



Influencing Through Stories

*"Great stories happen to those who can
tell them." - Ira Glass*

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Introduction

Everyone has stories to tell. We are introduced to stories as children – when we are awestruck by fairytales and stories of wizards and goblins, princesses and princes. Stories continue to enthrall us and keep us spellbound even as we grow up and enter adulthood. The truth is that well-told stories never fail to affect us, no matter how old we get.

Storytelling has earned its place as the most essential tradition that humans possess. That is because every story has a lesson to be learned. It serves to codify values of a culture, conveys history and values that unite people, explores conflicts faced by individuals and populations, and examines the human conscience.

In a business sense, storytelling conveys purpose; and businesses with purpose are known to be more successful than those that don't. Stories are one of the most powerful tools that leaders have to teach, inspire, and influence. They forge connections between people and ideas. Today, storytelling is also a business skill that can boost a business in several ways, including creating a strong brand and a strong marketing strategy, increasing profits, and creating improved customer loyalty.





Within an organization, stories help employees make more sense of the organization. Well created stories about the organization resonate with the employees and lead to creativity, interaction, and transformation. It is one of the best ways that leaders can use today to communicate with the people that they lead.





Chapter 1:

Why Leadership Storytelling is Important

Storytelling is a crucial leadership technique that is not only free, quick, natural, and refreshing, but also powerful, persuasive, holistic, and collaborative. It is well adapted to handle several of the challenges faced by leaders today.

- Stories inspire action
- Stories travel further
- Stories are authentic and memorable

Storytelling is a way of sharing experiences. It helps people understand with clarity like no other art. Within the workplace, storytelling offers more than mere dry facts.

Here are some ways that storytelling supports leaders.



Reaching a wider audience more effectively

- A story that is told well appeals to a wider variety of listening, learning, and information-processing styles. You have a better chance of reaching a wider audience through a story than by PowerPoint presentations, emails,





texts, or dialogue. That alone can help cut through the clutter and noise of several hundreds of disconnected messages that daily bombard your employees.

- Stories taps into the emotions of employees and creates a memorable impact. They are easy to understand; and because employees understand the information more deeply, they retain this information for longer.



A reasoning process

- Stories provide more depth to reason.
- All good business cases are developed and supported through the use of numbers. But storytelling translates dry statistics and numbers into compelling pictures of the leader's goal for their team.



A great communication tool

- Stories of the past have a way of bringing together groups and teams to work toward a shared future.
- Storytelling has the power to spark change, enhance a brand, transmit values, share knowledge, lead people into the future, and even tame the grapevine by neutralizing rumor and gossip.





- Leadership can provide information about who they are as leaders – their values, passions, and motives.
- Employees are often left feeling disconnected in a virtual world. But the platform on which a story is shared acts as a shared space for dialogue - something that these employees crave.



Managing conflicts

- Conflicts cannot always be approached directly, and even when it can, a discussion is often too slow and ineffective. Stories can indirectly get a message across to handle, address, and resolve workplace conflicts, struggles, and problems.



Persuading change

- Sometimes, only stories can persuade groups of managers or team members to act enthusiastically toward major changes in the organization. That is because they work beyond the scope of simple, linear logic.
- Position opportunities and threats through stories to bring the need for change into focus.





- They can inspire employees to take steps toward an unknown or unfamiliar future – simply through the power of imagination. They can be used to preview the future by creating an appealing vision of the future that leaves employees motivated and inspired and as interested in the future as in the present.

