The Storytelling Blueprint
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1. How to Use Stories to Help Your Business
The Role of Storytelling

At its best, storytelling is a tool, a technique, a strategy, and a core competence for business leaders. Well-crafted stories touch people and inspire them to improve and to act.

- **Why Use Storytelling?:** The current business climate means that new problems arise daily that don’t have pat or standard solutions. Also, communication within corporations has become more complex. Those who have data and knowledge need to find ways to persuade others by packaging this information into palatable forms. Storytelling helps with both these key areas.

- **Stories Help Business:** When you use stories, you move people from focusing on the tangible or intangible benefits and features of your products/services to something that’s more memorable.

- **Stories with Substance:** Many of the “stories” we hear every day on the internet, radio, or television are quick stories without much underlying depth. Memorable stories contain an “a-ha” moment or inspire us to think about something in our own lives in a different way.
What Makes a Story?

There are many different forms of storytelling and the word “story” can be defined in many ways. One definition is: *a narrative that tells of a character’s struggles to solve a problem against obstacles to conquer or achieve an important goal.*

All well-crafted stories of substance have specific qualities.

- **Sensory Language:** All well-crafted stories provide sensory language that reaches the audience through stimulating sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.

- **Quick Understanding:** The flow of the plot gives the listener a quick understanding of the battles the character has had to face in reaching the goal. Data and information is more memorable in the context of a story.

- **Creates Meaning:** The story provides a memorable key message that has meaning on a universal level.
The Impact of Stories Part 1

Well-crafted stories with deep meaning have the potential to influence people in at least four different ways.

• **Physical:** When people are truly listening, their behavior changes. They may sit at the edge of their seats, they may lean back, they may look at the speaker more closely, or they may stop taking notes. They may even get very quiet or shed tears. Dynamic or heart-tugging stories create a physical impact.

• **Mental:** It’s been shown that when a speaker has an audience’s attention, the brain patterns of those in the audience mirror that of the speaker with the exception of the fact that the audience is awaiting what will happen next.

• **Results:** By telling stories you can change the physical behavior of an audience and you can get their minds to resonate with the information you are communicating in your story. Storytelling is wired into the human brain. It’s a powerful way for people to form connections with each other.
The Impact of Stories Part 2

The most powerful stories impact people at all four levels—physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual.

• **Emotional:** Most of the decisions we make, 95% or so, are made unconsciously on auto-pilot. The left sides of our brains are skeptical and want facts, but the right sides are creative and emotional. Surprisingly, most consumer decisions are not made solely using logic. Most of the everyday decisions we make are in response to emotional triggers.

• **Spiritual:** Stories that trigger an emotional response are important but those that inspire and highlight the human experience and the triumph of the human spirit are even more memorable.

• **Results:** Persuading people to take action is more emotional and spiritual than logical. Stories help take people to these levels and lift data and information into something more personal.
Storytelling Myths

Sometimes it takes people a while to understand the value of storytelling. There are objections that others may have to storytelling.

- **Stories Take Too Long:** Yes, it’s true that it generally takes longer to tell a story than to just do a presentation of facts. However, which do you think an audience would remember longer?: a 5-minute story of how a manager overcame odds to meet his sales goals or a chart that just shows sales figures for 3 years.

- **Just Want the Facts:** People claim they just want data, facts, and figures but the truth is that if this is the way you present findings, the audience will need a lot of follow up to commit it to memory.

- **Too Revealing:** Stories make us vulnerable. It takes courage to discuss our personal or business failures and hard-worn successes. However, these are the business stories that have the power to transform behaviors and change lives.
2. Why Storytelling Works
Stories Add Value

Even when stories are clearly fictional and are presented as such, if they are well-crafted, they add value to the services and products they support. People perceive an object as having more value when a story accompanies it.

- **Credibility and Believability:** Stories present information about products and services in a way that makes data more believable to the audience.

- **Create Connections:** Stories create connection and trust among buyers, sellers, employees, management, and investors.

- **Strengthen Relationships:** Stories strengthen business relationships and create communities increasing the chance for loyalty instead of one-off transactions.
Stories Communicate Effectively

When listening to stories, people assimilate information much more rapidly than they do when listening to a list of facts or figures.

- **Provide Enjoyable Listening:** Well-crafted stories are engaging to listen to and enjoy. Stories that stimulate the senses are more memorable than tables of facts and figures.

- **Communicate Quickly:** It’s much easier and quicker to communicate an important message within the context of a story than any other way. Complex information is more accessible to the layperson when it comes wrapped in a story.

- **Great Stories Are Shared:** When you hear a powerful story, you’re more likely to share it with someone else. This doubles or triples the effectiveness of stories compared to other ways to relay information. It gives them the potential to “go viral.”
Stories Stimulate Action

Stories are inspiring. Well-crafted stories can empower the audience to take steps toward specific goals.

- **Spark Conversation:** By sparking conversations within your organization or around the world, stories can be a catalyst for transformation.

- **Imagine the Future:** Stories can paint a vision of the future that’s attainable with audience participation.

