

Ask Better
Give Better
Expand County

QUESTIONS
ANSWERS
CAPACITY

COURSE MATERIALS

Storytelling and Other Strategies in the Art of Persuasion

Bill Chiat

CI-378

Storytelling and Other Elements of the Art of Persuasion



COURSE SYLLABUS

Times are approximate

- 10:00 Introduction: *Why did you choose this course?*
- 10:15 Activity: *Story About Yourself*
- 10:55 Discussion: *Why use stories?*
- 11:00 Discussion: *Context of Storytelling – The Art of Persuasion*
- 11:45 Activity: *Case Study of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*
- 12:30 Lunch
- 1:00 Brainstorm and Discussion: *Stories in the Workplace*
- 1:30 Activity: *Sources and Inventory of Individual Stories*
- 1:50 Discussion: *How to Tell a Story*
- 2:30 Activity: *Practicum*
- 3:15 Lessons Learned About Storytelling
- 3:25 Evaluation

INSTRUCTOR **Bill Chiat**

Bill Chiat is the Manager of the CSAC Institute. His expertise spans 30 years in local and state governments. He served as County Executive Officer of Napa County and Director of Organizational Effectiveness in Santa Barbara County. Mr. Chiat has held executive positions in city and special district governments, including several regional agencies and joint power authorities. At the state level, he served as Executive Director of the Arizona Governor's Office for Excellence in Government and led the state's executive education program. In addition to his work with CSAC, Mr. Chiat is Executive Director of the California Association of Local Agency Formation Commissions. He also provides organizational development consulting to a number of local governments.



Mr. Chiat has a B.S. from the University of Minnesota and a M.S. in natural resources administration from the University of Michigan. He is a graduate of the Senior Executives in State and Local Government Program from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He has research and taught numerous courses in public agency leadership, organizational structure, governance and operations.



Principles of Persuasion

Definitions

An attempt to evoke a change in the attitude and/or behavior of someone.

A voluntary change. Not a command, threat, or coercion.

Aristotle's Rhetoric:

Logos: logical, coherent, cogent argument

Ethos: the characteristics and credibility of the speaker

Pathos: the motives, feelings, attitudes, and knowledge of the audience

“Agora”: the context (where, when, timing, venue, culture) – from Ancient Greece: a gathering place

We are logos-oriented—committed to the power of proof, reasoning, and technical solutions. If we can prove something is true, we often assume others will feel compelled to accept it. Good ‘logos’ arguments are sometimes necessary for persuasion, but usually not sufficient. The landscape is littered with great logos arguments that went nowhere.

Syzygy

From the Greek: to join, to yoke. The rare alignment of celestial bodies, such as the sun, moon, and earth during an eclipse.

Persuasion Goal: Align the key elements. Balance logos, ethos, pathos, and agora.



KEY TECHNIQUES

1. Contrast

What we see and believe in a situation depends to a great degree on what we have encountered immediately prior to that situation

Anchoring: We perceive a situation from the standpoint of a reference point, or anchor. What’s going to be the reference point?

What will your request be compared to?

2. Know the Audience

What are the needs, experiences, expectations, and benefits sought by your audience? We selectively filter information based on our prior dispositions. What is important to you may not be to your audience.

Look at your audiences’ point of view.

Avoid the “mirror trap:” We think we’re looking through a window at the audience, when in reality we are looking in a mirror and really seeing only our own disposition.

3. Simplicity

KISS. Keep your message simple and comprehensible.

Simplicity is a challenge since our subjects are often complex and we tend to be logos-oriented.

Limit the number of substantive arguments, and the number of persuasion principles in your presentation.

4. Storytelling

Stories provide a unique opportunity to communicate a message. They increase your credibility, capture attention, and engage the mind. It is amazing how we believe stories.

Let the listener interpret the message in his or her own terms. Make sure your stories are accurate.

5. Analogies and Metaphors

These tap into existing categories in people's minds. Connects to what we already know.

