the emotions.
- Stories shows respect for your audience – because you can get a message across without arrogance.

The next time you need to make a point, figure out a way to lead with a story that illustrates and encapsulates what you're trying to say.

Listeners will love you for it.

About of Author

PAUL SMITH is a keynote speaker and corporate trainer. He previously served as Director of Consumer & Communications Research at Procter & Gamble and as a business consultant with Anderson Consulting. He has served in leadership positions in multi-billion-dollar business units, manufacturing plants and sales teams working with global retailers like Wal-Mart, Sam's Club and Costco. He is a graduate of the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania.

The Web site for this book is at www.leadwithastory.com.

1. How to structure memorable business stories

Well-told business stories are not like Hollywood movies or novels. They have a simple structure with three components – Context–Action–Result. The best way to learn and remember the key components of a memorable business story is to use the memory aid CAR = STORY MARKERS.

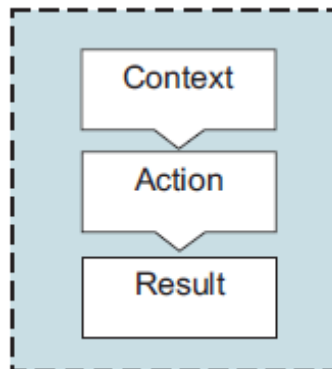
CAR

=

STORY

MAKERS

Great business stories have a simple three-part structure:



1. Context – You tell the listener the setting for the story and all of the background details they will need to know in order to draw the right conclusions. Context grabs the audience’s attention, convinces them the story will be relevant and generates interest for the rest of the story. The four questions everyone will want to know are:

■ Where and when is this story taking place?

You want to signal right at the outset whether the story is true (“When I was admitted to West Point...”) or fictional (“Once upon a time, in a galaxy far, far away...”)

■ Who is the main character?

You want to introduce the hero or the protagonist who ideally is someone the audience can relate to. Sometimes you want them to think, “Hey, that could be me.” Other times they will be thankful the story is about someone else.

■ What is your hero trying to achieve?

Next you want to explain what’s your hero’s passion or the quest they’re on. Are they trying to save the world or get the treasure?

■ What’s getting in their way?

To give more color, you then explain what obstacle they’re up against. Without a villain or an imminent adversity to overcome, your story will be pointless. Describing the challenge being faced is important.

2. Action – You then tell exactly what happened to your main character and detail how

they did battle with the villain. Often this will be a case where problems surface and conflicts arise but they hang in there and ultimately triumph. These ups and downs inject excitement and drama into your story.

3. Result – You usually end a business narrative by telling the outcome, by explaining the main underlying lesson which was learned and then by linking back to why you told the story in the first place. You detail the fate of the main characters, the moral of the story and if appropriate what you want the listener to go and do after hearing your story.

So how does this play out in practice? An example:

Context

In the late-1990s, golf ball manufacturer Titleist had a 75 percent market share among the best golfers in the country. The only problem was professional players make up only 5 percent of the overall market. For the other 95 percent, Titleist had only a 20 percent market share. Titleist found most recreational golfers were happy with the \$3 ball offered by competitors rather than spending \$5 on the Titleist ball preferred by the more accomplished golfers. Titleist wondered whether it should bring to market a lower-priced, lower-quality ball and if doing that would impact on its current sales.

Action

To address this challenge of how to grow its lower-end market without impacting on its high-end product, Titleist came up with an interesting idea. It developed a cheaper ball, called the Titleist NXT, which had less spin, a soft feel and more consistency. Recreational golfers loved the NXT because it was easier to put down the fairway but the NXT didn't have the same range as Titleist's flagship golf ball, the ProV1. In this way, Titleist managed to bring to the market a ball which would appeal to recreational golfers but which wasn't something accomplished golfers would consider trading down to. It was the perfect solution and a break from conventional business wisdom.

Result

The NXT turned out to be a huge market success for Titleist. Titleist's market share amongst recreational golfers more than doubled from 20 percent to 43 percent without impacting on sales to elite golfers. Titleist managed to grow its business based on an interesting insight: average consumers don't necessarily want watered-down versions of the very best products, they have different needs altogether. The key lesson for other companies is if you understand your customer's needs in depth, you can then design a product which will delight customers in each market segment independent of each other.