- **Problem Solving:** Stories that show how others have collaborated to solve problems can inspire employees to strive for greater innovation and creativity. Stories make abstract concepts more tangible to the audience. Stories can help individuals and organizations learn more rapidly.
Stories Are More Sticky

Most consumer decisions, over 90%, are unconsciously made. Stories appeal to the senses and heart and are therefore much more sticky than other ways of conveying information.

- **Connect with the Senses and Emotions:** When your story connects with people’s needs or emotional states, you have a higher likelihood of staying in their consciousness for longer periods of time.

- **Stories Stick:** Think about powerful stories you have heard. Many of them may have been told to you in childhood and stuck with you for decades. Inspiring business stories stay with you for much longer than slideshow presentations with no support stories. Stories are filled away in your subconscious and influence your behavior.

- **Captivate Interest:** Because stories captivate your listeners, they become more attentive and retain the information you are conveying. Also, stories guide the audience to draw their own conclusions, which empowers them and makes them active participants instead of just passive listeners.
Stories Help with Unique Selling Proposition

Many companies use storytelling to convey their brand. Some select companies use stories as core ways to organize all the action they take both within the company and as their outward face to customers. When stories are used the second way, they have more lasting impact at all levels of an organization.

- **Differentiate Yourself and Your Organization:** Stories help you to communicate to the consumer why you and your organization are unique.

- **Communicate Values and Passions:** Stories with their supporting images help you communicate your values and passions to a wide audience.

- **Establish Economic Value:** By using stories, you can establish the economic value of your products and services with your end user. It helps the end consumer to develop an appreciation of all that goes into the work you do.
3. A Story Vs. an Informational Piece
What Defines a Story?

What is the difference between a story and a presentation that’s just a business narrative? Many business presentations sound like: “We have a fabulous product. Here’s what our customers say about it. You should buy it.” This is not a story. There’s no beautiful language that stimulates the senses, there’s no conflict to be resolved, there are no interesting characters, and there’s no core or universal message.

1. Core Elements of a Story:

(a) Plot

A story always contains a fleshed-out plot with conflict. A business story should focus on one named character. It’s best to avoid fairy tales or Aesop’s fables in business storytelling. Use real people in real stories for the best impact.

(b) Inner and Outer Dialogue

Stories frequently convey both the inner and outer dialogue of their main characters.
(c) Sensory Details and Emotion

A well-crafted story provides a lot of sensory detail. Stories convey emotion and help the audience feel the ups and downs of the character’s emotions.

(d) Drama and Conflict

Stories get the audience interested by providing lots of drama and conflict. The hero or heroine overcomes obstacles.

(e) Key Message/Layers of Meaning

A well-thought-out story contains a key message and often contains layers of meaning throughout.
2. Describing a Situation Versus Telling a Story

Describing a situation is not the same as telling a story. Here is a description of a situation: “For nine months I struggled with my office colleague. His way of working didn’t mesh with mine. Then by accident we discovered something that changed our views of each other’s working styles.” This is just a description but could be changed into an engaging business story with the proper embellishments.

3. Other Narrative Forms/Not Stories

There are nine different narrative forms that are not stories. These narrative forms are valuable in business as well, however they are generally not as effective as stories are. Most of them can provide the basis for a story/stories. The elements they most commonly exclude are dialogue, sensory details, and a core message.
Anecdotes, Case Studies:

What are they? How do they differ from stories? When should you use them?

- **Definition:** An anecdote is a short, personal account; A case study is an analysis of a situation that is used to draw conclusions.

- **How Do They Differ from Stories:** An anecdote differs from a story because it doesn’t provide sensory info, dialogue, context, or setting. Even though a case study frequently has a beginning, middle, and end, it isn’t a story. Case studies are broken into situation, solution to problem/s, summary of results, and analysis of results.

- **When Should You Use:** Anecdotes can be shared quickly to spark conversations or to underscore a point. However, they are not a good replacement for a fuller, richer storyline. Case studies are good for teaching critical thinking skills and for lending credibility to a process you want to employ in the future. They provide models for business practices.
Descriptions, Examples:

What are they? How do they differ from stories? When should you use them?

• **Definition:** A description is an explanation of a situation written in third person. An example is focused on an event or incident that illustrates a particular point.

• **How Do They Differ from Stories:** Descriptions and examples are both used when “talking about” a story instead of telling one.

• **When Should You Use:** You can use a description of a story to find out whether someone wants to hear the full-blown story. Descriptions are frequently used to provide the executive summary for a more detailed report. Examples work well when there isn’t enough time to tell a story or not enough print space allocated for a more complete story. Examples are a concise way to add validity to the point/s you’re making.
News Reports, Profiles:

What are they? How do they differ from stories? When should you use them?

- **Definition:** A news report is an account of recent events. A profile is a concise biographical sketch of a notable person or company.

- **How Do They Differ from Stories:** A news report summarizes the ending at the very beginning. Its most important details are front loaded and its ending has the least important details so that editors can cut them. Profiles are descriptions and don’t include conflict resolution or emotional connection. They are short biographies.

- **When Should You Use:** News reports work well when you’re conveying information about current events. They also work well in press releases and annual reports. Profiles are effective as part of internal project proposals or as part of an RFP (request for proposal).
Scenarios, Testimonials, Vignettes:

What are they? How do they differ from stories? When should you use them?

