

# Tap the Power of Storytelling

Rodger Dean Duncan

No doubt about it, the best speakers are good storytellers. The best writers are good storytellers. The best leaders are good storytellers. The best teachers and trainers and coaches are good storytellers. It might even be argued that the best parents are good storytellers.

While storytelling is not the only way to engage people with your ideas, it's certainly a critical part of the recipe.

**Geoffrey Berwind** is a professional Storytelling Consultant and Trainer. He's created storytelling projects for historic sites and provides consulting services for leaders, entrepreneurs, speakers, and companies worldwide. His clients include Historic Philadelphia, Inc., Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex, UNUM Global IT Leaders, along with thousands of experts in many fields who want to make a deeper impact on their audiences, customers, management teams, and influential stakeholders.

I invited Geoffrey to share with us some of what he's learned about the power of good storytelling.

## Why is there so much buzz about the use of Story in business communications?

For too long, companies have relied on offering change ideas only by supplying data, numbers, statistics, analytics, and so on. We've heard for years now that "PowerPoint is dead," yet time and again this is the expected form of communicating an idea or proposal. Steve Jobs was one of the pioneers in the use of simple images

and one-line concepts to support his verbal storytelling. TED Talks have carried that practice forward and their world-class speakers are expected to speak in simple narratives, using stories and powerful imagery to convey their message.

## Why use stories when speaking in a business setting?

Stories powerfully *connect* us to our listeners. When we share our own real-life stories or the stories of others (Example or Proof stories) our audiences feel that they get to know us as *authentic* people – people who have lives outside the corporate setting, people who have struggled with problems and who have figured out how to overcome them.

There's a well-known marketing axiom that "people buy from people they know, like and trust." During my years of training in making presentations I've seen that there is simply no more impactful way to have that occur than through the strategic use of storytelling. Great leaders recognize that human connections need to go before concepts and strategies: connect first with your prospects, your audiences – *then* get down to business. I've seen increased attention being paid by companies to the mastery of these so-called "soft skills."

## What role can storytelling play in a speaker's credibility?

How long have humans been around? As long as there have been campfires, humans have gathered around them and conveyed their view of the world through the use of stories. Stories are a “shared experience,” and I believe we are hard-wired to receive information primarily through storytelling. Stories trigger the ancient human muscle of the imagination.

Our own early years were largely spent through play and exploring. We experienced the world through direct engagement and, as children, we learned through being told bedtime stories, fairy tales, hearing family stories around the dinner table. We became *story-listeners* when we were young. When leaders use storytelling I believe they bring their audiences back to a natural state of primal listening.

So, credibility isn't really an issue. The use of stories, properly conveyed, is actually how we *prefer* to receive communications. When leaders learn how to meld the use of stories with the left-brain data-based information they also need to convey ... well, this becomes irresistible. Their influence and engagement becomes more powerful, and real change occurs because people are moved to action.

## What kinds of stories could leaders use to influence others?

There are a number of powerful strategic stories you could use to persuade and influence. A “Purpose Story” is a big picture story that conveys a big idea. Use “Example or Proof Stories” to illustrate how others overcame a similar problem and

had a successful outcome. When offering a change-idea, craft a “What If?” or “Imagine ...” story.

In your “story toolbox” you can also use Cautionary stories, Teaching stories, Inspirational stories, and your own Everyday stories that make you more relatable to your audiences.

## When making a speech, is there an ideal kind of story to begin with?

Many of us feel a sense of mission in life beyond simply making money. Most leaders feel some kind of passion for what they do and so when they convey this they can deeply affect their audiences. If you are offering a change-idea, you're pitching a transformation of some kind – so your goal is to overcome resistance in those who are in front of you. Sharing why you care, why it matters becomes pivotal.

I encourage professionals to craft their Why I Do What I Do story – (which I recommend using at the very beginning of a speech). This WHY is the very heart of why we use stories: before you prescribe the “What,” the “Who,” the “How” and the “When,” be clear about the WHY. It makes all the difference. Tell your stories!

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