



Stories

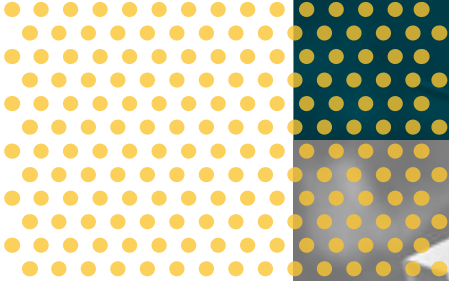
The key to our hearts



Most successful stories are moral.

They teach us how to live, whether explicitly or implicitly, and bind us together around common values.

The most powerful way to persuade people is by uniting an idea with an emotion. The best way to do that is by telling a compelling story.



Persuading with a story is hard. Any intelligent person can sit down, make lists and design an argument using conventional rhetoric. However, it demands vivid insight and storytelling skill to present an idea that packs enough emotional power to be truly memorable.

As individuals we use stories to make sense of the world, to tie together our experiences and perceptions. They give us the context we need to discover and own things for ourselves, moving us both rationally and emotionally. They shape us as individuals, affect the identity of our friendship groups and help us to understand social norms. They influence the way we think, feel, act and behave.

Stories can form the foundations of an entire workplace culture; they have the power to break down barriers, rectify negative situations, capture our imaginations, illustrate our ideas, and inspire us in a way that cold, hard facts often can't. Too often in business we only try and connect with people on a rational level. This helps others understand what you want them to do, but if they're not emotionally engaged, it isn't enough to actually change their behaviour.

When you tell a story well, it can create an intense, personal connection between your audience and your message. Effective storytelling can change opinions, inspire us to achieve goals that we didn't think were possible, and demonstrate how we can change things for the better.

Knowing which story to tell

In her book “Whoever Tells the Best Story Wins”, author Annette Simmons identifies six types of business story. Let’s look at each one in detail.



1. ‘Who-I-am’ stories

These stories explain who you are as a person. They tell others about your dreams, goals, accomplishments, failures, motivations, values or history.

‘Who-I-am’ stories are essential to build trust. Tell these stories when you join a new team, or when you need to establish a connection with a stranger.

2. ‘Why-I-am-here’ stories

‘Why-I-am-here’ stories communicate why you’re here, and their aim is to replace suspicion with trust. People want to know, “what’s in it for me?” but they also want to know, “what’s in it for you?”. These stories explain that you don’t have a hidden agenda, and that you’ll both get something fair out of the situation.

For example, people may be asking themselves if you are passionate about what you do, or are you financially motivated? Are you here for the right or wrong reasons?

You can use ‘why-I-am-here’ stories in fundraising, sales, and situations when you need to build trust quickly.

3. Teaching stories

Teaching stories creates an experience that transforms listeners or readers. They show how a change in their behaviour, perspective or skills can lead to meaningful results.

You can also use teaching stories to illustrate a situation, such as a best or worst-case scenario.

4. Vision stories

Vision stories inspire people, and encourage them to feel hope or happiness. Here, you convince your audience that their hard work and sacrifice is worth the effort. You need to link their actions to a specific, valuable, and worthwhile outcome.

Use vision stories when you need to motivate people to change their behaviour. They can inspire people to overcome the frustrations, obstacles and challenges that arise during a period of change.

5. Values-in-action stories

Values-in-action stories reinforce the values that you want your audience to demonstrate or think about. These stories can be positive or negative. For example, you can tell stories that demonstrate integrity, compassion and commitment. Alternatively, you can tell stories that highlight attitudes you don't want to see such as cynicism, a slapdash approach to quality, or a poor work ethic.

6. 'I-know-what-you-are-thinking' stories

'I-know-what-you-are-thinking' stories allow you to address the objections of others (as well as their suspicions, questions or concerns) before they voice them. With these stories, you need to identify your audience's point of view, so you choose a story that deals with their unspoken concerns.

When you tell this type of story, you validate the audience's perspective, demonstrating that you're on their side and that you can relate to their emotions. These stories are valuable in situations involving sales or negotiations.



How to form an engaging story

A good story is like a recipe – certain ‘ingredients’ need to be part of the mix for it to be a success.

There are many storytelling frameworks, but fundamentally, all great stories contain certain essential elements: the context (or situation), the action (or task) and the result.