- **Definition:** A scenario is an imagined sequence of events designed to bring forth new ideas. A testimonial is a favorable report from an internal or external customer. A vignette captures a revealing slice of life. Vignettes can sometimes be strung together to create an effective story.

- **How Do They Differ:** Scenarios are generally descriptions not stories. Testimonials are recommendations and not complete stories. Vignettes are generally episodes within a larger story framework.

- **When Should You Use:** Scenarios work for future planning and to stimulate creativity. Testimonials are great for building credibility in print and online. Vignettes are best to capture interest quickly or as the individual pearls on a longer, more detailed story necklace.
4. How to Craft a Great Story
Key Message

The best key message is one that resonates to everyone in your audience. It has universal appeal.

• **Important Themes:** Sometimes the key message pops out of your story but often it doesn’t. When it doesn’t, begin by making a list of possible themes so you can find the key message.

• **Pick the Top Themes:** Once you have a list of possible themes such as—creativity and innovation, courage, leadership, assertiveness and bravery, teamwork, persistence, service to others—pick the top 2-3 that are the best match for your raw story.

• **Believe and Do:** What do you want the audience to believe and what action would you like them to take after they hear your story? A well-crafted key message is: a statement in a full sentence; concise and memorable; focused on one vital point; a positive and universal message.
How to Start

Don’t begin with the backstory or introductory information about yourself. Instead, begin your story by introducing the setting and characters.

• **One Named Character:** Your audience will relate better to one named character than an unnamed group. You should provide some key concise details about your main character (also known as the protagonist) and a few supporting characters.

• **Don’t Use the Word “Story”**: Strangely enough, beginning your story by saying “let me tell you a story” frequently turns people off. Some people equate the word “story” with “fabricated.” Just begin with the setting, character, and sensory details and they will be willing listeners.

• **Don’t Give Away the Ending**: Part of what makes a story engaging is that your audience doesn’t yet know the key message or take away. Don’t give a summary at the beginning and destroy the suspense.
Core Conflict

The problem or issue that the main character must face or overcome is the core conflict of your story.

- **What’s the Problem?:** Your main character, the protagonist, will encounter a difficult problem that he or she will need to solve. The antagonist or villain can be an individual, a company, extreme weather, or some other force that prevents the protagonist from solving the problem.

- **What’s the Plot?:** Once you’ve identified the key message and the core conflict your character/s will have, the next thing is to outline the sequence of events that becomes the plot of the story. The plot is essentially the unique list of events where the story unfolds and ultimately becomes resolved at the end.

- **What’s the Story Arc?:** Every story should have a clearly defined beginning, middle, and end. The middle is generally the part of the story that is the highest point of tension in regard to the struggle the main character is having. The story arc keeps the audience moving through the story until the character experiences an “a-ha” moment that leads to the resolution of the conflict.
To create a well-crafted story, there’s a clearly defined series of steps. You’ll start with a raw story and go through this process to refine it into either an oral or written presentation.

- **Your Idea:** Once you brainstorm some ideas, you’ll select the story idea you feel would be the best vehicle for the key message you want to deliver.

- **Notes and Research:** You’ll organize your raw story in the form of a transcript, a bulleted list, an image deck or storyboard, a video, or just a loosely written beginning story.

- **Create a Mock-Up:** Create a beginning mock-up by gathering your notes and research and organizing them into these categories: opening scene; the conflict materializes, obstacles to the solution appear; these obstacles or barriers are overcome once the character has an “a-ha” moment; resolution happens and new insight has been gained; the end offers a conclusion and a parting message that emphasizes the key message that’s been built throughout the story.
Detailed Outline 2

Stories need lots of sensory details and facts to remain interesting. However, you shouldn’t take side paths that don’t contribute to the main conflict or key message of the story.

- **Tighten It Up:** Re-examine the details you’ve gathered for your story. Eliminate extraneous details that don’t contribute to either moving the plot line along or underscoring your key message.

- **Trial Run:** If you’ve used a storyboard format or image deck, recast the story with the revised outline to see if it works.

- **Save It:** Make sure to save your work and label your revisions so you can see how the story evolved for future reference. In general, an oral story can have more detail and take longer to present than a written story so it’s helpful to know in advance how you’ll communicate the story to your audience before you make revisions.
5. Storytelling Techniques
Grab Attention

You’ve got to get your audience’s attention within the first 30 seconds.

- **Begin with a Story**: Don’t start with introductory remarks. Instead, grab your audience’s attention by beginning with a story.

- **Powerful Stories**: Our brains are hardwired to listen to stories. Stories have been told since the earliest civilizations on Earth.

- **Mental Journey**: A well-crafted story takes your listeners on a mental journey. Stories give you as the speaker an opportunity to impart a lesson or message without preaching.
Story Conflict

The element of conflict in a story is what makes it interesting. Don’t be afraid to share personal stories.

- **Strong Conflict:** The stronger the conflict that is shared in your story, the more captivating it will be to your audience.

- **Get Emotions Involved:** When judging the elements of a story ask yourself whether the conflict in the story is strong enough to get your audience engaged.