"Long before the first formal business was established . . . the six most powerful words in any language were: 'Let me tell you a story.'"

– Ryan Matthews and Watts Wacker, authors

"Every great leader is a great storyteller."

– Howard Garner, Harvard psychologist

"What you need as a business leader is a simple structure that works. Every adult is a natural-born storyteller. You've been studying the art of storytelling ever since your parents read you bedtime stories. You already know what the structure of a good story is. All you need is to be reminded."

– Paul Smith

Another good example of the Context–Action–Result pattern in a business related story:

Context

In the 1990s, a judge contacted a university professor and asked if he would assign some psych students to investigate the jury deliberation process and determine how to improve it. A group of young, idealistic college students gathered together and were enthusiastic about tackling such a noble mission.

Action

They interviewed dozens of judges, attorneys, former jurors and other court officials and asked them about a variety of different factors. To their surprise, they found things like the ethnic background of the jury and even the hours they spend deliberating didn't seem to matter much at all. What they did find mattered was the shape of the table in the jury room! If it was a rectangular table, the juror sitting at the head of the table (even if that person wasn't the foreman) tended to dominate the conversation. In jury rooms where there were round or oval tables, the debate seemed to be more thorough and robust. The students were excited to think they had come up with such an easy fix which would lead to more open-minded discussion amongst jurists.

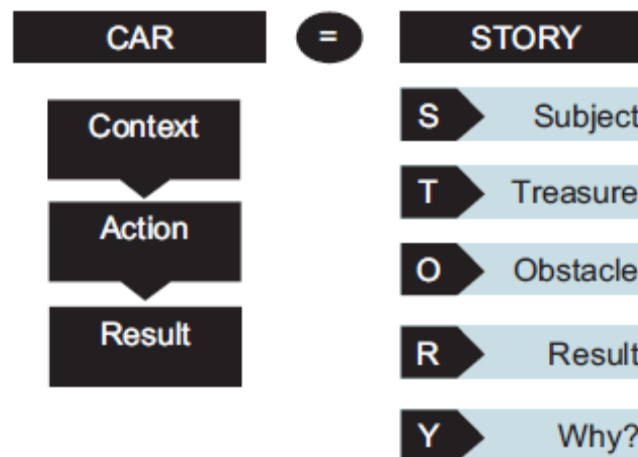
Result

The students were proud of their success as they presented their results to the chief judge. They were stunned when the judge promptly issued a directive that all round tables in jury deliberation rooms were to be removed and replaced by rectangular tables. The students couldn't get their heads around what was happening and why. It turned out that rather than asking them to single-handedly fix an imperfect judicial system, the judge wanted to reduce the backlog of cases clogging up his court docket. He wanted speedier decisions, regardless of whether the decision was right or wrong. The students received an A on their report card but they felt completely deflated about the results of their project. So what was the real lesson here? Whenever you embark on a research project, it's vital that you are clear about the objectives before you start. Don't make the mistake of assuming you know. Ask right up-front or suffer the consequences.

"Today, many of the most successful organizations on the planet intentionally use storytelling as a key leadership tool. Many of these companies have assigned a high-level "corporate storyteller" to capture and share their most important stories. At Nike, all the senior executives are designated "corporate storytellers." 3M banned bullet points years ago and replaced them with a process of writing "strategic narratives." Procter & Gamble has hired Hollywood movie directors to teach its senior executives storytelling techniques."