6. Counter-Intuitive

An argument which deviates from the audiences expectations. Novel, fresh, surprising information may be necessary to cause people to modify their predispositions and beliefs. Audiences associate credibility and authority with the lack of self-interest.

7. Repetition

Create more learning and more retention with repetition. Have to see an ad five times before it has an impact.

8. Involve the Audience

Get your audience involved in the presentation: ask a question, play a tape, brainstorm, challenge them, use question/answer, write something.

9. Humor

Humor captures attention and builds rapport with your audience. Humor which is self-deprecating, self-mocking, self-parody is most effective. Humor is also an effective techniques for delivering negative messages, and to reduce tension in a difficult situation.

10. Conformity

People are persuaded to change their attitude or behavior in response to real or imagined group pressure: the power of social norms.

This principle is particularly strong in situations of uncertainty and ambiguity. It is very difficult to withstand social disapproval.

11. Commitment

People feel personal and peer pressures to honor and to behave consistently with their prior commitments. People wish to be (and to appear to be) consistent with what they have already said and done. Create opportunities from small, initial commitments.

Most powerful when they are: active (written, such as a team charter), public, cause people to stretch, and felt to be voluntary.

12. Scarcity

Opportunities seem more valuable when their availability is limited. This applies to ideas and information, not just products.

What do people stand to lose if they don't take the action you are suggesting. Don't focus just on anticipated benefits.

Information that is scarce, new, or exclusive should be stated early in a persuasion message.

13. Reciprocation

We are more likely to be persuaded by someone who has given us something (tangible or intangible). We feel obliged to repay what another person has provided us.

Concessions are persuasive; they stimulate return concessions.

Listening can be persuasive in and of itself. An audience who is listened to will tend to reciprocate and be more receptive. Listening is the cheapest concession you can make.

Give away credit: appreciation, disclosure, encouragement, acknowledgement—are all forms for reciprocation.

14. Liking and Association

We are more likely to be influenced by people we know and like. We like people who are like us; who are similar to us, who have cooperated with us for common goals, and with whom we have pleasant associations.

Remember the power of praise, complements, recognition.

15. Perceived Authority

We are more likely to be persuaded (even without the inclination to do so) by someone who is perceived to be in authority.

The two key elements of credible authority: knowledge and expertise (“know their stuff”), and trustworthiness (integrity).

Authority refers to persuasion (*voluntary* attitude or behavior change), not command. Typically the authority principle is not sufficient. It must be accompanied by other persuasion principles.

Action Suggestions

- * If I am trying to persuade someone about something, what will they **compare** my request to in their minds? (Contrast principle)
- * **Who else** can speak for me or my cause? Who can better invoke peer pressure than me? (Conformity principle)
- * Can I do this persuasion in **stages** so that I can get an initial commitment? (Commitment principle)
- * Can I exercise **self control** over the number of my arguments? (Simplicity principle)
- * Can I **help or benefit** the audience in some way? Can I give them something—substantive or stylistic? (Reciprocation principle)
- * Can I tell my audience something **scarce, new, or exclusive**? Can I help my audience avoid a **loss**? (Scarcity principle)
- * Why should the audience accept my word? How can I convey my **expertise and integrity**? Who else (or what else) can vouch for my credibility? (Authority principle)
- * Can I say something which is apparently **contrary to my self-interest**? (Counter-Intuitive principle)
- * Is there a **genuine similarity** between me and my audience? What genuinely admirable qualities does my audience have? (Liking principle)
- * Which **face of the issue** should I try and emphasize? How can I reframe it in another light or perspective?
- * How can I turn my opponent’s **negative attack** into a positive persuasion argument?

The Three Imperatives of Persuasion

1. Know the audience
2. Know your opponents
3. Know yourself
 - ◆ Mirror trap
 - ◆ Command tendencies
 - ◆ Logos-orientation
 - ◆ Listening abilities
 - ◆ Personal strengths and weaknesses



“I Have a Dream”

Dr. Martin Luther King

Lincoln Memorial, Washington, DC

28 August 1963

Five score years ago,
a great American, in
whose symbolic
shadow we stand
signed the
Emancipation

Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of captivity.