- **Conflict Peaks Curiosity:** If there is no conflict in a story, then you can’t get your audience curious about the outcome. In a story with a strong conflict, the audience will be mentally guessing to see what comes next.
Bring Characters Alive

You can bring the people in your story alive by providing details.

• **Provide Details:** Provide details about the characters in the story so that you give your audience a visual picture of each character. These details will allow them to draw their own conclusions about the nature of the characters.

• **Sensory Information:** Provide lots of details about sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch so that audiences can relate to the characters and the story through their senses.

• **“Show” versus “Tell”:** Compare these two descriptions: (1) Tell: Mrs. Flowers didn’t encourage closeness. (2) Show: Her skin was a rich black that would have peeled like a plum if snagged, but then no one would have thought of getting close enough to Mrs. Flowers to ruffle her dress, let alone snag her skin. She didn’t encourage familiarity. (from I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou (Bantam, 1993))
Sensory Details

Include as many sensory details as possible in the stories you use for your speeches and presentations. These are important not only for character descriptions but throughout your story to keep it alive for your audience.

- **Visual and Auditory:** What should your audience see? What should they hear?

- **Smell, Taste, and Touch:** What can the audience smell? What can they taste? What do they feel either emotionally or physically?

- **Concise and Clear:** Even though you need to use details to keep it interesting, keep your descriptions concise and clear.
Specificity is Important

By providing specific details in dates and measurements you add credibility to your story.

• **Specific Details:** By saying “she was barely 5 foot 1 inch tall” is more specific than saying “she was short in stature.”

• **Specificity Equals Credibility:** By adding specific dates, percentages, and measurements you add internal credibility to your story and make it more believable for the audience.

• **Be Consistent:** Make sure the details you provide are consistent throughout your stories so that characters, scenes, and dates connect well.
6. How to Polish Your Story and Make It Memorable
Select a Structure for Your Story

Almost every story has four distinct pieces. The plot identifies the problem and gives the sequence of events. The story arc is the motivation and meaning behind the story. The elements of the story include the way the story is crafted to use emotions, drama, contrast, and sensory details. The structure of the story is the order in which you connect all these different pieces.

1. Hollywood Influences Storytelling

There are three basic types of Hollywood stories.

(a) Stories of transformation where the character gets into trouble but is better off at the end;

(b) Stories of gain and loss where the character has his/her dreams come to fruition, loses it all, and then gets it back;

(c) Stories like Cinderella where the main character is in a bad place until someone helps. Even though things seem to be improving, the main character has a setback. Eventually conditions change and the main character achieves “happily ever after.”
2. Business Focused Storytelling

Sometimes business stories don’t lend themselves to the more dramatic contrast of a Hollywood story. There are four popular story structures in business:

(a) Begin with setting, then explain the obstacle/s, tell the action, the results of that action, evaluate what happened, and suggest future actions;

(b) Begin with the problem, then tell the action that was taken, the results, what was learned, and how that learning can be applied in other situations;

(c) Begin with the context for the situation or problem that’s faced, then describe the challenge, the action, and then describe the result using quantifiable numbers or information, wrap up with suggested actions;

(d) Begin with the context, describe the challenge, actions, results, but then make a departure from (c) by providing a universal lesson that can offer guidance for suggested future actions.
3. Label the Sections of Your Story

By labelling the sections of your story with “context, challenge, action, result, lesson, and suggested future actions” you can see whether your story follows one of the structures described. It will also give you ideas on whether there are missing elements to your story, how to tighten your story, or how to make it more effective.
How to Get a Story to Pop

To get a story to pop you need to provide interesting characters, provide sensory details and contrast, and use figures of speech to enhance the picture you’re painting.

• **Characters:** There are many ways you can paint a picture of your characters. What are their features and gestures? What are their speech patterns? What drives or motivates them? What are their fears? What are their goals? Adding dialogue helps your audience connect with the characters.

• **Sensory Details and Contrast:** By offering sensory details and contrast, you’re giving the audience memorable details. What do you want your audience to taste, see, smell, hear, or feel? What contrasts can you add, such as temperature (hot/cold), behavioral contrasts (peaceful/violent). Where can you add irony? (such as a balanced breakfast meal of pizza and root beer)

• **Figures of Speech:** oxymorons (beautiful mess), metaphors (light of my life), similes (like a flowing river), analogies (hand is to glove as head is to hat), and aphorisms (birds of a feather flock together) can help you provide images that will stay in the minds of your audience.
Grabbing Your Audience’s Attention

To keep the attention of your audience, your story must have emotion, drama, and surprise. For some stories, humor is a welcome touch as well.

- **Emotion:** What can you do to strengthen the emotions in the story and where can you add emotion to keep the audience interested in the story?

- **Tension:** What drama or tension can you add that masks the resolution of the story so you can keep the audience engaged until they hear and retain your core message?

- **Surprise or Humor:** What unexpected element/s can you add to your story to give it a unique twist or wake up the audience with a surprise? Is humor appropriate and where can it be added to engage your audience?
Make Sure Your Audience Remembers

When the story is over, you want to be sure that your audience retains your core message.

• **Who Will Deliver the Message:** Will the narrator of the story deliver the key message or will one of your characters deliver the message?