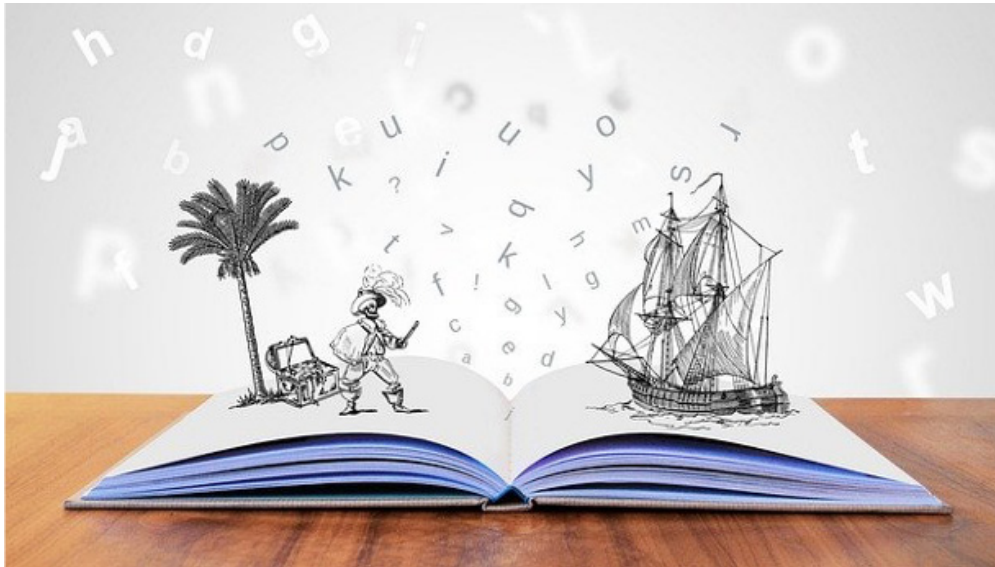


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Chapter 2:

The 5 Elements OR The 5 P's that make up a Great Story

If you're going to reap the most significant benefits from storytelling in the workplace, you must think strategically about the stories you want to tell. Ensure that you first identify with what you want your story to achieve, and then develop the right narrative to achieve it. While every story is different and has its unique benefits, all strategic stories are composed of five essential elements.



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1. Premise

The premise of your story is the context of your story. It connects the story that you are going to tell to the workplace situation in which you will tell it and the mindset of the audience who will hear it. The premise will help you build up the story, build a shared understanding with your audience, and help them fully appreciate why they should listen to it.





For example, you are a manager who has to roll out a major initiative that requires your team to operate a new way. You know that several of your team members are anxious about this new change. You are also aware that they are going to be unwilling to change unless you can make this change appealing to them. Your strategy is to share a great story with them, telling them about the advantages of embracing change and learning new skills. But before you go head-on into your story, introduce the premise for your story by saying...

“You all know that we are about to introduce a big change in the office, and I know that several of you are anxious about this change. I am nervous about this change too. But it reminds me of a time when I had to go through a big change myself. So before we dive into the new plans for our team, let me just tell you a quick story.”

Then, you tell your story about the change you had to go through. You have prepared your audience, and they are prepared to listen to your story of change because you have already set the premise. In setting up the premise, you have acknowledged how they feel and also set up the reason for the meeting. So now, your audience is more open to hearing you begin your session with a story.





2. Platform

Now that you have established the premise, your audience is all set to listen to your story. Establish the starting point of your story – the time and the place it all began. Fairytales often start with, “Once upon a time, in a land far away.” The beginning of your story is your audience’s cue that your story is about to unfold.

For example, in the above context, your story might begin with, “When I working at my first job at Blue Lagoon Advertising Agency in Dallas, Texas, word came down that a major reorg was coming.”



3. Person

The stories that you tell must have a main character who is supported by other characters who influence or have an impact on the main character’s journey through the story. The main character could be you – if you are telling a personal story, or you could tell the story about someone else and their experience, and you are a witness in the story. Make the story about the main character. If you are not the main character, ensure you make the story about that person and not about you – even if you are telling it from your perspective.





4. Plot

The plot of a story is the driving force of that story. A plot gives your story structure and flow. It provides the story with a clear beginning, middle, and most importantly, an end.

While stories can have several types of plots, the most common and successful plots are those that involve:

- A person or a group of people
- Who are in a particular situation
- Have a goal to achieve
- But experience challenges and obstacles in trying to reach that goal
- But somehow manage to reach overcome these challenges
- Reach their goal.

Engage your audience in the plot by introducing tension around the challenges and obstacles, and then relieve this tension when the character(s) successfully move past these challenges.





5. Point

Finally, your story must have a point to it. That is the message or the key takeaway that your audience draws from your story. The point of the story flows naturally from the plot of your story, and it impacts the person/character that the story revolves around.

Your story aims is to reach this key takeaway, so don't leave it to chance. Don't leave it to your audience to guess what it is. Always conclude your story by driving the point home.

For example, you can say, "The point of this story is that ..." or, "What I learned from that situation is that..." or, "The reason I shared this story with you is that..."

Important points to remember

- Ensure that the middle three elements – the platform, the person, and the plot - of your story are engaging, well outlined, and connected.
- When telling your story, firmly establish the first and the fifth elements – the premise, and the point – that will ensure that your story is strategic and relevant to the workplace situation in which you are telling it.