But one hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. So we have come here today to dramatize an appalling condition.

In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has

given the Negro people a bad check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we have come to cash this check -- a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to open the doors of opportunity to all of God's children. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment and to underestimate the determination of the Negro. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place we must

not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.

We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny and their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone.

And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.

Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern

cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair.



I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama, whose governor's lips are presently dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, will be transformed into a situation where little

black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith with which I return to the South. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with a new meaning, "My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring."

And if America is to be a great nation this must become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania!

Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado!

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous peaks of California!

But not only that; let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia!

Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee!

Let freedom ring from every hill and every molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! free at last! thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"



Storytelling Inventory



Use this worksheet to keep a list of stories and story ideas.

Hints on Finding Your Own Stories

- * Something interesting about where you grew up
- * Lesson from first job
- * A time you felt really proud to be a public employee; made a difference
- * A time you recovered from a major mistake
- * A time when courage was called for
- * A time when you were young that you learned something about yourself
- * A value work/life you have held throughout your career

STORY NAME

KEY ELEMENTS

GOAL

Sparkling Action: Springboard Stories

Who I Am (credibility; trust) and Why I Am Here Stories

What is this Organization Stories

Transmitting Values in Action Stories

Telling the Right Story

Choosing the Right Story for the Leadership Challenge at Hand¹

TABLE 1.1 Eight Narrative Patterns

If your objective is ...	You will need a story that ...	In telling it, you will need to ...	Your story will inspire such phrases as ...
Sparking action	Describes how a successful change was implemented in the past, but allows listeners to imagine how it might work in their situation.	Avoid excessive detail that will take the audience's mind off its own challenge.	"Just imagine ..." "What if ..."
Communicating who you are	Provides audience-engaging drama and reveals some strength or vulnerability from your past.	Provide meaningful details but also make sure the audience has the time and inclination to hear your story.	"I didn't know that about him!" "Now I see what she's driving at!"
Transmitting values	Feels familiar to the audience and will prompt discussion about the issues raised by the value being promoted.	Use believable (though perhaps hypothetical) characters and situations, and never forget that the story must be consistent with your own actions.	"That's so right!" "Why don't we do that <i>all</i> the time!"
Communicating who the firm is—branding	Is usually told by the product or service itself, or by customer word of mouth or by a credible third party.	Be sure that the firm is actually delivering on the brand promise.	"Wow!" "I'm going to tell my friends about this!"

If your objective is ...	You will need a story that ...	In telling it, you will need to ...	Your story will inspire such phrases as ...
Fostering collaboration	Movingly recounts a situation that listeners have also experienced and prompts them to share their own stories about the topic.	Ensure that a set agenda doesn't squelch this swapping of stories—and that you have an action plan ready to tap the energy unleashed by this narrative chain reaction.	"That reminds me of the time that I ..." "Hey, I've got a story like that."
Taming the grapevine	Highlights, often through the use of gentle humor, some aspect of a rumor that reveals it to be untrue or unreasonable.	Avoid the temptation to be mean-spirited—and be sure that the rumor is indeed false!	"No kidding!" "I'd never thought about it like that before!"
Sharing knowledge	Focuses on problems and shows in some detail how they were corrected, with an explanation of why the solution worked.	Solicit alternative—and possibly better—solutions.	"There but for the grace of God ..." "Gosh! We'd better watch out for that in the future!"
Leading people into the future	Evokes the future you want to create without providing excessive detail that will only turn out to be wrong.	Be sure of your storytelling skills. Otherwise use a story in which the past can serve as a springboard to the future.	"When do we start?" "Let's do it!"