• **What Question Can You Pose:** Is there a question you can ask your audience that will bring power to your key message and get them to identify with the message and how it impacts them? (for example, what can you do each day to make your department work more efficiently?)

• **Quotations and Personal Reflections:** Quotations or personal reflections that emphasize the key message can help to make it more memorable.
Put It All Together

Add the final polish to your story by re-reading it several times. Time yourself to see how long it takes to deliver. Do a trial run with close friends or associates to get their feedback.

- **Tagline:** Can you create a tagline that will help your audience remember your story without giving away the core message yet?

- **Length:** Is the story too long or too short for the presentation you’re planning? If it’s too long, label the structure again to see if there are places where you’ve wandered from the main points. If it’s too short, where can you embellish to emphasize the core message?

- **Flow and Contrast:** Does your story flow well? Is there enough tension and contrast? Are there enough unique and surprising elements to keep your audience engaged for the length of your presentation?
7. Constructing a Repertoire of Stories to Use
Start-Up, Turning-Point, and Stand-For Stories

Stories that discuss the start-up of an organization or the turning point in an individual’s career apply to the launches of new companies, new products, and new careers. Stories that present the mission or core values of a company help new employees and potential customers understand the motivation behind the products and services a company offers.

• **Finding Start-Up Stories:** Interview the founders to find out more about the genesis of an organization. What motivated them to start? Was it a problem that needed to be solved or was it a unique experience that led them to think in new ways? Stories about how companies survived challenges and transformed into offering completely different products and services are useful to spur on creative problem solving and innovation.

• **Finding Turning-Point Stories:** Interview inspirational CEOs, Managers, and Employees to find out what gave them the motivation for the line of work they are in. These stories renew interest and joy in work and help employees understand the value they contribute.

• **Finding Stand-For Stories:** A tagline or description is not enough to communicate your company’s core values. A powerful story, one that depicts (shows not tells) how your company’s values and principles are embodied in your workplace is what you need to influence the behavior of others.
What-We-Do Stories

Stories that focus on what an individual does in his/her daily work or what an organization does that brings value to their products/services are inspiring to potential business partners, investors, and future customers.

- **Finding What-We-Do Stories About Individuals:** To discover these stories, ask a colleague or yourself these questions:

  (a) Who has influenced you as a mentor or coach and why?

  (b) What was the most memorable moment of your career?

  (c) What event, personal or business, has had the most impact on your life and how does it influence your work?

  (d) What personal legacy are you leaving with your work?
• **Finding What-We-Do Stories About Companies:** To discover these stories, ask influential members of the organization these questions:

(a) What can you tell me about the “why” behind the work you do?

(b) Can you tell me about a customer challenge your organization solved?

(c) Is there a moment or event that encapsulates the importance of the work the organization does?

• **The Structure for a What-We-Do Story about a Company:** In Simon Sinek’s 2009 TED talk he makes a persuasive presentation that organizations should construct their “What-We-Do” stories based on three concentric circles. The innermost circle is the “why” you do what you do. The middle circle tells “how” you do it. The outermost circle tells “what” you do. Many companies begin with the “what” when they should begin with the “why.” Profit is a byproduct. People want to do business with organizations that have a core belief or mission that drives what they do. A well-crafted “what-we-do” story communicates these core values to the audience and inspires them to invest, associate with, or buy from your company.
Future and Success Stories

Stories that forecast the future and discuss an individual’s or organization’s role in enhancing the quality of life for others can inspire others to action. Success stories help us to realize that millions of other people have overcome obstacles on their path to success. We can do the same.

• **Finding Personal Future or Situational Stories:** To uncover or create these stories ask these questions:

(a) What will you be doing in the next five years? The next ten?

(b) What will be the most exciting thing you’ll do in your lifetime?

(c) What will be your lasting legacy?; Situational stories can sometimes help you think through complex upcoming decisions. Brainstorm options and write a story with three different endings. Then step back and look at your creation. Which ending best suits the situation and why?
• **Finding Organization’s Future Stories:** Work together with other team members to craft a future story for your company. By sharing this story, you can help others imagine a better future that’s achievable through their collective effort.

• **Finding Success Stories:** Success stories are all around but individuals are sometimes hesitant to discuss their successes. To discover individual and organizational success stories ask customers and employees these questions:

  (a) As a customer, what success were you able to achieve by using our product/service? Can you provide data that shows that success?

  (b) As a salesperson, what successful sales have you made? How did you turn a reluctant prospect into a return buyer?

  (c) Can you tell me about yourself or another rock star employee that brought in business or publicity for the company?
Overcoming Obstacles and

Important Customer Stories

Stories of perseverance, both personal and organizational, inspire us with courage and hope. Important and memorable customer stories help us understand our roles both as buyers and sellers.

• **Finding Personal Stories About Overcoming Obstacles:** To discover these personal stories ask these questions:

(a) Can you remember a time when you overcame a major life hurdle?

(b) Can you tell me about a time when you were surrounded by so many challenges that you never thought you would dig your way out?

(c) Have you ever consciously decided to become successful at something despite overwhelming odds?
• **Finding Organizational Stories About Overcoming Obstacles:** To discover these company stories ask these questions:

(a) Can you tell me about a big, unexpected challenge and how members of the organization worked to solve it?

