

Transcript: bigQUEST Podcast | S1, Ep 10

Paul Smith on The Ten Stories You Need To Tell

Andy Murray: Hey, Paul, how are you doing today? It's great to see you.

Paul Smith: Hey, great, Andy. Thanks for having me.

Andy Murray: Many people don't know this or probably no one does really, but you and I go way back to when you were working in Procter & Gamble.

Paul Smith: Yes. I'm afraid to say how many years that was, but it's been awhile. I think we didn't quite overlap — you had already gone off and founded what became Saatchi & Saatchi X, right? I think you had already left to do that by the time I got on the team. But your legend lived on there and we got to cross paths a little bit before you moved on to other things.

Andy Murray: Yes. What's funny and interesting is that when you were just starting the brand idea of “lead with a story,” I remember you and I having a conversation. Matter of fact, I think I interviewed you for a podcast I was working on at the time to hear that story. But then to actually see you make the leap and leave a very perfectly good job while you were still thinking through and then building out this brand idea, which we'll get to.

But I'd like to hear *why did you decide to leave that corporate job?* Not many people leave Procter & Gamble unless they've got a really clear path and know exactly what's going on. But I'd love to know how you went about that and why.

Paul Smith: Yes, it was a perfectly good job and I had a fair number of people tell me how crazy I was. I was in my mid-forties at the time, wife and kids at home, so too young to retire and all that.

It took a lot of thinking and planning. In fact, it was a two-year long process, but the gist of it was: my personal philosophy with careers is that most of us love like 10% of our job. It's the reason why we joined that company to begin with or went into that line of work to begin with. And most of us probably hate 10% of our job, whether it's office politics or filling out your expense report.

But the big bulk in the middle — the 80% of the job in the middle, I think most of us think, *Hey, it's decent work. I wouldn't do it if he didn't pay me, but it's good work.* And I thought, *Wouldn't it be cool if I*

*could just do that 10% of the top? The 10% that I absolutely love? And it took me awhile to figure out what that was, but I started to actively think about *What would be my 10%?**

And for me, it was the few days a year that I got to either give a speech at the company annual meeting or teach a new hire training class or teach a new General Manager University within the company or something like that.

So essentially what I loved to do was teach. And I don't mean in school, but professionals. And it turned out there was not a single job at Procter & Gamble — you remember this — that had that job. One hundred and twenty thousand people and not one person had that full-time job. It just didn't exist.

So I started to look around and see who gets to do that full-time? And it turns out the only people that get to do that full-time are people who've written a best-selling book and then they travel around the world talking about whatever it is that they wrote about in the book. And so I thought *I guess I've got to write a book*. So it was literally that intentional. It wasn't that I just had this book in me that I had to get out, it was that *I want to change careers and that appears to be the path to changing careers*.

So I spent probably 18 months researching and writing about the topic of storytelling and I picked that because it was the thing that I was the most passionate about. And then I waited another 6 or 8 or 12 months to go through the publishing process. So it was a good two-year process of making that decision and going through with it before I actually had a book on the shelf. And by the way, I did all that while I was still at P & G. So I still hadn't made the decision to leave, but I was laying the groundwork for that. The decision to leave is another one. If you want to hear that, I've got some pretty specific criteria for how I got there.

Andy Murray: It's interesting — when I left P & G after nine years and went to a smaller company, much smaller, I remember having a conversation with my dad who said you sure you really want to do that? In Cincinnati, P & G is a big company. You almost felt like there was a lifetime guaranteed employment. So it wasn't something that he was jumping up and down about. How did you finally work up the courage to go through with it?

Paul Smith: Yes it was also a conversation with my dad. And I expected him to either tell me what your dad told you, or he was going to tell me, "I know you can do it, Son!" He's going to be my cheerleader and cheer me on and have me go.

But he didn't do either of those things. He literally wrote me a letter because he was 80 years old and hard of hearing so I couldn't talk to him on the phone anymore. He wrote me a letter and he told me a story about himself that he'd never told me before, he'd never told any of my siblings. He said, "*When I was five years old, I knew exactly what I wanted to do with my life.*" He said "*I wanted to be a singer, like Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, or Sammy Davis Jr.*" He's 80, so that was his genre. And he said, "*I knew that for sure. The first day of first grade there when the teacher asked all the students, if anybody had*

any special talents, like dancing or magic tricks or something,” and he said, “I raised my hand and I said, ‘I can sing.’”

Andy, I'll just ask you: What do you think the teacher — a good teacher — would do if a little five-year-old Bobby says that he can sing?

Andy Murray: Can you sing me a song?