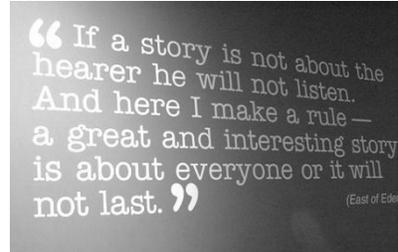
¹ From: Denning, Stephen. 2011. *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling: Mastering the Art and Discipline of Business Narrative*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

TECHNIQUES

Telling Your Story

Four Elements of Performance

1. **Style:** Talk to a single individual; avoid hedges and disclaimers; keep stories focused, simple and direct; be yourself. Find a style that you're comfortable with.
2. **Truth:** Tell the truth as you see it; use caution in disclosing information about other people.
3. **Prepare:** Rehearse, but be spontaneous even if it's the 398th time you've told the story; choose the DESIGN of the story (backbone) and stick to it – add to it as audience responds; practice-practice -practice
4. **Delivery:** Storytelling is a performance art – be ready to perform; be lively (use voice inflection); connect with all parts of the audience (where does Obama look??); know your audience; connect with your audience. Remember to breath; use pauses for emphasis ... particularly around the key point of your story.



Techniques to Compose and Tell a Leadership Story

COMPOSITION

- Have an end in mind – why are you telling the story: what is the change you hope the story will elicit
- What action do you want the audience to take?
- Tell stories that have meaning for you
- More importantly, craft stories that have meaning to the audience: intrigue and captivate listeners
- Tell a story about something that actually happened – don't make it up
- Some detail is important: Give a date or place or name where the story happened – it helps audiences believe it's real
- Pick a single individual as protagonist (even yourself) – individual similar to audience
- Pick a story that addresses a problem the audience has – a similar adversity you have had in the past
- Have a positive tone and a happy/satisfactory ending for the protagonist – even if it's lesson(s) learned
- Use humor to brighten
- Start your story with some context; create a setting

DELIVERY

- Be confident (no apologies)
- Don't memorize – use your words; your images
- Keep going – there are no mistakes; improvise
- KISS – 8 minutes or less; watch your audience for clues
- Words are less than 15% of what listeners hear

- Use body language: facial expressions, movement, gestures
- Use descriptions of sounds, smells and tastes to create images
- Pause, pacing and timing add meaning and variety to story. Take your time.
- Tone is a critical factor. Work on your feelings and your tone will follow.
- Remember congruency – words, body language, expression, tone all should match
- Take time to finish well
- Develop you own style
- Practice
- Get out from behind podiums, tables – it’s about one-on-one
- Try props – be daring

Other Techniques

A Few Things to Avoid

- Don’t use stories to manipulate people (enough said)
- Practice so you don’t come across as ‘superior’ (park your ego). Focus people on how smart *they* are not how smart you are.
- Don’t bore your audience. Keep stories interesting to the audience. Keep stories brief. Don’t fill stories with too much information or that go nowhere.
- Don’t scare people or make them feel guilty. Fear and shame tend to immobilize people.
- Storytelling is not a soap box. Avoid taking advantage of a ‘captive’ audience
- Don’t lie or make up stories unless you are clear it’s fiction
- Avoid use of notes, note cards, reading your story
- Read your audience; end and move on quickly if they’re not connecting

Telling the Story Right

Using Narrative to Ignite Action and Implement New Ideas¹

Template for Crafting a Springboard Story

Finding the Right Story

1. What is your change idea?
2. Who is your audience?
3. What action do you want your audience to take?
4. Think of an incident where the change idea has been successfully implemented, at least in part.
5. In that incident, can you find a single individual who is similar to your audience and could be the protagonist of your story?
6. Does the story have an authentically positive ending for the protagonist?
7. Will the audience see it as an authentically positive ending for them?
8. Does the story fully embody the change idea? If not, can it be extrapolated so that it does?

Assembling the Story

1. Begin with:
 - The date
 - The place
 - The protagonist
2. What obstacles was the protagonist facing?
3. What would have happened without the change idea?
4. What did the protagonist do to overcome the obstacles?
5. What was the happy ending for the protagonist?
6. Check that the story has the right level of detail.
7. Link the story to the change idea, by "What if ... " or "Just think ... " or "Imagine ... "

Practicing the Story

1. Practice telling the story a number of times and observe the audience reaction.
2. Amend the story in the light of experience before telling it to your target audience.