(b) Can you tell me a story about an employee or group of employees who went the extra mile to help a customer?

(c) Can you tell me a story about an employee who saved the day?

• **Finding Important Customer Stories:** To discover these stories talk to your customers. Ask them these questions:

(a) Has our product or service helped you to overcome a significant obstacle?

(b) Has our product or service helped you gain success in your personal or business life?

(c) Has our product or service enhanced your life and if so in what way?
Stories to Avoid

Your stories are your authentic voice. Stay away from stories that show you as arrogant or self-serving. Perfection has no place in stories. No one is perfect. A perfect person or story isn’t authentic. Stay away from negative stories. They won’t move your positive agenda forward.

• **Don’t Badmouth Customers:** Every one has these stories but it’s best not to repeat them.

• **Don’t Badmouth Your Competition:** Remember today’s competitor is tomorrow’s investor or ally.

• **Don’t Guilt Potential Customers into Making a Purchase:** If you do, you’ll be sorry because customers will feel bad about their purchase afterwards.
8. Using Storytelling to Market Your Products and Services
Providing Stories that Consumers Will Share

In the past, companies pushed marketing messages to their potential customers. Stories are a very effective marketing tool since they pull consumers in. It’s the difference between a tagline that explains the taste of a cinnamon roll and the enticing aroma that brings the customers into the store.

- **Sharable Stories:** To find sharable stories, ones that customers will repeat to other potential customers, ask yourself the question: What information about my company is worthy of talk and buzz? What story can I share that consumers will want to talk about? We all need meaning in our lives so stories that talk about the why of your business are meaningful and thus more sharable.

- **Insider Stories:** Do you remember you first saw the Wizard of Oz behind his curtain? Consumers love to hear stories about the inside culture or inner workings of your organization.

- **Bring the Outside In and the Inside Out:** No matter the size of your organization, you have to live your stories in order to make your communication with the outside world authentic. In other words, an organization that presents itself as humanitarian must also have an internal culture that displays that same core value. Employees should feel just as comfortable relaying their company’s stories as the CEO.
The Story Behind Your Products and Services

Consumers don’t want to hear exclusively about the features and benefits of your product. Instead they want to hear the story behind your product or a story about the people behind your product or a story about the people using your product. Even products that are considered commodities can be sold with the special magic of the people and events attached to them.

• **Tell Your Unique Story:** To discover stories you can tell about your products and services, ask yourself these questions: What idea created this product? What need or issue motivated you to bring this product to market? Which consumers are using this product? How do they use it and how does it impact their lives?

• **Workmanship is Important:** Consumers love to understand the work that gets put into a product. The process of workmanship and the quality that is put into the final product adds value to the consumer if he/she is made aware of or becomes a part of that process.
The Why is the Core: When you focus on features and benefits you sometimes lose sight of the why. An exercise that really helps you get to the root of the why is to continue to ask yourself the why question until you get deeper and deeper. For example: What problem does your product or service help?

Why 1: Why is that important?

Why 2: Why is why #1 important?

Why 3: Why is why #2 important? And so on until you have 5 or 6 whys. Then you can summarize the whys to get your core story message.
The Consumer as Hero

There are two ways to develop stories that talk about your end consumer or customer. One way is to develop possible personalities and archetypes and get feedback from the marketplace. Another way is to uncover the stories about heroes, heroines, and underdogs in the market segments you’ve already identified.

- **Unique Personalities and Archetypes:** In order to craft marketing stories with unique personalities and archetypes you need to start by understanding your character’s deepest motivations. Are they craving security or do they long for adventure? Do they value respect and reverence or do they more highly value connection and enlightenment? Do they value personal development and their ability to make a contribution or do they value leisure more? If you know your market segments, you can further refine your picture of your end consumer by getting feedback on stories you put into the market.

- **The Underdog:** An underdog story has a specific structure. The underdog has experienced significant struggles throughout his or her life. Somebody shows up with a product or service that may help. The underdog is delivered from the struggle. The product/service has had a significant impact on his/her life.
• **The Customer is the Hero or Heroine:** Your company and its products is not the hero or heroine of the consumer story. Instead, the hero or heroine is the consumer who has used your product/service and has changed as a result. To uncover this type of powerful consumer story, find out about the challenges your customers face. Listen to and learn about the effects of using your product/service. Tell the story of how their lives have changed. Remember that the story is focused on your consumer, not on you or your company.
Persuading Customers to Tell Their Stories

If you want consumers to share their stories, begin by providing an interesting story and then “listen” to the responses from your customers and potential customers.

• **Use the Community to Mine Stories:** You can request customer stories if you are strategic about how you do it. Give people a common situation or problem that’s universal and then follow that with a story prompt. This method is a lot more effective than just asking for them to submit stories. You can reach out to people who are active on your social media pages or online communities to see if they will share their stories. Seed online communities, such as quora.com, with story prompts and then mine the responses for stories you can craft or uncover.

• **Integrate Stories into Websites and E-Mail:** Share well-crafted stories on your website and in your marketing email in order to increase consumer engagement. Your brand, your consumer hero and heroine, your identified market segments, and your storytelling narrative must all work together to achieve the best effect.