Paul Smith: Absolutely. *“Bobby, could you sing us a song?”* So little five-year-old Bobby Smith stands up and he belts out his favorite song right there in front of the teacher and the other students. And he said in this letter to me: *“I nailed it. I got the words, right, all the melody and everything.”* He was so proud. And he said when he was finished, *“The teacher and the other students stood up and they applauded me. So I got a standing ovation my first time to sing in front of an audience!”* Because he'd never sang in front of anybody except his mom in the kitchen before — he's five.

And he said in this letter — he went on to say — unfortunately, that turned out not just to be the first time in my life that ever sang in front of an audience, it turned out to be the last time that I ever sang in front of an audience. He said, *“The truth is son, I just never had the courage to go through with it.”* And he said, *“That's been 75 years. And in that 75 years, there's not been a month that's gone by that I haven't regretted that decision.”* And he said, *“Someday you're gonna be 80 years old, like me, and it's going to be too late to pursue your dream.”*

And honestly, as if that wasn't enough — and it was, by the way — I kid you not, he ended this letter with these words: *“I'd love to see you achieve your dream. But that doesn't mean in your lifetime son, that means in mine.”*

Oh, wow. Gosh, tick tock! The guy's 80, right? I don't have all day to wait!

Andy Murray: That's great writing. What a writer.

Paul Smith: Two days later I walked into my boss's office and I resigned from my 20-year career. I would not have done it that soon had it not been for that letter.

Andy Murray: Yes, that is a great story. And now I understand why storytelling is so important to you. It's something that you've really had in your heritage. I'm sure that's not the only great story he's told you.

Paul Smith: Yes, I come by it honestly.

Andy Murray: Paul, one of the things that I think people get a little confused on, or maybe they just gloss over because it's such a familiar word and they just jump through it, is the word “story” itself.

So when you talk about storytelling what do you mean by story and what can be a story? Is it a metaphor? Put some context around, when you're talking about story, what do you mean?

Paul Smith: That word can mean a lot of things to a lot of people. And my definition is just mine. But when I teach people about storytelling, what I mean by story is *a narrative about something interesting that happened to someone*.

Other people will use that word to mean all kinds of things: our marketing strategy tells a story, our mission statement tells a story, our brand logo tells a story. And maybe they do but probably not. Probably it's just a great mission statement, a great marketing plan, it could be a fabulous logo. It doesn't necessarily have to tell a story. It will have a message, and brands have equities. But brand equity and a story, in my definition, are not the same thing.

A story is a narrative about something that happened to someone, something interesting that happened to somebody. So as such it'll have a time, a place, a main character, and that main character will be facing some kind of a challenge. They'll have a goal, and there will be an obstacle getting in the way of that goal, and there will be events that transpire along the way that hopefully resolve themselves, and in the end there will be either a success or failure. That's what a story is. You ask any 10 year old kid, that's what they mean by a story, and that's what I mean by a story as well.

Andy Murray: Versus just clever copy or great messaging. You're talking about something that illustrates a problem and how that problem was overcome in some ways, right?

Paul Smith: Exactly.

Andy Murray: One of the things that we're working on with bigQUEST is making sure that when you get to that moment where you need to start creating buy-in and moving forward on something that may not be well-known — because you're really moving a bit more into blue ocean spaces — that you need to think through how you tell that story and often use a story to make it relevant.

As you look at stories, because I know you've looked at all kinds of stories that leaders tell — we'll get into that. I'm curious about the stories that you may have heard in development of your brand and the books that you've written that relate to convincing someone to leap into something new, to create buy-in or how to get someone over a barrier. Are there any stories or ideas around how you might do that, that you'd be willing to share or have available to share?

Paul Smith: I think the kind of story you're talking about I would probably refer to as a Case For Change Story. It's a story that gives people the emotional motivation to leave their comfort zone of what they're doing now to do something different.

And those stories are typically stories about someone — could be yourself, could be somebody else — that has a problem. There's something wrong now and you need the audience to see that and feel that problem, that human suffering if you will, even if it's not a terrible life-threatening suffering, but some kind of suffering that would motivate them to help create a change.

The example in my last book, in that chapter on Case For Change Stories, is about a 10-year-old boy named Joey who had some rare form of kidney cancer that presents in kids. And unfortunately there was no cure for it at the time. And of course, that's a terrible suffering that you go through — the whole family has to suffer through it with him.

The mom in this case tried everything to get all the doctors to help find a cure for her kid. And eventually Merck Pharmaceuticals came up with a new drug to treat this, it's a class of drugs called a pd1 inhibitor. It was called Keytruda. And it was developed exactly for this kind of cancer. And she ended up having to lobby them to get it to be used before it was ready. You know, kind of these emergency use authorizations like we're seeing right now with a COVID vaccines. She eventually got approval to use it on her son and three or four weeks into the process he ended up dying, unfortunately, because he just didn't get it soon enough. If he'd gotten it months earlier, he might've survived.