¹ From: Denning, Stephen. 2011. *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling: Mastering the Art and Discipline of Business Narrative*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

Sources for Stories and Storytelling

1. Your own life and experiences
2. Family stories
3. Stories you've heard others tell
4. Stories you've read
5. Radio and TV stories
6. News articles
7. Stories about people you admire

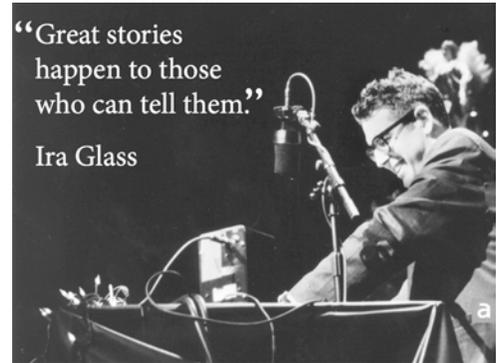
Other sources:

On-Line Resources for Stories

- <http://storiesfortrainers.com>
- <http://www.anecdote.com.au>
- <http://www.businessballs.com/stories.htm>
- <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/>
- <http://govleaders.org/storytelling.htm>

Storytelling Guide for Canadian Government Managers

- http://www.managers-gestionnaires.gc.ca/read_getreal-eng.asp



The Beams at New Oxford University

A leadership story of strategic planning

New College, Oxford, is of rather late foundation, hence the name. It was founded around the late 14th century. It has, like other colleges, a great dining hall with big oak beams across the top. These might be two feet square and forty-five feet long.



A century ago, so I am told, some busy entomologist went up into the roof of the dining hall with a penknife and poked at the beams and found that they were full of beetles. This was reported to the College Council, who met in some dismay, because they had no idea where they would get beams of that caliber nowadays.

One of the Junior Fellows stuck his neck out and suggested that there might be some oak on College lands. These colleges are endowed with pieces of land scattered across the country. So they called in the

College Forester, who of course had not been near the college itself for some years, and asked about oaks. And he pulled his forelock and said, "Well sirs, we was wonderin' when you'd be askin'."

Upon further inquiry it was discovered that when the College was founded, a grove of oaks has been planted to replace the beams in the dining hall when they became beetly, because oak beams always become beetly in the end. This plan had been passed down from one Forester to the next for five hundred years. "You don't cut them oaks. Them's for the College Hall."

Teams & Leadership

Five Lessons from Geese

Factoid 1

As each goose flaps its wings, it creates an "uplift" for the birds that follow. By flying in a "V" formation, the whole flock adds 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew alone.

LEADERSHIP LESSON

People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going quicker and easier because they are traveling on the thrust of each other.

Factoid 2

When a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of flying alone. It quickly moves back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front of it.

LEADERSHIP LESSON

If we have as much sense as a goose, we stay in formation with those headed where we want to go. We are willing to accept their help and give our help to others.

Factoid 3

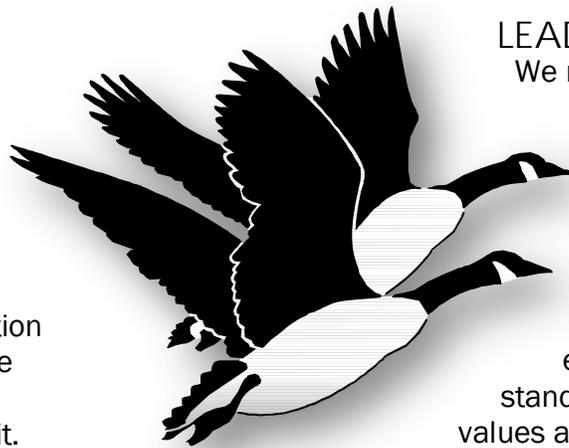
When the lead bird tires, it rotates back into the formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front of it.