By doing this, you can be sure that your story is engaging, relatable, and that you will have your audience's attention right to the very end.





Chapter 3: Story-Listening – The Other Side of Story Telling

Telling a great story is one thing, but there is another critical skill that leaders must possess, and that is story-listening.

Story-listening through conversation and interview techniques helps leaders to get their teams to tell their own stories and share incidents, achievements, impacts, and emotions. It helps leaders understand complex issues. It also shows employees and team members that their leader cares about them and that they are open to their ideas. It builds trust and connection and also helps build relationships with team members. Story-listening can also help build a leader's empathy skills.

Story-listening is a powerful tool to understand the way your employees/team/customers/suppliers think, the problems and challenges they face, and a more in-depth insight into your organization/team.



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Here are some necessary elements of story-listening.

1. Give story permissions.

While your team members are willing to share their stories with their friends and family, they are not so willing to share their stories with their managers and leaders. They need your permission to tell their stories. You can encourage them by saying, “tell me a story about one of your most disgruntled customers.” You can even give your team advance notice that you would like to have a session where you would like to hear their stories.

2. Don't interrupt

As a leader, you might be tempted to interrupt your team member as they relate their story, or cross-examine them and get down to the bottom line. These tactics will only kill their stories. They should know that they can tell their whole story – even beyond the plain facts.

3. Encourage with your eyes

People know when they have your full attention. Let your eyes show attentiveness and that you are following their story.





4. Don't be afraid to share good stories

When you hear a story that is moving or one that is key to the organization, find a way to get the story heard by the organization. Stories told by employees, customers, partners, and vendors and shared within the organization have a positive impact on your employees. You could create audio or a video that can be shared more widely within the organization.

5. Honor the story and the storyteller.

While it is necessary to collect stories from your customers, employees, teammates, vendors, and suppliers, it is also important to honor the story and the storyteller. That means if you plan on retelling the story yourself, ensure you do it with the storyteller's permission. Don't change facts and always give the storyteller full credit.

6. Don't play dueling stories.

While you might have a similar great story to tell, don't interrupt your storyteller and refrain from following up on their story with one of your own. That could undermine the whole purpose of story-listening.





Chapter 4: The Different Narrative Patterns and Their Uses

Storytelling is an art, but there is also a science to telling great stories. Different narrative patterns can be used to tell a story, but each pattern is useful for different purposes of leadership. Knowing which pattern is suitable for which task is critical to compelling storytelling. Without proper knowledge on these narratives and their uses could lead to a leader stumbling upon an inappropriate narrative pattern for the task at hand, which could lead to adverse consequences.



Type of Narrative	What it is	When it can be used
Career narratives	Stories about who you are, what you do, and why you do it.	Useful in interviews, when meeting new prospects, peers, and partners.
Professional narratives	Stories told among peers such as healthcare executives and marketing professionals	Told at trade associations and events.
Industry narratives	Stories that relate to a particular ecosystem and shared by policymakers, vendors, consultants, physicians, etc.	Told within the markets and industries.
Organizational narratives	Stories about the organization	Told within the company and to let the public know about the organization – who they are, what they do, and why they do it





Product/service narratives	Stories about a particular product or service and what it does and why it is needed	Used for marketing purposes and shared with customers and potential customers
Creation narratives	Stories of failures and successes, turning points, and passions.	Used to form bonds with listeners; to increase sales.
Connection stories	Stories of past context and results, and change and its impact.	Used for change management; to increase sales.
Success stories	Stories about overcoming problems	Used to make case studies more engaging, knowledge management, and to increase sales.
Influence stories	Have the ability to change opinions and overcome objections.	Used for change management.
Story listening	Getting employees/team members to share their stories	Used to understand complex issues; for knowledge management; during interviews to understand candidates better.



CONCLUSION

Of all the communication tools that are available to leaders today, there is perhaps none that is as powerful as storytelling. Leaders have used stories to connect people with ideas, to communicate with their team, and even to vision a future that they want to make real. It is a vital methodology to handle and resolve struggles and address problems. It can bring together teams and groups of people to work toward a common goal. Leaders can use this powerful medium to influence, inspire, and teach.

As well as being able to tell stories, managers and leaders must also be able to listen to stories told by their team.

Storytelling is an art – one that can be learned – and one that must be learned – because we all have powerful and influential stories to tell.



A few books that we recommend:

