

1. Good morning, everyone. I'm Jim. As most of you probably do, I love to read. I love to watch Netflix and go to movies and play videogames— I love storytelling. I interact with it every day, and thought it could be fun to discuss. So... let me tell you a story.
2. The wizard Gandalf returns to the Shire to enlighten Frodo about Bilbo's ring. It's the Dark Lord Sauron's ring, the one that nearly brought Middle Earth to its knees. Sauron is back and hunting the ring, and with a band of unlikely companions, Frodo's quest into Mordor to destroy the ring unfolds.
3. Sound familiar? Try this one: an unlikely protagonist must respond to a call much greater than herself to venture out on a strange and supernatural and terrifying journey to fulfill her quest and overcome the dark forces threatening the world, returning from her adventure to a life much the same yet fundamentally transformed.
4. That's the monomyth— the "heroic cycle" which is likely an old friend to all of us here from so many fairy tales. So let's try one more: October 6, 1993, a healthy male child is born in Piedmont Hospital, Atlanta. He comes of age, raised by a native Southerner and a second generation Italian-American from Queens.
5. He loves life and almost loses it half a dozen times by a mixture of curiosity and recklessness, in car wrecks, on misadventures. He's granted miraculous and mundane days in equal measure. He feels bad in good situations, loves people and hurts people, and searches for something larger than himself as he moves into an open-ended future.
6. Is this one familiar? Maybe, if you're much like me, or at least what I can generalize over forty seconds. I wager you connect with these stories on some level, and the question that itches me every day is— why? I think storytelling is one of the most powerful tools available to the human being. Why?
7. Minds far better than mine have reflected on this, one of the oldest human traditions, for generations. There are thousands of reasons out there— All I'm here to offer is a few opinions that bear on the way I try to live. Maybe you'll agree, maybe not. They're two-fold:
8. Stories orient us relative to ourselves and stories orient us relative to each other. First, with regard to ourselves, a good story may contain something relevant to our own situation that can inform our journey. They can give us guidance, direction. Maybe we see virtues we want to embody or vices we want to avoid.
9. I'm in the middle of House of Cards, for instance. It's compelling, but I don't know anyone who aspires to be Frank Underwood. Dude is downright *foul*. The story is so well-crafted, and we see the depths of human depravity and the seduction of power. As people who will wield power in different forms, it's vital we learn from that tale.
10. More importantly though, good stories connect us with people and circumstances which we might never experience otherwise. They expand us, connect us with other cultures, show us the full extent of the human condition and the reach of human capability. Good stories build community: they foster understanding between disoriented parties.
11. Alright, alright, alright. This is all way out in some meta headspace and I know you're all practical people, so what does this mean for us as entrepreneurs? Great rhetorical question, everyone. Andrew has framed us as builders, but builders of what? First and foremost: community.

12. To move somewhere new, to grow a company, to revitalize a city– these require interaction with others. Everything we do here requires community. Community cannot exist without connection, and connection
13. is best fostered through story. Your story. Mine. The lived narratives of all those with whom we're preparing to interact. To meet others' needs and solve problems, we must understand those needs and problems, so we must constantly be telling and hearing stories. And I know... you're probably thinking this is all very idealistic.
14. And it is! But that's who I am. It's who you are– all of us in this room are idealists on some level, we wouldn't be here if we weren't, we wouldn't be here if we didn't have some level of understanding that the world is not as it should be and the belief that with hard work and a little love and goddamn human ingenuity we can go out and *fix it*.
15. That's the value good storytelling has– it exposes so much darkness and lightness inherent to the human experience and teaches us how we can *change* it. Let's us believe we *can* change it. So let's start. Share your story with me, and I'll tell you mine. First, let's be storytellers. Thank you.