• **Inspire and Engage Consumers with Stories:** In the past, a lot of traditional marketing supported products that were status related…the big car, fancy house, fine clothes. Today’s storytelling concentrates more on the things that people can achieve with the help of the product or service.
Use Storytelling Throughout Your Brand Strategy

A carefully-thought-out brand strategy can be integrated throughout all forms of media and reinforce your unique company brand and message.

- **Using Storytelling with Social Media:** Stories don’t always have to be long. A story can be told in less than 140 characters (twitter size) if thought through. On LinkedIn, Google+, Quora, and Facebook, mini-stories can be offered instead of the usual marketing anecdotes. The idea is to offer stories that create an ongoing dialogue with your customers or potential customers. Visual media, such as Pinterest and Instagram, can be effective for storytelling as well.

- **Brand with Storytelling:** No one story can encompass everything your company stands for. Instead it’s best to connect the dots on numerous stories to create a unified story that will stand the test of time.

- **Build a Storytelling Strategy:** Instead of duplicating your key stories across platforms, present the main story on one platform, accompanying consumer stories on another platform, and employee stories on yet a third. All the pieces must work together to effectively tell the larger story of your organization and its products.
9. Using Storytelling to Enhance Your Credibility, to Sell Your Products/Services, or to Get Funding for Your Passion or Business
Before You Begin Prospecting

Think about the last big or mid-sized purchase you made. How much did you know about the company and its products/services before you had a face to face meeting with a sales person? How much credibility did the company have in your eyes before you even thought about approaching them for a purchase?

In today’s marketplace the consumer journey is a long one. It begins with awareness of your company and its products. They have heard your story on TV or radio, in print or word of mouth. They’ve considered a purchase with your company by looking at ads, reading reviews, or through email that they subscribe to. They could go to a retail store or purchase your product online through an e-commerce platform or website.

If you do your job right, they might participate in your community or read the knowledge base of FAQs on your site. If they become a loyal customer, they might even advocate for your and your products through their own blog, social networks, or newsletter.

- **Create Customer Chemistry**: Your marketing stories should have set the stage to create chemistry and affinity within the mind of your buyer. Now your job as the salesperson will be to prompt your potential customer to tell you how he or she is feeling during the sales cycle...not thinking, but feeling. Connecting with your customer is a key part of creating the bond that will make this possible.
What is the Awareness Level? Since consumers may already have had a lot of exposure to you and your brand in the marketplace already it’s important to know where they fall on the awareness continuum before you open a sales discussion. There are different levels of consumer awareness:

**Not aware:** This consumer doesn’t know anything about your company but has landed on your website. Here you will have a story about what you offer. This story should educate and also entertain.

**Aware of a problem:** This consumer comes to you with a burning problem and will benefit from a story that shows how other customers have had this same problem and have overcome it through the use of your product.

**Aware of a solution:** This consumer wants a customized solution for his/her problem and will benefit from a similar story.

**Aware of your product/service:** This consumer is already inclined to buy your product and will benefit from stories that show the superiority of your product through the eyes of others who have used it.

**Educated and aware:** This consumer looks for stories that demonstrate how the product/service has made a difference in the lives of others.

Know Your Market Segments: If you know your market segments and the greatest pain points of that particular demographic, it will help you craft effective stories for those segments.
Using Storytelling During Prospecting

The best salespeople are effective at finding comfortable ways to use storytelling during the process of prospecting.

- **Use Stories Face to Face:** If someone asks you what you do, it’s a great opportunity for you to tell them a story. You can always begin the story and see if there’s interest before telling the entire, more detailed story. If you wear a unique item, you can use that for a story springboard and tie it back to your work.

- **Get Them to Tell You Their Story:** When you’re first introduced to someone, your job is to get them to tell you their story. Use the event, their name, something they’re wearing, anything of interest that you can use as a story prompt to get them talking. To reconnect with someone you haven’t talked to in awhile, bring up something you know about them so they will tell you their current stories.

- **Use Stories Online:** When a prospect contacts you online, ask them what or why they reached out to uncover a story. When communicating online, offer a story that shows information in a new light. When writing blogs or sending out newsletters, use a teaser with a link to a more detailed story.
Calling on a Business Prospect and Making the Sale

Every sales training handbook will tell you to ask probing questions. However, if you really want to close the sale, you need to get your customer to tell you stories.

• **Uncover Customer Needs:** Begin by using story prompts to get the customer to reveal his/her needs and desires. Tell me about: the moment you were spurred to call; the situation that made you start your business; something in your industry that alarms you; the biggest change in your business since last year; what wish you would grant your business if you had a magic wand.

• **Active Listening:** Here are the steps to actively listening for clues from your customer: Ask a story prompt to get your customer telling his/her story, the customer tells a story, you listen without interruption and then ask relevant questions and express appreciation. Then you respond with a story that is appropriate to the needs the customer expressed.

• **Overcome Objections:** The four most common types of objections are lack of money, lack of trust in your company or in you, lack of urgency for a decision, and lack of need for the product. All of these objections can be addressed with well-crafted stories that help your customer shift his or her point of view.
Sell Yourself and Your Company to Get Funding

The ultimate sales presentation is when you pitch your ideas or your company to get funding.

