

StorySelling Tips

Before You Tell a Story...

Business publications these days sing the praises of corporate storytelling. But what if you're not a natural storyteller? How do you fashion a tale that inspires and connects — and still suits a business setting? Here are nine tips to get you started:

1. Brief is better. Choose a story that can be boiled down to 3-5 minutes. Longer tales can get too complex. A good story should be like a skirt: long enough to cover the subject, but short enough to keep things interesting.

2. What is the Why? Why are you telling this particular story? Make sure it reinforces the value you want to reinforce in a positive way.

Know the key point of your story. This will help you choose what to leave in and what to leave out.

3. This time it's personal. Find a story from your own life if possible — especially for a “why I'm here” tale (one that explains your purpose for speaking to your listeners). This gives you authority and authenticity.

4. Who's your hero? Listeners need a clear protagonist to identify with. If you have too many heroes, the audience and the tale lose focus. Telling it from a single hero's point of view keeps things simple and powerful.

5. What's the beef? Every story needs a clear problem and solution. Make sure this problem has relevance to your listeners, and remember to include the solution. Listeners need closure.

6. Make 'em feel it. If you want your story to hit home, give it some strong human emotion. Fear, anger, excitement, frustration, joy — it doesn't matter which feeling, as long as it's genuine. Your involvement in the story's emotion triggers your listeners' emotional involvement.

7. Keep it real. For most business purposes, true stories resonate more than parables or myths. *Who Moved My Cheese?* aside, would you relate better to a story that happened to the teller or one that happened to mice?

8. All's well that ends well. Pick a story with a happy ending. Why? It'll give your listeners an endorphin rush and leave them with a positive impression. Yes, fear can motivate, but it can also lead to paralysis. Take a tip from Hollywood and end on an up note.

9. Papa, don't preach. At your story's end, let the listeners draw their own conclusion. If you spell out the moral, you ram it down their throats. Leave space for the audience to reach its own conclusions, and you draw people in.

Bruce Hale is a Master Storyteller and author. Find out more about how to develop your strategic storytelling from his website at:
<http://www.brucetalks.com>.

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