– Paul Smith

In the pressure of real-world situations, getting Context–Action–Result right can be difficult. With that in mind, use this mnemonic to remind you:



To tell a memorable and engaging business story, you need to describe in enough detail:

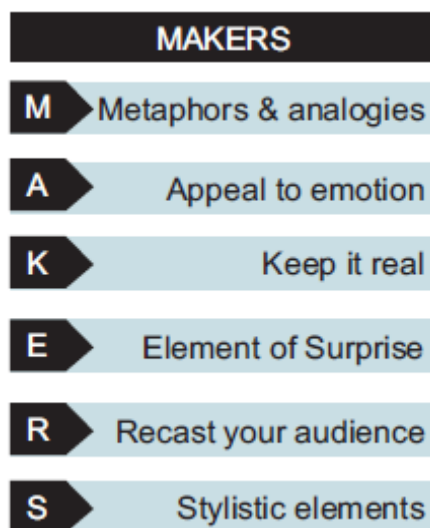
- S** The subject you want to talk about.
- T** The treasure or goal your main character is going after. Obviously the more alluring this, the better. Most of the time, your context will specify the subject at hand, the characters involved and the treasure they're going after.
- O** The obstacle or obstacles which initially stand in the way of realizing that objective.
- R** The end result once all the obstacles have been overcome and the lesson which you can draw from that story. The obstacle or obstacles and the end result will usually be embodied in the Action section of your story's narrative.
- Y** The why you told that story which will often be a link back to the thought or idea you started with. Sometimes there will also be a twist in the tale of your story which adds more impact to the point you're trying to make. Everybody wants to know what happened to the hero in the end when you tell an engaging story. You can also spell out the lesson to be learned so it doesn't get misconstrued.

Bear in mind stories are generally designed to be spoken more than read. With that in mind, some other good hints are:

- Try and use short sentences. Break big sentences up into smaller ones if necessary.
- Use familiar, small words rather than impressive-sounding but more ambiguous variants.

- Try and use an active voice rather than passive phrases. Passive: “It did not go unnoticed by the board that the recommendation lacked management support.” Active: “The board noticed top management didn’t support the recommendation, so they rejected it.”
- Get to verbs quickly. Don’t make the listener go through a long and dry description before they get to some action words. Make what you’re saying interesting by injecting action.
- Cut to the chase. Be concise in what you’re saying. Most good stories can be told in two or three minutes at most. If you’re taking longer than that, either you’re waffling or including too much information.

To add polish, interest and appeal to your story, you then use a second mnemonic to jig your memory:



To really make your story sizzle:

- M** Inject some interesting metaphors and analogies into the storyline. Metaphors are where you compare something new to something very well known and established. A great metaphor can be used to improve a story or to act as a catalyst for a new line of thought. A great example of the use of metaphors is the Walt Disney Company which refers to all its theme park employees as “cast members.” This sends the signal they are there to provide the customers with a great experience and they should make decisions with that objective in mind. Metaphors and analogies work extremely well in business stories because you can link to ideas which are already embedded in the minds of the audience that way. Great metaphors are everywhere if you look for them.
- A** You can also inject emotion to add to the impact of a story. Many experts suggest the formula for a memorable story is: FACT + EMOTION + ACTION = STORY. In other words, unless and until you evoke an emotional reaction in the listener, you haven’t really succeeded in telling a story. You might have a good case study or a solid memo but it’s the emotional element which makes it crossover into story

territory. Pure and simple humans make emotional decisions and you need to recognize that fact and use it to your advantage. One of the best (and often untapped) sources of emotion is to go to your customers and find out what they get out of your product or service in human terms. If you dig a little, you'll find there are lots of ways to inject some emotional elements into stories.

K To keep your stories real, talk about concrete ideas rather than abstract concepts. Build your story around specific people, actual events and a single example of someone who gets what you're trying to do rather than vague generalizations. Keeping it real also requires that you avoid technical jargon and instead make the facts, the numbers or the events relevant to your audience. Some companies have found one way to build concrete stories is to create customer personas or profiles and then link back decisions which are made to the way that persona would react. By using techniques like this, generalities can be superceded by more concrete and workable ideas.

E The French military general Charles De Gaulle once noted: "A true leader always keeps an element of surprise up his sleeve." This is especially true for business stories. If you can inject a surprise at the beginning of your story, people will sit up and pay attention. Alternatively, if you link what you're talking about to a newsworthy and highly topical event, you can also generate some great momentum right out of the gate. Or you might try using some unexpected candor like: "You know, you're not really getting maximum value out of our services. If I were you, I would fire us!" Leading with a statement like that will definitely make you stand out from the crowd. If that's not feasible, you can also find a way to hold back a key piece of information in your story until the grand reveal at the end. That can also inject impact into your story.