In Paul Smith’s 2012 book, ‘Lead with a Story’, he examines how leaders can use the CAR structure to tell better business stories. Let’s look at the elements of the frameworks in more detail.

Context (or situation)

Smith believes that context is the element most neglected by leaders. Without context, your story may confuse or bore your audience. By setting the scene you create a start point.

The context provides the background information that listeners or readers need to make sense of your story. It should also spark their interest and make a connection, so that they care about what you have to say.

Context needs to address four key questions:

1. Where and when does it take place?

Set the scene early. Functional information gives vital building blocks to help people understand what you go on to say. Introduce the main character and describe the time, place and people involved.

2. Who does the story centre around?

This will be the main character of your story. Why are they important? Again, this is vital to set the scene.

3. What does your main character want?

What is their agenda? What goal are they looking to achieve? Think about your own feelings on this.

4. What might get in their way?

In your situation, what or who is the obstacle or challenge that they need to overcome to make their goal happen? Again, think about how to include your own feelings on this – it will help your audience to empathise and draw them in.

As you think about how to tell your story, plan how you'll answer these four questions. It's also important to be authentic, especially when you tell a personal story.

Action (or task)

Every great story has action: ups and downs, setbacks, conflicts, failures and battles. The action is where we experience defeats and learn lessons.

In your story, your main character must 'do' something – what is needed to be done. Ideally, he or she will experience a setback, failure, or problem along the way. Obstacles create tension and forge an important connection with your audience, because everyone experiences them daily.

Here, you can introduce the steps and the actions taken, why these were so important, and think about the emotions you want to leave your audience feeling – perhaps inspired by how the challenges were overcome.

Result

At the end of your story, you reveal your main character's fate. You also need to explain, subtly, what the audience should have learned from this story. What were the results of your character's behaviour and actions? What is the moral and the impact on your character and others? Why did you tell this story and how can it be used to inspire others.



**Why did you tell
this story and
how can it be
used to inspire
others?**

Segmenting your story

Releasing messages in chapters is not new – it's been around since Charles Dickens first wrote the *Pickwick Papers* in the 1800s and is widely used today in the entertainment industry – think *House of Cards* or *Breaking Bad*. The process is known as 'serialisation' or 'episodic storytelling'.

Breaking messages down into bite-sized chunks enables you to engage employees earlier and more often. By factoring in 'breathing room' you allow your audience to absorb each piece of content and provide feedback one step at a time. In today's complex and ever-changing business environment, when we don't always know 'how the story ends', what employee reaction will be, or what other news is being shared at the same time, the ability to do this is increasingly important. It enables us to avoid backtracking on messages and ensure the information shared clearly responds to employee needs/concerns – because we're in touch with what these are.

When considering how to deliver your story, it's important to ascertain what you know about your message from the outset, as well as what each target audience's likely response will be. It's also vital that you form some hypotheses around what possible changes could crop up that would influence your message.

Splitting your story into incremental chapters (rather than delivering the entire message all at once) ensures transparency. Your audience have time to listen and digest the information you're giving them.

How to use it

To break messages into an effective series, consider the following points:

The message

- What is the primary goal of the message?
- What are the important elements of the message? (i.e. who, what, when, where, why, how).
- Of these elements, which are you most certain about? Which are you least certain about? Can you obtain greater certainty around any of these before your first message is sent out?
- For each element, hypothesise 2-3 scenarios that could change or influence the message (e.g. a customer shift, a new product release, an executive departure, etc.). If these scenarios proved true, which elements of your story would need to change?

The audience

1. Who is the target audience?
2. What is the target audience currently working on? What major issues are they engaged in?
3. What does each audience know about your story already?
4. For each chapter, consider what uncertainties might cause confusion or frustration.

Write an outline for your story, focusing on those elements you're most certain of and are least likely to change given unexpected scenarios. Next, restructure your outline to 'chapter format' so that the most certain pieces of information are in the first chapter, and less certain information appears in later chapters.

