

FAST COMPANY

7 TIPS FOR GREAT STORYTELLING AS A LEADER

TELL BETTER STORIES—AND LEAVE YOUR AUDIENCE WANTING TO HEAR MORE—WITH THESE TIPS ON TALE-SPINNING.

BY DIANNA BOOHER

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We share our stories with our friends, family, and strangers on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. We talk about vacations, holiday get-togethers, office projects, and travel mishaps. We don't dump statistics on our social media sites. Why? Because our stories carry emotion that connects us with people and drives a point deeper and deeper into our psyche.

We tell ourselves stories about why we do what we do; about why we act the way we act; about what we said and why we said it; about how something should be done or not done. The stories that go on in our head prove positively that stories are a natural mode of communication.

So it should be natural that we tell others our stories as a means to influence them on the job. When tragedy strikes, the media doesn't just report how many people died, the impact on the Richter scale or the economy, and the inches of snow, rain, or flooding. Instead, reporters find the people stories. They put a face to the tragedy by telling you of the single guy who jumped from the safety of his boat to save a drowning two-year-old whose parents, unable to swim, stood on the swollen river's shore screaming for help.

But storytelling is not just about sensationalism. Storytelling makes leadership possible. A leader without the ability to tell a great story has lost the platform and power to persuade.

Researchers have discovered that even judges and seasoned attorneys prefer story briefs to logo briefs (those built totally on logical argument). An empirical study on the power of story determined that stories are persuasive to experienced lawyers and judges because they evoke emotional responses that make legal claims of the parties more credible and elicit empathy in their judicial thinking.

Structure is to storytelling what framing is to a house. Without it, you just have a heap of supplies on a vacant lot.

Think back to your high-school or college English classes. Your professor defined a story this way: "A hero struggles to overcome obstacles to reach an important goal." Keep these tips in mind as you start to build your personal or business stories:

1. SHOW, DON'T TELL

That is, don't tell your audience about the movie. Put them in the movie theater, and let them see the movie. Recreate the scenes.

2. START WITH A HERO

Anything or anyone can be a hero in the story: Your organization, a product, a location, your client, a passerby. Make sure your audience can identify with your hero.

3. MANAGE YOUR EGO

Don't always try to be the hero or heroine in your own stories or talk about your successes. Audiences relate more often and learn more from "failure" stories.

4. ADD SOME TWISTS

Give your hero a goal or challenge to overcome. Add struggles. The hero must overcome struggles or obstacles to master the challenge or meet the goal.

5. MAKE IT INTERESTING

Use dialogue to let listeners hear the characters talk to each other. Be interactive in the telling. Use analogies, metaphors, and props and add some humor—self-effacing humor is best.

6. CREATE A CALLBACK LINE

Refer back to a line from earlier in your story that will continue to drive home your message. Bringing this line to mind again makes the story feel like it's come full circle for listeners and clarifies the takeaway.

7. CHALLENGE YOUR LISTENERS

End with a resolution that motivates your listeners to action.

Master this basic skill of story-telling as a first step to move people emotionally—to buy your product, to become a strategic partner, to increase productivity, to change a habit, to cast your vision.

Tell it and they will engage.

—***Dianna Booher**, CEO of Booher Research and an expert in leadership communications, is the author of 46 books, published in 26 languages, with nearly 4 million copies sold. Her latest book, What More Can I Say: Why Communication Fails and What to Do About It, is available at local and online bookstores and www.BooherResearch.com.*

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