R Another great way to add to the effectiveness of your story is to come up with a powerful way to recast your audience right into the storyline. This sounds hard but it's not. Instead of telling your story, pause at a key point and invite listeners to tell you what they would do if they were placed in a similar situation. Or create an experiment or a practical demonstration that gives them hands-on experience in what you're talking about. The underlying dynamic here is people generally remember 20 to 30 percent of what they hear but 90 percent of what they themselves do. If you can find ways to make the audience part of the storyline, the impact of what you're saying will soar. Just remember this works best if you let the audience in on the surprise quickly – within a few seconds or minutes at most.

S Also pay attention to the style of your story and the various style elements you use. Great stories have strong and memorable beginnings – a big surprise, a mystery or an obviously difficult challenge which you're about to go on a quest to solve. If you can involve real names and larger-than-life characters in the story, all the better. Include dialogue between your main characters which gets everyone on the same page and up with the play. Short sentences in the active voice work best. Repeat words, phrases or thoughts which are important to emphasize. Inject lots of verbs and get to them quickly. Use good grammar and avoid spelling mistakes. And never announce or apologize in advance of using a story – just tell it.

"It is useless to attempt to reason a man out of what he was never reasoned into."

– Jonathan Swift

"If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well."

– Martin Luther King Jr.

"You may have to fight a battle more than once to win it."

– Margaret Thatcher, former Prime Minister of England

"Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success."

– Henry Ford

"How do you tell stories? With passion."

– David Armstrong, author

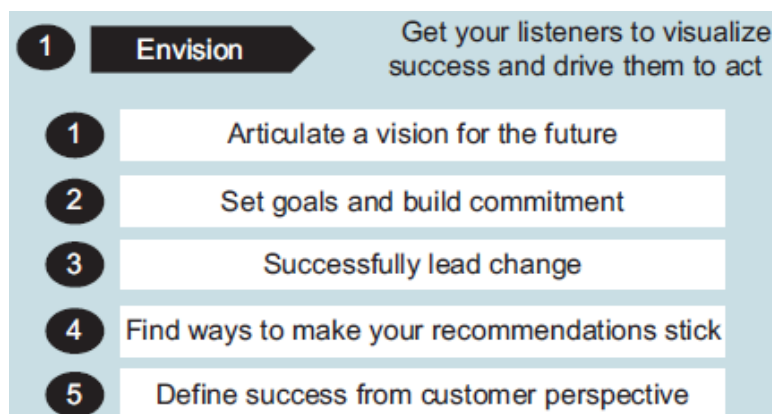
2.

Applying business stories to the five leadership challenges

Business storytelling has great power and adaptability. It can be applied successfully and with great power to the five challenges of the leadership of every successful organization. Storytelling in a business setting has come of age.



The Five Challenges of Leadership



Stories are a great way to get people on the right bus and heading in the same direction you are. The reason they work so well for this leadership challenge is stories are so inclusive. You can use them to get everyone to agree to what needs to be achieved yet feel like it's their own idea. This is a very smart way to operate because when people feel responsible for their ideas, that sense of ownership extends to execution as well.

Look for and develop stories which describe an alluring future. You can then engage the efforts of the entire team in heading towards the promised land.

"In her book *Wake Me Up When the Data Is Over*, Lori Silverman recounts how some very bright people at Bristol-Myers Squibb once created a future story and printed it in the format of London's *Financial Times* newspaper, their president's favorite reading material. Why? Because they couldn't get him to read their 50-page strategy document. The paper they slipped under his door had this headline: "Bristol-Myers Squibb Named Top-Ranked Global Pharmaceutical Company." He was halfway through the article before he noticed the date at the top of the page and realized it was a story about the future. When he finished reading the article, he had a complete understanding of the strategy his team wanted him to embrace, because they'd written it into the story."

– Paul Smith

Context

In 1981, Jack Welch became chairman and CEO of General Electric. It took him about a year to get around and visit the company's various operating units in person. He visited GE's nuclear reactor business in San Jose, California where the leadership team presented a rosy plan which assumed they would continue to sell three new reactors a year – just like they always had since the 1970s.

Action

Jack Welch listened to their presentation and then pointed out the Three Mile Island disaster in Pennsylvania had been a game-changer for the industry. He suggested public support for new nuclear power plants would be nonexistent for the foreseeable future. He bluntly told them: "Guys, you're not going to get three orders a year. In my opinion, you'll never get another order for a new nuclear power plant in the U.S." Jack Welch also went on to suggest they should figure out how to make a business out of selling nuclear fuel and services to the 72 active reactors GE had already built.

Result

Everyone was shocked initially by what General Electric's new CEO had said and argued that if they took those orders out of the plan, it would kill company morale and GE wouldn't be able to mobilize the business when the orders came back. Jack Welch didn't buy it. Eventually, GE restaffed the business to focus on a service model rather than the traditional sales model. This strategy worked well and earnings went from \$14 million to \$116 million in just two years. As an interesting aside, GE still hadn't received a single new order for a nuclear reactor in the United States when Jack Welch retired 20 years later.

Making changes in any organization is hard. Even when people accept that change is needed, they've got to stop doing what they do now and start doing something different. There will be all kinds of emotional and mental barriers to overcome. If you can tell a story which your audience will relate to and which hits them at a deep level, it will be far more effective than issuing an memo or a directive. Stories, told well, can move mountains.

"If people aren't laughing at your ideas, you're not being creative enough."

– David Armstrong

"Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity."

– General George S. Patton Jr.

"Storytelling has proven a powerful tool. It's removed the language barrier between the science of research and the language of business."

– Christopher J. Frank, Microsoft researcher

"Feedback is the breakfast of champions."

– Kenneth Blanchard

The Five Challenges of Leadership



Stories are great for building an environment of success. You can use them to:

1. Define the culture that you want to build – by spreading stories which embody and demonstrate the culture you want to build. Even stories of bad behavior can be employed to strengthen the culture if the transgressor is suitably reprimanded. The great thing about culture building stories is they influence the unspoken norms of the organization and lay a good foundation for how people should behave.
2. Establish values – to illustrate your company values and principles and to bring these challenge but chooses to keep his or her promises and ultimately pulls off something spectacular as a result of having integrity can speak volumes. You should be on the lookout for these kinds of values-based stories at all times and in all places.
3. Encourage collaboration – which will happen when you get people together and sharing their personal stories, they can't help but form better relationships as they realize they share common values. Moving stories where people go on a roller coaster ride of emotions can be highly inclusive and will build a great platform for future collaboration. Stories can also be useful recruiting tools because they bring to life what it's like to work for your firm.
4. Make people feel valued and part of a team – and therefore they should perform their best. You should search your organization for stories which illustrate the importance of inclusiveness in bright and vibrant detail. Even folktales can be used to teach subtle lessons indirectly. By using the right stories, you can tackle topics which people generally shy away from like diversity. The next time you're running a meeting, share a few personal stories and see what happens. If people respond with their own stories, you'll be well on your way to creating a genuinely inclusive team.
5. Set policy without having to give a plethora of rules – which is ideal. Most of the time, people won't read policy manuals but they will happily listen to a story. And even if they read the manual, there may still be some misunderstandings. When you use a story to reinforce the behavior you want, there's much less possibility of misunderstanding. Furthermore, a good story well told can move people in the right direction far faster than dictating a set of rules to them.

Context

In June 2000, Andrew Moorfield was inspired by the dot-com boom and left his job as an investment banker at Citibank to start btfinance.co.uk, a London-based online lending platform for small businesses. "It was exhilarating and terrifying at the same time," he later admitted. The new company started well but after a few months, it struck a cashflow crisis and Moorfield realized he wouldn't be able to make payroll. Coming from a big-company environment, his first instinct was to secretly decide how much every employee should be paid, then meet with each in private and make them that offer. The only problem was that approach would create doubt and suspicion.

Action

Instead of sticking to the usual script, Moorfield did something quite creative. He pulled all 25 employees into a conference room and explained everything in brutally honest detail. He then asked his workforce – all 25 of them – what they thought he should do about it.

Result

The company could only afford to pay everyone about one-third of their normal salaries that month so Moorfield assumed that's what his employees would agree on. Instead, they came up with a different proposal. They suggested it would be better to pay a third of the employees all their salary while the other two thirds would wait a month or two to catch up. Moorfield was horrified at the prospect of trying to decide who to pay and who to defer but the employees also offered to decide among themselves. They figured out who needed the money most urgently and several volunteered to go without. Over the following months, btfinance.co.uk became highly successful. Everyone was paid their back wages and the company was sold to another entity for a sizable capital gain. Andrew Moorfield went back to the banking world and would later be appointed managing director of Lloyd's Bank in London but he never forgot the two lessons he learned at btfinance.co.uk. When you're in crisis mode, if you're real, open and candid with your people, they will surprise you with their creativity. And second, if you bring people into the reasoning process rather than just throwing an edict at them, they will come up with solutions you probably wouldn't think of yourself. They will also accept the decision better if they're the ones who come up with it. Always be brutally open and honest about difficult subjects.

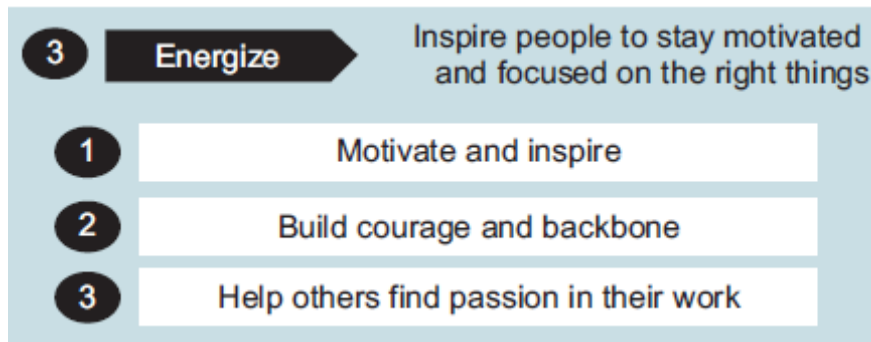
"People are going to tell stories about you whether you want them to or not. Choose which ones they tell."

– Bob McDonald, CEO, Procter & Gamble

"Learning is not compulsory. But neither is survival."

– J. Edwards

The Five Challenges of Leadership

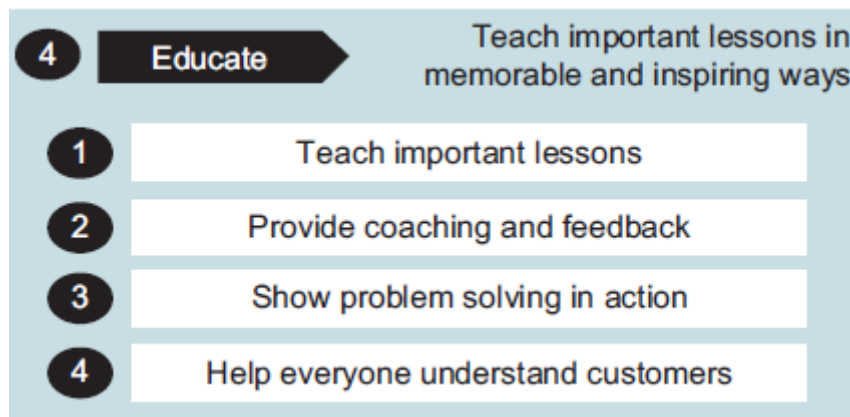


In today's world, there are literally an unlimited number of distractions which get delivered to employees continuously by modern communications technology. It's very easy for people to get distracted from what really counts. Stories can be used to offset that by inspiring and energizing. How?

1. You can tell true stories about people who overcame tough challenges and ended up coming out as winners. One well chosen and well told story about beating the odds can have a huge impact on morale. Stories inspire, facts don't.
2. Stories about people who hang in there and persevere despite multiple setbacks also inspire. Even simple, human interest stories can be incredibly effective in this regard. Thomas Edison once said, "Many of life's failures are people who didn't realize how close they were to success when they gave up." That's quite a profound sentiment. Business stories which illuminate this thought are everywhere to be found if you look for them.
3. Some well chosen stories – perhaps about what you're really trying to accomplish – can help your people find their passion. While you can't really order people to love their jobs, you can tell stories which help them discover or reconnect with their passions. Stories about the impact of your product or service in the lives of your customers can do it. The whole point is stories generate passion and you can and should use this dynamic to advantage.