LEADERSHIP LESSON

It pays to take turns doing the hard tasks and sharing leadership. As with geese, people are interdependent on each others' skills, capabilities, and unique arrangements of gifts, talents, or resources.

Factoid 4

The geese flying in formation honk to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.



LEADERSHIP LESSON

We need to make sure our honking is encouraging. In groups where there is encouragement, the production is much greater. The power of encouragement (to stand by one's heart or core values and to encourage the heart and core values of others) is the quality of honking we seek.

Factoid 5

When a goose gets sick, wounded, or shot down, two geese drop out of formation and follow it down to help and protect it. They stay with it until it dies or is able to fly again. Then, they launch out with another formation or catch up with the flock.

LEADERSHIP LESSON

If we have as much sense of geese, we will stand by each other in difficult times as well as when we're strong.

Why some leaders inspire action while others are mostly forgettable

THE VITAL ROLE OF BUSINESS STORYTELLING

By Shawn Callahan

INTRODUCTION

Just the other day my business partner, Mark Schenk, surprised himself and in the process learned a valuable lesson. Mark had developed a strong belief that people don't leave companies, they leave bad managers. Even in a poorly run company, if the employee has an excellent manager, they are likely to stay. Mark was expounding this point of view at a leadership development program that he was facilitating, when one of the participants said, "I don't buy it." This challenge made Mark bristle inside. He knew the speaker was wrong and was ready to argue with him, but rather than lose his cool, Mark said, "Can you give me an example of what you mean?"

"Sure," he said. "I was working at [large utility company] and it was one of the worst companies I've worked for—ruled by fear, with too many incompetent executives who were unclear about where the company was headed. And at the same time I had the very best manager anyone could hope for. She did her best to shield us from all the crap that was going on and also gave me plenty of scope to do my job in the way I knew it needed to be done. She had been with this company for 12 years and was doing everything she could to make a change, but to no avail. In the end I left the company to seek out a more productive working environment."

Immediately Mark realised he had to rethink his point of view. His mind was changed by a simple story describing someone's real-life experience.

Successful leaders are game changers: they can help people change the minds,

feelings and ultimately their actions in ways that convey the meaning and significance of what needs to be done. So, by this definition, anyone in an organisation can be a leader. The man in Mark's workshop is one. It's about getting things done with the support and help of your colleagues.

But changing people's minds and actions takes more than persuasive argument. In fact argument alone can often merely result in people digging in their heels. Changing minds and actions also involves empathy, listening, questioning and, in particular, stories. Harvard Professor and author of *Changing Minds*, Howard Gardner, puts it this way: "The principal vehicle of leadership is the story: the leader affects individual behavior, thought, and feelings through the stories that he and she tells."^[1]

WAYS LEADERS USE STORIES AND WHY THEY ARE EFFECTIVE

Leaders can tell stories to paint a vision or strategic direction, share a lesson, convey values or illustrate desired behaviours. Stories also have an ability to forge deeper connections between people, so inspiring them to focus their attention and take action. As Terrence Gargiulo said, "The shortest distance between two people is a story."^[2]

Stories work for leaders as a successful communication and engagement technique for several reasons.

Firstly, stories convey emotion effectively, and emotion united with a strong idea is persuasive. We remember what we feel. And our emotions inspire us to take action.

Stories engage the listener, pulling them into the story to participate in the conversation, rather than telling them what to think.

Our stories, collectively and individually, have a profound effect on what we believe is possible.

Secondly, stories are concrete and have the ability to transport us imaginatively to a place where we can visualise the events being recounted.

Thirdly, stories are memorable: we are up to 22 times more likely to remember a story than a set of disconnected facts (such as presentation dot-points).^[3]

Lastly, stories represent a pull strategy, unlike the push strategy used when we argue in a more traditional way. Stories engage the listener, pulling them into the story to participate in the conversation, rather than telling them what to think.^[4]

WHAT IS A STORY ANYWAY?

