



Protagonist *Ink*

# Finding Your Story

*A Retreat on Narrative & Transformation*

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FEBRUARY 8, 2026

ABOUT PROTAGONIST | INK

We build stories meant  
for business.



We build stories for people on a mission—the founders, brands, and cultural organizations carving their own paths. You're the ones shaping what's next. We're here to help you tell the right story in the right way.

*Narrative architecture is the strategy that anchors your vision, aligns your people, and makes every conversation click.*

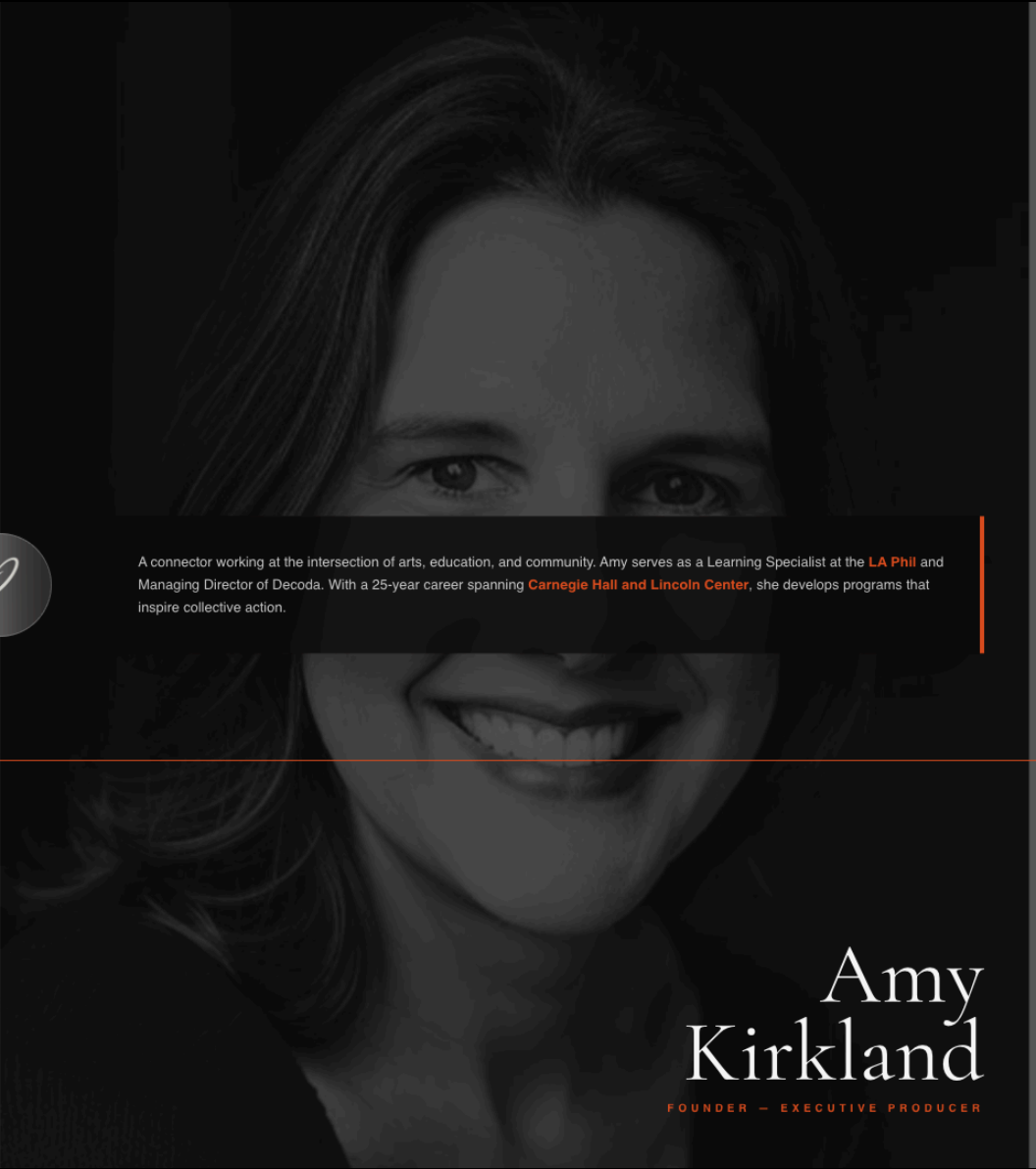
A powerful story is more than your marketing, it's your DNA. Our goal is to make sure you show up as the protagonist: confident, clear, and impossible to ignore.