Richard Feynman was a Nobel Prize winning physicist. In the early 1940s, he was an entry-level engineer working on the Manhattan project at Los Alamos National Labs. His young wife was undergoing treatment for tuberculosis in nearby Albuquerque and he would hitchhike to the hospital on weekends to visit her. One day, she asked him to cook her a steak on an 18-inch charcoal grill she'd bought by mail order because she was so tired of hospital food. Feynman said, "How can we cook in the hospital room with all the smoke and everything?" She replied, "Just go out on the front lawn of the hospital." Feynman protested that people driving along the busy highway would think he was crazy but his wife said, "What do you care what other people think?" These words struck a profound chord with Feynman and every weekend thereafter, he would cook his wife a steak right out in front of the hospital. The disease would ultimately prove to be terminal for his wife but Feynman spent the rest of his life and career focusing on what really mattered rather than worrying about what other people were thinking of him. He became one of the best-known physicists in the world. Feynman is remembered fondly for his defining role in the investigation of the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster in 1986 when he threw a frozen O-ring on the dias during a congressional panel hearing. The O-ring shattered providing the perfect illustration of what had caused the sequence of events which culminated in the launch failure.

The Five Challenges of Leadership



Stories are a great way to educate and train the people within your organization. If you can share true stories which involve real people facing difficult challenges and overcoming them, that can teach some key lessons in a more memorable way than just about any other option other than first-hand experience.

Keep in mind you always learn more from your failures than you ever do from your personal successes. Therefore, stories where people face two roads, one of which

leads to success and the other to failure, can be highly illuminating. If you have examples of real people your audience will relate to, all the better but even fictional characters will work here. By detailing the differences in direction according to the decisions made, you can teach very important lessons in vivid detail.

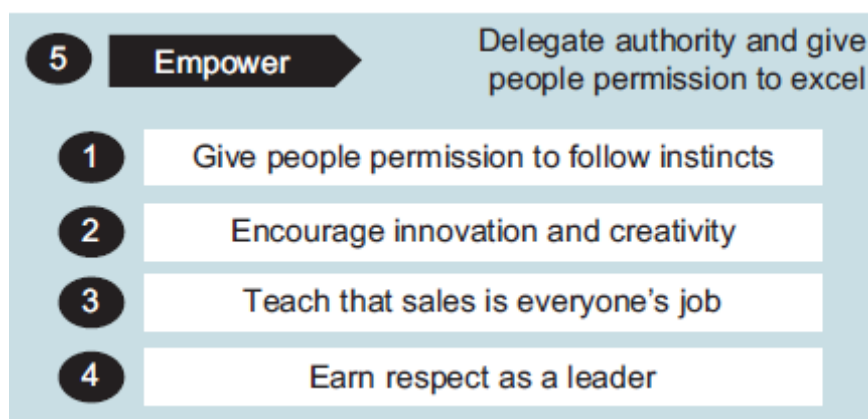
Stories also work well in providing coaching and feedback and in illustrating problem solving in action. The great thing about stories are they are indirect. You can tell a story about someone else and then watch as it gradually dawns on the listener you're talking about a situation that applies to their circumstances as well. Stories from outside your industry of people who think outside the box and come up with creative solutions to difficult challenges can not only inspire but get people moving on developing the solutions you need. Stories can be used to generate progress at every stage and every step of the overall problem solving process.

If you genuinely aspire to educate your people, the best thing you can ever do is get out from behind your desk and go visit your customers. Find out what their story is, write it down and then share actual customer stories with your people. Walk in the customer's shoes for a day or so and understand what they're trying to achieve when they buy your product or your service offering. Develop an engaging story based around your customers and tell this far and wide. Your people will love it and they will become more focused than ever on your customers. This can lead to some great breakthroughs.