I share that because that story — a pharmaceutical company, not Merck, a different one — hired me to help them with their Case For Change Story. And they ended up choosing that one they'd heard on a local NPR radio station. I find that fascinating because, notice that wasn't their product and that wasn't their customer, but they chose that story because it illustrated the value of getting their products — their life-saving products — to market sooner. They were trying to reduce their drug development time from 15 years to 5 years or something, and telling people what the MPV is or how much more money they're going to make just didn't motivate the employees very much. But telling them stories about kids like Joey, whose life could have been saved if they'd gotten the drugs to market sooner, was motivating.

So that's a Case For Change Story. Not all of them are going to be about curing cancer, it doesn't have to be that dramatic, but that's an example of one.

Andy Murray: What is it about us as people that we're more persuaded by a story that may or may not be true? Most likely it could be, and it was in this case, but you put story over here versus compelling facts over here, and we're still motivated by the story. And yet leaders that are often pitching new ideas will tend to go through all the facts and think it's really a conversation about rational and logic. But why is it that it's actually the story that is more powerful?

Paul Smith: Yes. so I think you need both. But the reason why the story tends to be critical there is that it turns out humans don't make the rational, logical decisions that we'd like to think we do. And there's a very specific reason for that.

It turns out most of our decisions are made in a subconscious, emotional processing part of our brain and then those decisions are justified a few nanoseconds later in a conscious thinking, rational processing part of the brain. So we leave a decision making process only cognizant of that rational, conscious thinking part of the brain.

But really the decision was made a few nanoseconds earlier subconsciously and the rest of our brain is just catching up. So, if you want to influence people's opinions, decisions, and behavior, you need to

influence both parts of the brain. But we typically, like you said, only talk to that rational, logical thinking part of the brain and you need to reach both.

Storytelling is just uniquely suited to reach the subconscious, emotional processing part of the brain, whereas a list of rational and logical facts and arguments and data just don't. They don't ever get over to that other part of the brain.

Andy Murray: I have another question that could be a bit more challenging. I think you're up for it, though.

In today's corporate world where we've been pretty much encouraged, developed, promoted, by excellent left brain thinking that can get to answers quickly, shows decisiveness, is achievement based — that's the side of the brain that gets exercised quite a bit. Now you're talking about story, which sounds to me like right brain thinking, which is not a part of the brain that gets exercised — and whose use almost gets discouraged in a lot of companies and has been since post-industrial age.

I wonder how accessible it is to those more left brain leaders to venture into the space of: *I'm going to turn this into a story. How do I do that? I'm not a right brain thinker.*

Paul Smith: Yes, welcome to every one of my clients for the last 10 years. That's exactly what I spend my time doing is helping people, those left brain leaders like you're talking about, be able to channel the right side of their brain.

And part of what puts them at ease, Andy, is that I tell them right up front: *You don't need to do this all day long. In fact only 10% - 15% of the words coming out of your mouth as a leader should be in the form of a story — 10% - 15%. So 85%, 90% of the conversations you're having are just normal conversations like you and I are having right now.*

In other words, not involving a story. If you do that math: out of a 60-minute meeting, you might spend six to nine minutes of that hour telling a story. And these stories are two or three or four minutes each, so you might tell three, three-minute stories out of the course of an hour-long meeting with somebody or with a group of people.

So it's not all the time. They can relax, thinking *I don't need to completely change the way I lead.* But being able to sprinkle in a few of these compelling stories every once in a while will radically change their leadership capability.

Andy Murray: It sounds like you would pick your moments for that. I've been around a few leaders that have been long in the tooth and I'd hear their stories many times. And it seemed like they just settled in on that state. So we resist that sometimes because we're not really clear: *What's the appropriate time to use a story?* The outcome you're trying to achieve in that moment is a real guiding point to say, *This is a good time for a story to use.*

How do you assess or guide your clients to know: *In this situation, you'll be better served with a story here than probably anything else.* Have you categorized those moments where a story might be the right answer?

Paul Smith: Yes. So this may be the time to get into what stories you need to tell because part of what I teach leaders is that you probably can use storytelling for more leadership purposes than you thought you could.

Most people say *I don't want to tell a story unless the situation calls for it and I've got a good story to tell*, and that's exactly right. You shouldn't, unless both of those things are true: the situation calls for it and you've got an effective story you can tell.

