

Storytelling as Change Strategy

Ten Tips for Storytellers

1. **Stories are about people.** (And people have names – even if you have to make them up.) Instinctively, your audience will want to know whom they will be following on this particular journey, and they also will want a mental picture of that person, so it helps to provide at least a few physical details.
2. **One or more of the people in your story has to *want something*:** to *do* something, to *change* something, to *get* something. A story doesn't really get started until the audience knows what the goal is and has a reason to care whether or not it is attained.
3. **Stories need to be fixed in time and space.** Audiences don't need *every* detail, but they want to know: was this last week or 10 years ago? Are we on a street corner in Boston, a Wal-Mart in Iowa, or somewhere else?
4. **While people in a story pursue a goal, they tend to talk.** Direct quotes let the audience hear your characters' unique voices, bring the audience into the action (which is precisely where you want them), and lend urgency to storytelling.
5. **Audiences bore easily.** Your story has to make them wonder, "What happens next?" or "How is this going to turn out?" As the people in your story pursue their goal, they have to run into obstacles, surprises, or something that makes the audience sit up and take notice.
6. **Stories speak the audience's language.** They are colorful (thanks to telling details), concise, and clearly understandable.
7. **Stories stir up emotions.** Human beings (which should comprise the majority of your audience) will not think about things they do not care about. So you have to make them care before you can get them to think about your issue. That's the test your story has to meet.
8. **Stories don't tell: they show.** Intellectually, your audience will understand a sentence such as, "She felt hostility from the family." But when you write, "The family wouldn't look her in the eye," your audience will see the moment and feel the family's anger.
9. **Stories have clear meaning.** When the curtain comes down, your audience should know exactly why they took this journey with you.
10. **Stories are containers of truth.** At their essence, the best stories are about how we should treat ourselves, how we should treat other people, or how we should treat the world around us.

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Ten Questions to Sharpen Your Stories

1. Who's the protagonist?
2. Have you created a world?
3. What's the hook?
4. What keeps it interesting?
5. Where's the conflict?
6. Have you included telling details?
7. Are you tapping emotion?
8. Is the meaning clear?
9. Are you showing rather than telling?
10. Are you speaking in the language of the audience?

1. Who's the Protagonist?

- Stories need someone -- either an individual or group -- to drive the action.
- Provide enough description or background so we can see a person in our mind's eye.

2. Have you created a world?

- Supply a little description up front fixing the story in time and space.
- People instinctively want to know who, where, when, what, why.

3. What's the Hook?

- Hook the audience right from the start by beginning the story in a place where the audience can identify with the situation or the protagonist's goal.

4. What Keeps It Interesting?

- Predictable stories are boring. If your story lacks obstacles, what can you do to make the straight-line pursuit more interesting?

5. Where's the Conflict?

- There is no drama and little comedy without conflict. It helps to have clearly defined heroes and villains with different notions of how the story should end.

6. Do you have telling details?

- A single telling detail can replace a paragraph of description by vividly and *concisely* painting a picture of the world you're describing.

7. Are You Tapping Emotion?

- An audience subconsciously enters into a contract with the storyteller: They want an emotional experience that makes the time worthwhile.

8. Is the Meaning Clear?

- If not, how can you make it more explicit without "spoon-feeding" the audience?
- Ira Glass (NPR's *This American Life*): tell people the lesson every few minutes.

9. Are you showing rather than telling?

- Show what is happening. Don't tell about it from a "safe distance."
- Don't let important action happen "off-screen."

10. Are you speaking in the language of the audience?

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Resources for Further Learning

Storytelling as Best Practice

by Andy Goodman, available at agoodmanonline.com

Free Range Thinking

A free monthly newsletter by by Andy Goodman, available at agoodmanonline.com

The Triumph of Narrative by Robert Fulford

“Story telling is an attempt to deal with and at least partly contain the terrifyingly haphazard quality of life.”

The Fifth Discipline by Peter Senge

“I realized that... many otherwise competent managers in leadership positions were not leaders of the same ilk precisely because they saw no larger story.”

The Story Factor by Annette Simmons

“In a complex environment, people listen to whomever makes the most sense -- whomever tells the best story.”

“Facts don’t have the power to change someone’s story. Your goal is to introduce a new story that will let your facts in.”

Data Smog by David Shenk

“We’re accustomed to the use of narrative information. That’s the way we learned things in our previous, preliterate cultures. It’s a relatively recent thing to learn about the world by statistics and by logical argument.”

Storytelling in Organizations by Yiannis Gabriel

“Storytelling comes to the rescue of meaning in an epoch saturated by information in which meaning is constantly displaced and crowded by noise.”

Storytelling For Grantseekers: The Guide to Creative Nonprofit Fundraising by Cheryl A. Clarke

All Marketers Are Liars: The Power of Telling Authentic Stories in a Low-Trust World by Seth Godin

Story: Substance, Structure, Style & Principles of Screenwriting By Robert McKee

Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting; A step-by-step guide from concept to finished script by Syd Field