Some companies even create short videos which portray a day in the life of a typical customer. If you can do something like that, you will have a far better teaching tool than reports, memos, charts or anything else. Getting everyone in your organization to understand the customer can be a game-changer. At the very least, people will play that video clip over and over while your research report will be stuck in a dusty file drawer somewhere. Quick video clips and short vignettes can be incredible teaching tools. Take advantage of them.

"We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them."
– Albert Einstein

The Five Challenges of Leadership



The fifth and final challenge of serving in a leadership position is finding ways to effectively empower others to do their best work. Every great leader manages to do that. Telling stories works here as well.

In addition to empowering, the right story at the right time can have a long-lasting impact. You can use empowering-style stories in a variety of different ways:

1. You can tell stories about leaders who delegated authority to others and gave them permission to follow their instincts in making the tough judgment calls which everyone faces at one point or another. Stories about people who were tasked with something great and who then had to face genuine make-or-break decisions for their firms and who came through and delivered can be incredibly inspiring. Stories about epic failures can be used to illustrate the pitfalls of delegation as well.
2. There are lots of stories available which show there are times when people have to ignore what they've been taught and instead just trust their instincts. People love hearing about rebels or independent thinkers who go against the tide to pull off something spectacular.
3. The corporate world is also full of stories about teams who used outside-the-box thinking to help people become more creative. Or you can find some stories about passionate people who reimagined something which exists and came up with unique combinations of existing products. Stories about innovators work because they send the signal innovation and creativity are welcome.

One lesson which is sometimes hard to teach is that everyone is in sales to one degree or another. You can use stories to teach customers why your products and services are worth what you charge, however aspect and dimension of your business model is focused on delivering value to them and what your people are passionate about. A few heartfelt stories left with the customer can have a far more powerful impact on their thinking than even the slickest sales presentation delivered by your best salesperson. Stories resonate and stay with the listener for long periods.

"Your reputation is nothing more than the stories people tell about you. Choose what stories people tell by telling them first."

– Paul Smith

So where can you look to find the kinds of stories which will be helpful in addressing the five challenges of leadership?

- Start by looking for stories from your past – things you've experienced firsthand and which have helped shape your career, your passions, your aims, etc. Come up with a few which define "Who I am" and "What I believe."
- Then look for stories that happen around you – observations you've made, success stories you've been involved with, things that you've seen successful people do, and so on.
- Take note of what others tell you about their experiences –pay attention to other people's stories which illustrate key points. Ask customers, suppliers and partners if they know any good stories. Run some in-house storytelling sessions to try and generate some fresh material.
- Keep an eye out for inspiring stories in the media, from the Internet or even from complete strangers – always be in the habit of collecting good stories whenever and wherever you come across them.

As you hear good stories, have a database you keep them in. This doesn't need to be complex – you can get started by writing down the stories you hear and saving them in a file somewhere. Once you have a few, start indexing them by topic, by characters or by whatever other index makes sense. If you're really well organized, you may even be able to develop a story matrix which classifies your story collection by topic or application. There are a wide variety of ways to do this.

You'll know you're doing a good job of gathering and then telling stories when:

√ Your leadership skills start to improve – mainly because people are listening to your stories, getting a better grasp of what you want them to do and then getting to work more collaboratively. Stories can generate all these positive outcomes.

√ You start to hear some of your own stories being told back to you – by people who don't even know it was you who started the story in the first place. Great stories are viral – they will crop up all over the place again and again. If people remember them and pass them on, you're doing well.

√ You find that every time you face a challenge, your first instinct is to find a good story to tell – because you know that's the best way to move people and make things happen.

“The most important first step to becoming a great storyteller, of course, is to become a storyteller. Stammering out your first one or two awkward stories is a necessary start, but doesn't make one a storyteller. Being a true storyteller requires a respect for the story and a passion for its telling that the newcomer may take time to develop. Writer and poet Maya Angelou once observed, “There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside of you.” So how do you know you're becoming a real storyteller? You'll have the agony. A compelling story will strike you; but instead of simply enjoying it and then dismissing it from your memory, you'll feel an uncontrollable urge to tell it to someone. That's when you'll know. From that moment on, you can be certain that when you lead, you'll lead with a story.”

– Paul Smith