But most leaders, I find, think that includes about four or five situations in the world where both those two things are the case, and it's not. There are dozens and dozens of them. I called out 22 or 23 of them in my first book. And in my most recent book, I tried to focus on fewer actually just to give people a place to start. And that may be the place for us to go. You want me to share?

Andy Murray: Yes, I'd love to hear about these. I'm fascinated.

Paul Smith: Out of the dozens of situations, leadership challenges where leaders could and should be using storytelling, these are the top 10. The first four go together because they're about setting the direction for the organization. So that's:

- Where we came from, a founding story
- Why we can't stay there, so that's the Case For Change Story I like we talked about earlier
- Where we're going, which is a vision story
- And how we're going to get there, which is a strategy story. A strategy is about how you are going to get from where you are now to where you want to be.

So if you imagine as a leader, if you can tell those four stories, you can easily articulate where we came from, why we can't stay there, where we're going and how we're going to get there.

The next four go together as well, but they're more about who we are as an organization. So that's:

- What we believe, that's a corporate values story
- Who we serve, a story about your customer so that everybody in your organization can have a personal human visceral understanding of the customer
- What we do for our customers, that's a classical sales story
- And how we're different from our competitors, and I call that a marketing story just because I think marketing's job is generally differentiating your brand from your competitors'.

So if you can tell those four stories easily, you can easily articulate who you are, who you serve, what you do for your customers and how you're different from your competitors.

If you're keeping track that's eight, so there's two more. These last two are really more personal to you, the leader:

- Why I lead the way I do, a personal leadership philosophy story, and
- Why should you want to work here? Not you but the person you're talking to, so that's a recruiting story.

Those are important because every leader's job is attracting talented people into the organization and getting them to stay and follow your leadership, even if you don't work in recruiting. So again, there's dozens more, but I think if you're just starting out as a leader, wanting to stretch your storytelling muscle, those would be the first 10 stories I would put in your repertoire of stories to tell. Then you'll be able to tell them when it's time and you recognize the need to tell a Case For Change Story or a Sales Story or a Marketing Story. You've got one to tell.

Andy Murray: It sounds like all those stories are a connection to heart and minds, not just intellectual stories about a bumblebee and a wasp or something. But it's got some sense that when you're talking story, in these cases, you're talking about something that connects to people emotionally.

This is my problem, a lot of my stories don't make sense. And so I am curious about what you might have as advice on what is a good story? Because if I sat down and wrote all 10 and they all started with once upon a time, I would need some help.

That's where I'm at. I would love to know a structure so it's not lame or the same format? Any guidance on how to get started doing it well?

Paul Smith: Yes. So interesting you say format.

Let me tell you a story...

First of all, that's the wrong way to start a story. Never start a story by saying, "Let me tell you a story." I think 60% or 70% of adults, when they hear those words at work, their eyes roll in the back of their head and they're like, "*Oh, seriously? We're busy. Can you just tell us what you want us to know?*"

Adults at work don't think they want to hear stories. But if you tell them a story and it's a good story, they'll love it. And it will be impactful and powerful, but don't ruin it by telling them — it's going to sound like you're a kindergarten teacher: *Gather around boys and girls. It's story time!* Grown-ups don't want to hear that.

Andy Murray: Good advice, Paul. This is the first time I've heard: *Don't start a story by saying, "Let me tell you a story."*

Paul Smith: There is a format that you should follow and you should follow it every time and your stories will not sound the same even though you're following the same format. The characters in the story, the plot line, all that stuff is going to be different because it's a totally different story. The format or the

structure of the story should be the same and that is what helps you tell an interesting, engaging, understandable story that doesn't meander and is short.

The way you do that is by answering eight questions, and you answer them in a particular order.

So the first one is:

1. Why should I bother listening to the story?

You've got to answer that question in the first, I don't know, 10 or 15 seconds, or they might not listen to your story, they might mentally, physically or emotionally walk away from your story. So you got to give them a reason to want to listen to you for the next two or three minutes.

Once you've done that, you've earned the right to answer the next five questions.

2. Where and when did it take place?

3. Who's the main character and what did they want?

4. What was the problem or opportunity they ran into?

5. What did they do about it?

6. How did it turn out in the end?

I know that should sound like the natural flow of the story, right because it is natural, but there are two left, that if you're keeping track. The last two questions are:

7. What did you learn from the story?

8. What do you think I should go do now? (I, the person you're telling the story to.)

So that's your opportunity.

Andy Murray: That last bit is really clever. That, because that brings it into *Why am I telling you this story?*

Paul Smith: Exactly. Now, interestingly though Andy: as the storyteller you only answer questions one through six. What you want is for the audience to answer questions seven and eight. People are more passionate about pursuing *their own ideas* than they are about pursuing *your ideas*.

So part of the benefit of telling a story is that it becomes their idea. You tell them a story and they're like, *Oh, I think I'm going to go do this now*. Now that's their idea, which they're more likely to go do then if you just boss them around and tell them to go do X, Y, or Z.

Andy Murray: I love it. Their imagination kicks in to fill in the story with how they would imagine it. That's brilliant. Keep going, this is good.

Paul Smith: So you're not saying "Let me tell you a story." You're answering these questions, or at least the first six, and then you pause and give the story a chance to work, see how your audience responds.

And normally they'll tell you what they thought of the story and the lesson they learned and what they're going to go do now. And if they get the right answer, good, your job is done. In fact what do they tell them in sales, Andy? *When the buyer says yes, shut up and go home, right?* Nothing you do after that is going to help. So if they say the right thing, good, you're done.

Now if they learn the wrong lesson, then you can always redirect. You can say, *"That's an interesting conclusion. I thought of that too, but I came to a different conclusion here."*

Andy Murray: So that's a very diplomatic way of saying you didn't get the story.

Paul Smith: Exactly.

Andy Murray: So how often do you recommend throwing a curveball in the story? Meaning it's not the ending they thought it would be. Does that throw people off or does that actually make them think even more?

Paul Smith: *As often as you can* is the answer to that question. So yes, it's not always possible, but there are some techniques that you can use that work almost all the time. To create a surprise ending, that's what you're talking about.

Andy Murray: Yes. An I-didn't-see-that-coming kind of story.

Paul Smith: That's important for maybe a surprising reason, ironically.

In a movie you watch or a book you're reading, we love surprise endings just because it's fun. And the same thing for your business stories as well, but it does something more important; it is what makes the story more memorable and the lesson at the end of it more memorable.

The reason is because when somebody is surprised, there's a little bit of a release of adrenaline in their system. That's what surprise does in the human body. Physiologically, adrenaline gets released in your system. It's been scientifically proven that adrenaline enhances your memory consolidation process — your memory formation. So, literally, adrenaline makes whatever's happening more memorable. And you want your story to be more memorable, especially the end where the lesson is.

So a surprise ending actually plays a practical role in a business or leadership story. And you can create one in almost any story with this technique. So I'll just, I'll illustrate it for you.

Andy Murray: Yes, please do.

Paul Smith: A young boy named James, a nine year old kid, is in the kitchen with his mom and his mom's sister. While mom and Auntie are sitting at the kitchen table, having a cup of tea, James is standing at the stove, watching the teakettle boil, and he's just fascinated with it. He's watching the jet of steam come out of the top of the kettle and he's got a little spoon, he holds it up there into the jet of steam and he's watching drops of water condensed on the spoon and they trickle down and they drip into a cup that he's got sitting out there just for that purpose.

He's watching the cycle go over and over again, just fascinated with it. Eventually his mother just gets frustrated with him and she yells at him: *"James, go do your homework! Ride your bike, read a book. Aren't you ashamed of yourself, just wasting your time staring at the tea kettle boiling for an hour now?"*

Fortunately young James was undaunted by his mother's admonition. Because 20 years later at the age of 29, in the year 1765, James Watt reinvented the steam engine, ushering in the industrial revolution that we, of course, all benefit from today, and all based on that fascination with steam that he developed at the age of nine in his mother's kitchen.

Now I can tell by the look on your face that you didn't see that coming, right? When I first read that story it was in a book titled *James Watt and the Steam Engine*. So of course it was no surprise to me that the nine-year-old kid in Chapter 1 was James Watt. It was a surprise to you for this very simple reason: I didn't tell you his last name.

I didn't answer a question that belonged at the beginning of the story. Question #3 is *Who's the main character?* I'm supposed to answer that question at the beginning of the story. The human brain expects that answer at the beginning of the story. And I only partially answered it and didn't give you the full answer until the end. Presto! A little bit of surprise.

Andy Murray: Now that you've explained it, that's a fairly simple mechanic that you can invent to create a surprise if you don't know the plot line on how to create a surprise. I could do that. I can leave that part out of an expected story and put it in at the end and all of a sudden now I'm a storyteller that creates surprise. But it's just that one device of what you expect to get at the front, save it for the end. That's brilliant. Any other kind of hacks like that would serve to help you build great stories? That's a good one.

Paul Smith: There are other things you need to do, like you need to have emotional engagement in a story. Some of the techniques to create that emotional engagement are dialogue, that's a simple one. If all your stories were: *The company did this and then the company did that and then the company did this*—that's not a story. That's a case study. That's an HBR case study. But if Bob did this and then Sally said that, and then Bob said this, now the dialogue makes it an interesting story and you care about people more. Dialogue is one of those things.

Putting in anything that has some emotional resonance to the audience, that they will care about, will of course, make them care about your story more. So there are little techniques like that to try and gain emotional engagement.

Andy Murray: One of the things I like about story after spending four years in the UK and just getting back is that many are brilliant storytellers and story is part of the culture there.

And then for me having to work with diverse groups — diversity is so important to get understanding of stories. Is there anything cultural that would hold you back or be a handicap to telling good stories?

I've found storytelling is pretty universal across cultures. I've not seen a culture yet that doesn't use stories. I'm curious to the relatedness of storytelling in a diverse and inclusive culture. My hypothesis is it gets richer if the whole team learns how to tell stories, because you're pulling in such personal connections to people. It's revealing a bit of yourself.

Paul Smith: Yes, I agree. I have not met a culture where storytelling is not used or not important at all. I have noticed a difference in the degree of importance and the acceptable amount of time to invest in conversations. That 10% to 15% I gave you, I've seen a spectrum of that.

For example, maybe this won't surprise you, in Latin America that number is bigger. In Germany that number is smaller. In the US that number somewhere in the middle. That's where I came up with a number, mostly in the US. So there's a spectrum, and I work with people all over the world, but I've yet to work with a group where that number is zero. It's always 5%, 10%, 15%, 20%.

In fact I had one of my clients in Latin America tell me that on a typical hour-long sales call that she would spend fifteen to twenty minutes of the hour, so that's 33%, trading personal stories with the buyer. That's the way they bonded, just in a human way, relationship building. And then in the remaining 40 minutes there might be a handful of other stories she would tell, more professional stories. So it could be 40% or 50% in some cultures, but I don't think zero ever happens.

Andy Murray: I can tell you one thing in my experience from working with Procter & Gamble, Walmart and in the agency business, the people at the dinner table that were really good at storytelling just commanded attention. Almost every senior leader, the more senior they got, would use a story to communicate. When Doug McMillon would come and speak to an audience, he often would use a story — every time he'd use stories. And I would say it was 80% stories of what he saw, what he believed, telling us a story of an associate's heroics — but he always seemed to tie it to reinforcing a value that he cared about or a statement of something he was concerned about. So if it's gratefulness or commitment — no matter what was on his mind — there seemed to have a story in there somewhere that was going to come out to reinforce that, probably because of the memorability of story to do that.

I wish that our culture and our professional environments would put more energy toward it, and you're obviously getting quite a bit of energy toward you because you're making a living teaching people how to do it.

But where's the demand curve right now for this? I feel like we'll have a much better life and working environment if we got out of our spreadsheets a bit and it became a bit more human in the way we talk to each other. What do you think?

Paul Smith: Yes, I agree. In fact that type of storytelling that you're referring to that's #5 on that list of 10. That's a What We Believe Story — what do we value? What are our ethics? What do we believe? So it's a very important type of story.

Where the demand curve is on this — it continues to grow. Before 30 years ago it was low. Around 30 years ago there was a renaissance, if you will, in storytelling in the professional ranks with a few books that were written at the time and that have continued to be published in that space. And I think it's, for the last three decades, been growing rapidly. And I don't see it slowing down anytime soon.

COVID lockdowns notwithstanding — we all just moved online — I just see it becoming more important. I don't see it becoming less important anytime soon.

Andy Murray: Some parts of a company are different than others. I know at P & G when I first started, I worked on a multifunctional team that was trying to create a customer service offering for the food division. And the guys that were just so interesting to hang out with were the sales guys. And for some reason they were much more clever at storytelling than us poor engineering / IT guys, we had the worst stories.

But it's good to know we could learn and improve — there's hope for everybody on that. But I think that was their profession. When you're dealing with people, being good at storytelling — I don't know if your experience at P & G was that — somehow these guys were all a collection of gifted storytellers, and you couldn't really survive as a top leader in sales at P & G without knowing the craft of storytelling.

Paul Smith: I agree, but interestingly, about half of my clients now are sales teams.

It's ironic. It's a bunch of people who are probably naturally more gifted in storytelling, like you're saying, than your average person from some other function. But they also know that in their job, it's more important than any other function to be very good at it, so they invest in that skillset.

So yes, I'd say about half of my clients now are in sales. And part of it is they need to learn, just like a leader does, the breadth of stories that they could and should be telling at work. And again it's a lot more than they probably thought. And my third book is *Sell With A Story*, specifically for salespeople. In it I documented 25 different types of sales stories that great salespeople are telling all over the world. If you ask a salesperson they'll go, *"I've got three good go-to stories!"* That's probably not enough. You need some more.

