**Negotiation Research You Can Use: Should you tell them a story?**

**BY**[**PON STAFF**](https://www.pon.harvard.edu/author/pon_staff/)**— ON AUGUST 31ST, 2019 /**[**NEGOTIATION SKILLS**](https://www.pon.harvard.edu/category/daily/negotiation-skills-daily/)

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Salespeople and advertisers have come up with a range of persuasion strategies that help close deals, from alluding to a product’s popularity to prompting concessions by offering potential customers “free gifts.” These strategies and others have proven useful for business negotiators who are trying to shine the best light on their offers.

Another effective strategy can be to embed your pitch or offer within a story. When stories are engrossing and compelling, they can lead listeners to passively accept the storyteller’s arguments and opinions, past research has shown. In a new study, Northwestern University researchers Rebecca J. Krause and Derek D. Rucker sought to determine why storytelling can be such a successful persuasion strategy.

For two of the experiments, the researchers came up with lists of product attributes for a fictitious brand of cell phone called Moonstone. Participants either read a list of facts about the cell phone or read a story that included facts about the phone. (Those in the story condition read about a man who is rock climbing with the woman he loves. After she falls and is injured, he is able to call for help on her Moonstone cell phone.) Some of the participants read facts about the phone (either in a list or in a story) that were not very compelling, such as its ability to withstand a fall of up to three feet. Others read more compelling facts, such as its ability to withstand a fall of up to 30 feet.

The results showed that when the facts about the phone were weak, participants were much more persuaded when the facts were included in a story than when they were simply listed. However, when the facts were compelling, participants were more persuaded by the list of facts than by facts embedded within a story.

Thus, it seems that when what you’re offering in a negotiation is not particularly remarkable, you might be able to increase its appeal if you can describe it in the context of a compelling story. However, if you’re offering an amazing deal, it may be best to let the facts stand on their own. What if you’re the buyer? Be aware of the tendency to be overly swayed by so-so offers embedded in engrossing stories.

A graph of different types of quality

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