- **Spark Emotions:** When trying to get funding or action from others, it’s sometimes better to start with the opportunity they have to make a difference. If you present a story in the standard order, your audience may feel that you’re presenting another problem to them, which feels heavy on their already full plates. Instead, provide a story that shows the opportunity, small actionable steps they can’t take to have an impact, and a transformational story arc that shows the change in the main character’s life as a result of their actions. Well-crafted stories bring the audience positive emotions.

- **Spotlight the Challenge:** When raising money or requesting resources, focus on the obstacles but make sure it’s clear that with the help of the funder, sponsor, or donor the obstacles will soon be removed. People want their influence to be felt.

- **Help Supporters Tell Their Stories:** Once your cause or organization has supporters and donors, you should incorporate their stories into your story repertoire. Venture capitalists frequently discuss their success stories within the investment community, which will be very helpful to you as a company if their investment has netted returns.
Structure Stories for Pitching to Investors

In addition to the business plan and the data you provide to a potential investor, there are four key stories you should offer: The story of the pain points and opportunities, the story of the future picture if specific action is taken, the story of why you and your company are passionate about your proposed products/services, the story of what you and the funder can accomplish together.

• **Get People on Board:** Sometimes getting budget within an organization requires that you pitch your story to groups within the organization to get the needed commitments and resources. Such a pitch can be structured similarly to the way you would pitch an outside investor.

• **Venture Capital:** When structuring a presentation to VCs include these steps: memorable introduction, problem/opportunity with your snapshot of the current environment, share the solution you offer and the passion you have for offering it, provide a vision of your company’s future, discuss the story of how their funding will make the vision possible, deliver the proper business plan, data, and action steps, close with an upbeat, inspiring ending that connects with their emotions.

• **Stories Transform as Your Company Transforms:** As your company transforms, your stories will transform as well. The stories you present for your 2nd and 3rd rounds of funding will differ from your first round.
10. Using Stories to Inspire People to Take Action
Create Vision

You can use stories to create an inspiring and dynamic vision of the future.

• **Build Meaning**: Get your audience to understand that they are not just laying tracks on the ground, they are building a transcontinental railroad. Find an analogy that works for the lesson or message you’re trying to convey.

• **Present Your Vision**: Present your vision in a story that allows the audience to see themselves in it. “A Day in the Life of” stories and framing your story like a newspaper article on future trends are two ways to achieve this.

• **Achievable Results**: Tell a story that shows how others have had similar challenges and have risen to overcome them. You want your audience to realize they can achieve the goals described.
Create Culture

You can use stories to create a winning corporate culture.

- **Demonstrate the Culture:** You can use stories about other organizations or your own stellar employees to demonstrate the culture you want to attain in your own organization.

- **Defining Values and Principles:** You can use stories to introduce and reinforce values and principles, such as integrity, hard work, persistence, tenacity, and putting the customer first.

- **Get Personal:** Don’t be afraid to share personal stories organization wide. Personal stories help you to become closer to the colleagues you work with. It helps build collaboration and team spirit at all levels.
Create Vitality

You can use stories to energize and provide people with the boost to tackle difficult endeavors.

- **Good Times and Bad:** There are endless distractions that keep employees from performing at their best level. If economic times are bad, it’s even more difficult to keep employees focused. You can use inspirational stories to motivate employees or others in your audience to stay motivated and give a specific goal or cause their best efforts.

- **Perseverance:** Perseverance after repeated failures is critical to the success of every great endeavor. You can use the stories of other organizations or stories from your own organization to give others the power to persevere despite great obstacles.

- **Passion and Purpose:** You can’t force people to love their jobs. Instead, try to find out what motivates the people you work with. Use their stories about why they love their jobs to inspire others. Customer stories about the meaning your products and services have had for them also make powerful stories.
Inform and Educate

You can use stories to inform and educate others to improve their lives.

• **Failure Stories:** None of us wants to use our failures as fuel, but failure stories and the final outcomes can help others understand key risks that can impede success.

• **Feedback and Coaching:** It’s difficult for any of us to accept negative or corrective feedback. Stories about others in similar situations can take the sting out of offering constructive feedback. It will also help the recipient of the feedback to more easily remember the lesson involved.

• **Problem Solving:** Complex problems are easier to solve when they are broken down into bite-sized pieces. Use stories to provide problem-solving techniques that can be applied to many different life and business situations.
Inspire Creativity

You can use stories to inspire creativity and a spirit of innovation.

• **Outside the Box Stories:** Outside-the-box stories provide inspiration for creativity and innovation as well as for problem solving.

• **Look with New Eyes:** Sometimes innovation is not just creating something that hasn’t been seen before. It’s looking at something old with new eyes and thinking of ways to make it better. Stories about such inventions can inspire others to look at how the everyday items around them can be transformed.

• **Fuelling Creativity:** Passion fuels innovation and creativity. Use stories to ignite the passion that your audience has for the dreams they have yet to create. Inside everyone are hidden desires to dream bigger and create more. Ignite that passion with inspirational stories about leaders who have created new inventions and processes.