Andy Murray: Yes. I've probably heard two of them. Because those tend to be repeated.

Talk a little bit, Paul, around taking story down a notch. I know there's a line there between story and message. And one of the things that I feel is helpful in trying to create a movement or a bigQUEST is when you've got this visual value proposition and whether it is that we're going to fight hunger, create change, or we're gonna put a playground in every postcode — is what we used in the UK — those communicated in themselves a whole message that could be broadened into a story.

I think of Bill Simon, when he was launching the prescription program at Walmart: \$4 generics. He could have said, *We're going to transform healthcare*, but instead he's creating an A to B journey in that story. My assumption is if you get good at storytelling, your brain's going to think in different ways about how to use language that's helpful, even in those visual metaphors that you create. Have you found any of that in your research to be true?

Paul Smith: Yes. Storytelling is an art, right? It's not a science. And like any other art some people are going to be born a little bit better at it than others and some of us aren't. But just like any other form of art, it's learnable; just because you can't play the guitar doesn't mean you'll never be able to play the guitar. You can take lessons from somebody who knows and you can learn.

I think what you're talking about is those catchphrases or taglines.

Andy Murray: If you've worked with Tom Muccio, he would be the king of that at P & G. That's exactly what I'm talking about.

Paul Smith: Those things are important, too. They're not stories — at least not the definition that I use. It's not a narrative about something that happened to somebody.

But again, remember only 10% - 15% of your communication should be these stories. You need these kinds of monikers and taglines and vision statements and mission statements, and OGSMs — we used to call them — and your strategy documents. You need all of those, too. That's the other 80-85-90% of the words that you're saying. You need these stories to go along with it. Just because you're a good storyteller doesn't necessarily mean you're going to be good at those other things either, but like any good art, it will stretch a part of your brain that you probably haven't been exercising. And so it wouldn't surprise me if you got better at some of those other things as well.

Andy Murray: That's exactly where I was going. Because you're using your right brain muscles, you're exercising them, you're creating those stories.

And any advice to someone that's just starting out? They're listening to this perhaps, and they've been a bit more of a left brain. They're definitely going to go read your book, I think they got that. But is there anything you would recommend people do every single day? Because I'm a big believer in *Find one thing that will move you towards your goal and do it every single day*.

How can it become a habit or practice? Is there one habit or practice that you can say, "You do this every single day, you are going to get better at this."

Paul Smith: Given the conversation we're having, I guess I would have to say that's at least tell at least one story a day. And if you spend eight hours at work, and if you use my 10% - 15% rule, you should be telling several. If you're not telling any, you're probably not getting any better.

You're going to need to start developing a repertoire of stories, like arrows in your quiver. Otherwise you're telling the same story over and over again. Developing a new story — maybe not every day, but once a week — and notice something interesting that happens at work. And if it moved you in some way, it'll move other people when you share it with them.

So I'd say maybe once a week develop a habit of developing a new story and every day, find at least one opportunity to share one of the many stories you have in a moment that it's going to be meaningful. That way when it's really important, when you're on stage in front of a bunch of people, you're in that buyer's office, or you're in front of the board of directors or whatever, and you need that really good story, you've had some practice telling some stories and this won't be your first rodeo, right?

Andy Murray: How do you address someone that might be saying, *"I have a great story, but I get stage fright or I'm not sure I'm good at delivery."*

Any kind of thoughts on how to help someone present a good story in a way that may help them improve their skills? Because I've got to believe the skill of it is one thing, it's different than the actual content of the story.

Let's say you're past the content. You've got a great story idea but you're just not confident. And you almost tell it, and you then tie your shoes cause you're worried that they're going to laugh at you or something. What's the technique that might help your confidence?

Paul Smith: I think what you're talking about is the difference between developing a story and delivering the story.

The delivery characteristics, as opposed to: I've crafted and answered the 8 questions, I've got an emotional component, I've got a surprise ending, etc. So that's crafting the story, all of that stuff that my books and my training courses will teach you to do is. You follow the pattern and you'll come out with a great crafted story, but now you need to deliver it.

The first thing I guess I would say to you is: *the story really is more important than the delivery.*

For people who are nervous about delivering a story in front of other people, it's because they think it has to be perfect. They feel like they have to deliver it like they're on stage and a Shakespearean actor is delivering something. Whereas when they were just talking they weren't nervous in that way.