A large, light gray portrait of Patrick Kirkland, a man with short dark hair, smiling slightly, wearing a collared shirt. The portrait is the background for the left half of the page.

# Patrick Kirkland

FOUNDER — CHIEF STORYBUILDER

Patrick has spent over two decades as a screenwriter, copywriter and creative director for Fortune 500 brands including **Apple, Verizon, and AT&T**, learning how stories scale at the highest level. Through Protagonist Ink, he partners with founders and organizations to shape narratives that matter.

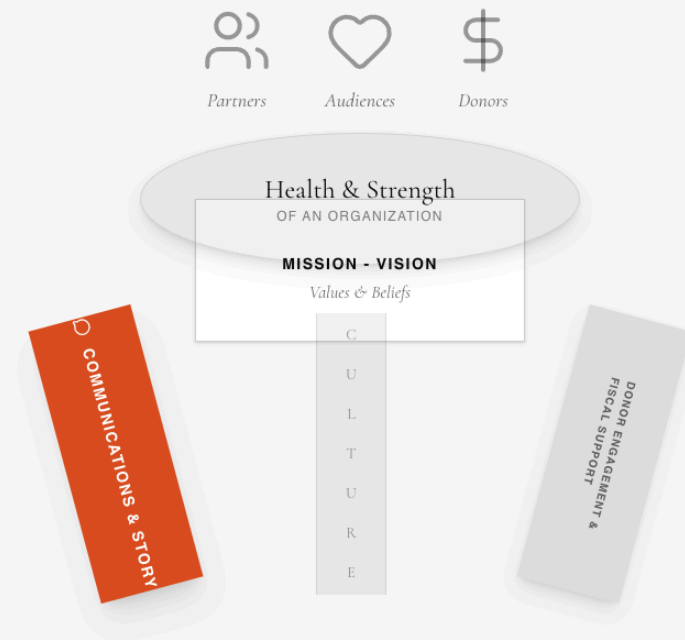
A large, dark portrait of Amy Kirkland, a woman with long dark hair, smiling. The portrait is the background for the right half of the page.

A connector working at the intersection of arts, education, and community, Amy serves as a Learning Specialist at the **LA Phil** and Managing Director of Decoda. With a 25-year career spanning **Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center**, she develops programs that inspire collective action.

# Amy Kirkland

FOUNDER — EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

# Why Storytelling?



## *Telling Our Story & Building the Next Chapter Together*

40 mi. •

### Reflecting On & Defining Identity

- What are our organizational values?
- What's been most meaningful?
- What's the story we're currently telling?

20 mi. •

### Telling a Story with Creativity

- What makes a great story?
- How are great stories shared?

40 mi. •

### Building & Transforming Your Story

- What do we dream for our organization?
- What makes us proud?
- What barriers must we overcome?

15 mi. •

### Sharing Your Story

- What is our shared narrative?
- How do we communicate our unique place?

ACT I

# *The Foundation*

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QUESTION 01

*Why are we here?*

QUESTION 02

*Why talk about story?*

# Once upon *a time...*

*There was an organization called Pacific Crest...*

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EXERCISE 01 • 8-10 MINUTES + SHARE OUT

THE CORE QUESTION

What is *Story*?

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PREAMBLE

# The Stakes: Why Story Matters

## *Positioning*

How you are perceived in the market. Story is the differentiator that moves you from a commodity to a category of one.

## *Alignment*

Internal cohesion. When the story is clear, every team member knows the mission, the stakes, and their role in the narrative.

## *Infrastructure*

The systems that support the story. Ensuring your operational reality matches the narrative you're telling the world.

FOUNDATIONS

# Reframing *Story*

Story isn't just a marketing tactic. It's the lens through which we process reality and make meaning.