Top tips on storytelling

- Always refer back to the 'story goal' (the main purpose of your message) in every chapter.
- Communicate strengths in each story to inform how your company will act or resolve a problem.
- Make sure every chapter is moving the story forward, not a stagnant repetition of early chapters.
- Make sure each chapter flows logically and contains no guess-work.
- Great storytellers know that a powerful story is only part of what inspires people to listen. Follow the tips below to become a better storyteller.
- **Listen** – The best storytellers are also the best listeners. Brush up on your active listening skills, and give others your full attention when they tell a story.
- **Practice** – Rehearse your story before you tell it. Even if you practice on your own, just once, in front of a mirror or video camera, this can improve your storytelling.
- **Create an experience** – When you tell a story, you create an experience for your listeners. Appeal to all five senses; don't just tell them.



Storytelling in business is an art that enables you to communicate and connect with employees, customers, suppliers, partners and anyone else involved with your organisation. The purpose of business stories isn't entertainment – they have a specific goal or desired outcome.

To tell a great business story, it's important to be authentic. Use stories that tell other people more about who you are, and why you're here. Don't be too afraid to tell stories that show failure, poor judgment, or mistakes on your part. When you're prepared to appear vulnerable in front of others, you can quickly establish trust and rapport.

Think about stories from your own career that you can use to teach your team.

Self-knowledge is the root of all great storytelling. A storyteller creates all characters by asking the question, "if I were this character in these circumstances, what would I do?". The more you understand your own humanity, the more you can appreciate the humanity of others in all of their struggles.

Elements of a great story

- 1 Clear beginning, middle and end.
 - 2 Use emotion and conflict to make a point.
 - 3 They make the listener think, feel and act.
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Further reading

Annette Simons

www.annettesimmons.com/the-six-kinds-of-stories

Robert McKee

www.mckeestory.com

Paul Smith

'Lead with a Story'

A brilliant book with an accompanying website.

www.leadwithastory.com

Andrew Stanton

The Clues to a Great Story

Stanton brought us "Toy Story" and "WALL-E", among others. He shares his discoveries of great storytelling in this TED Talk.

He explains that stories help us to understand who we really are and connect with others, allowing us to experience the similarities we have with one another. This is not only true in the world of feature films but also with business stories. One of the key ingredients is a feeling of connection, as connection breeds loyalty.

[Search 'Andrew Stanton Storytelling' on YouTube](#)

John Maeda

Storylistening

John Maeda from Swissmiss talks about the concept of 'Storylistening' and specifically how great leaders need to be great listeners before they can be great storytellers.

[Search 'John Maeda Storylistening' on YouTube](#)

JJ Abrams

The Mystery Box

Film and TV writer/director, JJ Abrams, staunchly believes that "mystery is the catalyst for imagination". In this TED Talk, Abrams opens up about how his fascination with the mysterious has been the driving force behind his storytelling. What does mystery mean to him? Infinite possibility. What we don't know, we make up with our imagination, driving engagement.

[Search 'JJ Abrams Mystery Box' on YouTube](#)

Nancy Duarte

Uncovering the Structure of the Greatest Communicators

Nancy Duarte is a writer and graphic designer who became a 'presentation expert' after discovering a common structure used by great storytellers.

Nancy compares Martin Luther King's 'I Had a Dream' speech with Steve Jobs' introduction of the iPhone in 2007.

Both stories succeed in stirring up strong emotions of possibility with their listeners. They do this by contrasting the status quo (or 'what is') with their vision ('what could be'). They employ this over and over again throughout their stories, culminating in a powerful call-to-action and a description of their new world. For Martin Luther King, this was a world with freedom; for Steve Jobs, this was a world with iPhones.

[Search 'Nancy Duarte Greatest Communicators' on YouTube](#)

Storytelling template - building your story

Once you've identified the experience or incident you want to share, you can build your story using the following structure:

Pre-story	What main idea are you trying to communicate?
Visualise and replay the event and experiences. Consider your thoughts, feelings and emotions.	What do you want your audience to do as a result of your story?
Context (or situation)	When and where did the story take place?
Subject	Who is the subject? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Real/fictional/you • You want the audience to think 'that could be me'
Treasure	What does the character want? Why are they important? Identify their passion or goal.
Obstacle	Who or what is getting in their way? Identify the villain, barriers or constraints that challenge progress.
Action (or task)	What happened to the hero, what steps did they take and why? Were there conflicts or temporary setbacks? Ups and downs along the way? Research done? Conclusions drawn?
Result	What happened to the hero in the end? What were the results of their behaviour and actions?

Keep it short and simple. It makes the story easy to understand, remember and re-tell.

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