So I think the problem you're talking about is the difference between crafting a story and delivering a story. So again, the first thing I guess I would say to you is: *the story really is more important than the delivery.*

I know the problem you're talking about because I see it all the time with the people that I'm coaching. They'll be in a conversation with 10, 15 people around a conference room and they're talking and they're perfectly comfortable talking in front of their peers. But the moment they want to tell a story they get nervous and say, "Okay, so I'm going to tell you the story" and it becomes a production and they're nervous. The reason is they're thinking about a story like some actor on stage and they're putting all this pressure on themselves to deliver the story well, and the truth is unless you're a professional actor or a professional speaker like me, nobody really expects you to deliver a story any better than you mumble out the stuff that you're saying the rest of the time.

So just take that pressure off of yourself. The story's more important than the delivery. In fact, I would go further and tell you that if you tell a helpful story, but you butcher that surprise ending and you stutter and stammer a little bit and you don't make good eye contact and you fidget with your hands a little bit, your audience will forgive you. Because your audience is just people you work with sitting around a conference room. If you're on stage at a TEDx event or something then that's a little different, but for just normal everyday stuff, your audience will forgive you because you told them a story that is helpful to them and motivating them.

But if you tell them a boring, irrelevant story that does not help them, but you deliver it in a way that would make a Shakespearean actor proud, they will never forgive you for wasting their time. The story is more important than the delivery.

Andy Murray: Most people would be thinking the opposite, that I've got to deliver this really well for it to work. So when you do your workshops, I'm not trying to oversell your workshops or raise the bar too high, but do you get into delivery as well as development and crafting?

Paul Smith: A little bit, after I make that point to relieve yourself of that pressure because that's what will make you mess up, all that pressure.

So it's not as important as the story, but of course there are some things that you can do to make the delivery better. And we'll cover a few of those things: using dialogue is one of those things that makes the delivery — it's easier to say what people say.

If you're going to deliver your story in writing in a letter or on a webpage or in a piece of direct mail or something, there are techniques you can use to make it sound more like a story: shorter sentences and smaller words. You want your written story to sound conversational instead of something that was written to be read.

People speak in sentences differently than they write in sentences. And so we cover some of the distinctions between those two things. And even if you're going to write your story, you want it to be written like it was spoken. In fact, that's my overall advice on delivery and writing is to *write the way you'd like to speak*. If you were speaking at your best, write that way. *Don't speak like you'd like to write, write the way you'd like to speak*.

Andy Murray: Yes. That's interesting. I've written talks and then put them on a teleprompter. And when I practiced, I thought this sounds horrible.

Paul Smith: Yes. It sounds like you're reading to them and nobody wants to be read to.

Andy Murray: Paul, what's next for you? As you continue down this journey, you've made a few pivots to broaden and expand the way you look at it. What's coming down the pike for you?

Paul Smith: My goal is to have another book every couple of years. I've been at this for eight or nine years now and my fifth book just came out not too long ago, so I'm on path. We would've called it my initiative pipeline, which is to continue to deliver.

The big pivot this year, of course, was because of COVID-19. All of my speaking engagements had to transition to online like this so I had to make some investments in equipment and studio and learning all kinds of new software and creating a lot of virtual assets now. So I had to basically create a bunch of online video training programs that my clients can access without having me in a room with them. So that took a few months of time and effort that I would have probably spent working on another book. So that hasn't happened yet because I'm working on this pivot right now. But yes, eventually I'll get back into writing something.

Andy Murray: If you had to turn 2020 as a year into a story — I'm not trying to put the master on display here or to the test, but you just made me think about that. How am I going to tell this story of 2020 and make any sense out of it? But I'd just love to hear your reaction to the year 2020 as a story.

Paul Smith: I don't know, but it would probably involve a dumpster fire on the deck of the Titanic that's sinking or something, I don't know. Every bad metaphor you can imagine would probably be involved in it.

If one good thing comes out of this year, it might be that we all just have better stories to tell we can tell our grandkids. "You remember in 2020 when we didn't have any toilet paper and there was no food at the grocery store and Daddy didn't work for six months?" Now we're going to have all that. We just stocked up on stories this year, that's all we've done.

Andy Murray: No question. Ben, do you have anything to add or a story that you would tell for 2020?

Ben Ortlip: I just was thinking of Dickens. If he had written it, he would have said *It was the worst of times; it was really the worst of times*. A Tale of Two Cities. Very different.

Andy Murray: Tale of Two Disasters. Yes.

Paul, I can't tell you much how much I appreciate what you're doing. I've read your books, I've used the thoughts and I've seen it in action. I've seen so many good leaders lead with a story that's changed the outcome or the trajectory or the belief system that someone might have that could be holding them back. In this day and age of Twitter and everything in short soundbites it makes me appreciate a great

story even more as a power to influence change. That's what we're all about here. And thank you for taking the time to be on here with us.

Paul Smith: Yes, I appreciate the time. It's always good getting to catch up with you.

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