## *01. Clarity over Cleverness*

The best stories are the ones we understand instantly. If the reader has to work to find the point, you've already lost.

## *02. Embrace the Conflict*

Without conflict, there is no story. We often try to hide the messy parts, but that's where the resonance lives.

THE CORE SHIFT

"The best brands in the world  
*don't sell products.*"

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*They sell the belief of transformation.*



# CASE

## *Belief, Not Product.*

EXEMPLAR: NIKE

"Nike doesn't just sell shoes. They sell the ***spirit of the athlete***. They sell the dream of overcoming."

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*When you align with a belief, the product becomes an artifact of that belief. You aren't buying a shoe; you're buying into a narrative of greatness.*

CASE STUDY 02

# Habitat for *Humanity*

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*"They sell the belief that everyone deserves a home."*



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What is  
*Pacific Crest's*  
Story?

CASE STUDY 03

ACT II

# Building the *Next Chapter*

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*Every transformation begins in the status quo.*

START: THE ORDINARY WORLD





*"A hero ventures forth from the world of common  
day into a region of supernatural wonder."*

**JOSEPH CAMPBELL**

*The Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949)*

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CONTEXT: WE DIDN'T INVENT THIS STRUCTURE. WE'RE APPLYING IT.

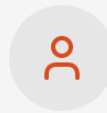
What are the elements needed to  
tell a *great story*?

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CHARACTER

CONFLICT

RESOLUTION



# PROTAGONIST

THE ONE WHO DRIVES THE STORY

FINDING NEMO

Marlin

BARBIE

Barbie

STAR WARS

Luke Skywalker





SELECT A STAGE TO EXPLORE THE JOURNEY

## Protagonist's Journey

In this exercise,  
the **protagonist**  
is your  
organization or  
program.

### The Ordinary World?

What reality, relationships, and resources shape your starting point?

### The Reward

What's the unique solution we now have that seemed impossible before?

### The Transformation

What is the fundamental shift in how we think and operate?

### The Ordeal

What are the challenges we might face?

### The Call

What is the problem that needs solving?

### Refusing the Call

What happens if we stop or do nothing?

### Mentors & Allies

Who are our guides and helpers?

What is the feeling you want other to believe?

ACT III

# *The Pitch*

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## The One Liner

THE NARRATIVE ARCHITECTURE OF YOUR BRAND.  
DISTILLED INTO A SINGLE, UNMISTAKABLE HOOK.

CLAIMING YOUR IDENTITY

*"We're a small community-based nonprofit trying to make a difference."*

*"We serve underresourced youth in the greater LA area."*

*"We believe every child deserves access to music education."*



## Who are the *major characters* in your organization?

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### CHARACTERS TO IDENTIFY

- The Protagonist (The Customer)
- The Villain (The Barrier)
- The Mentor (The Solution)

### TIMING

*5 Minute Discussion*



## THE BREAKOUT

🕒 10 MINUTES

# Round 1: Once Upon A Time

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### The Prompt

"Once upon a time, there was a [NARRATIVE IDENTITY] who believed [CORE BELIEF]..."

*Don't overthink. Focus on the raw essence of your role and your conviction.*

### OBJECTIVE

- 01 Identify your core archetype.
- 02 Define the foundational truth you stand for.
- 03 Share with your partner/group.

THE BREAKOUT

## Round 2: Building the Next Chapter



### *Dreams*

What is the ultimate vision for the future? What is the 'New World' your organization wants to build?



### *Barriers*

What stands in the way? Identify the internal and external conflicts that must be overcome.



### *Allies*

Who is on this journey with you? Who are the partners, community members, and stakeholders?



### *The Return*

How will you be changed? What is the lasting impact after the conflict is resolved?

THE SYNTHESIS

## Round 3: The Rewrite



### THE TRANSFORMER FORMULA

"We take [AUDIENCE/CONTEXT] "

"Through [SPECIFIC CONFLICT/ACTION] "

"To reach [THE NEW REALITY] "

Your one-liner should be a promise of transformation. It's not what you do; it's the bridge you build between current reality and potential.