At this point you might be thinking, “So what do you really mean by a *story*?” In business a story is simply the recounting of an event that happened to you or to someone you know, or even a story from another source such as a movie or a book. An effective story is surprising, emotional but most importantly it must be credible. For example, you might be the leader of a business unit facing a terrific opportunity to launch a new major product but you’re unable to raise enough capital to fund the venture into profitability. To get your sponsors on board, you could recount this story about Ted Turner and the launch of CNN.^[5]

When Ted Turner was planning to launch CNN in 1979, he knew he didn’t have enough funds to see it through to profitability, but at the same time he knew he had to move quickly, although no-one was going to lend him the money because of his inexperience in delivering TV news. So he drew on his knowledge of military history and likened the CNN launch strategy to Erwin Rommel’s desert campaign during World War II. On several occasions, the German general had launched an attack despite having too little fuel to conduct an entire offensive: he intended to strike when the British weren’t expecting it, overrun their lines, and then capture their fuel dumps in order to refuel

his Panzers and continue the offensive. Turner’s vision for financing CNN was similar: if they had enough cash to get on the air and could somehow survive their first year of broadcasting, people would see it was a viable and valuable service. Once the concept was proven, he would have easier access to capital. Even in the worst case, Turner figured that if he ran out of money after launching the channel and getting some distribution, he would have created a valuable asset that he could sell to a competitor.

Our stories, collectively and individually, have a profound effect on what we believe is possible. Therefore the challenge for leaders is both to understand the stories affecting individuals and groups and to know how to define and tell (ideally through wide participation) new stories that set the direction for the company. But that’s not all. The vital element in this challenge is to help people hear, remember and believe where the company is headed and then to inspire people to act in line with that belief.

Aligning everyone’s actions to the company’s strategy is equivalent to finding the corporate Shangri-la. Yet it can be done. Take IBM’s turnaround, for example. Lou Gerstner arrived as the new CEO in 1993 at a time when IBM was on the endangered species list. Gerstner had been CEO at Nabisco and American Express, and before that he was a director of McKinsey Consulting. He’d seen hundreds of strategies and knew that most are the same—it’s extremely difficult to have a unique strategy. What makes the difference, however, is the execution of the strategy. Gerstner set about turning around IBM by telling new stories about their direction, such as the new emphasis on services and the growth that would come from software. And of course he didn’t do this alone. He worked hard to develop a strong team who understood the stories and could act in ways that created new ones which reinforced the strategy.^[6]

The first step to become a storytelling leader is to develop an awareness of the stories that swirl around you every day.

Each time you recount an experience you're conveying your values, whether you like it or not.

FINDING YOUR OWN STORIES

The first step to become a storytelling leader is to develop an awareness of the stories that swirl around you every day. Whenever a set of events strikes you as remarkable, take notice of what happened and ask yourself, "What does that set of events say about the behaviours I want to instil or dispel in my group?" Say, for example, you are a leader at FedEx, the company that promises to deliver your package "absolutely, positively" overnight, and you hear the following:

"In St Vincent, a tractor trailer accident blocked the main road going into the airport. Together, a FedEx driver and ramp agent tried every possible alternate route to the airport but were stymied by traffic jams. They eventually struck out on foot, shuttling every package the last mile to the airport for an on-time departure."^[7]

This story is packed with the behaviours you want everyone in your company to exhibit. So instead of merely pleading for people to be persistent, innovative, collaborative, tell this story as an example of what can be done.

The second step is to move your style of speaking away from being predominantly rational and argument-based to being a good mixture of stories and argument. But here's the secret. We humans are afflicted by what psychologists call the confirmation bias, which results in us digging in our heels whenever someone tries to convince us to change our minds with sophisticated rationale. In fact we often come away from these exchanges doubly convinced of our own opinions. Think about how most presentations normally flow: we outline our argument, and then follow on with examples, having already unwittingly activated that pesky confirmation bias.

We can avoid triggering this bias by starting our presentations with examples instead. Specifically, it's beneficial to start with a negative story to grab their attention. We are hardwired to notice negative stories, but negativity rarely changes our minds. So we follow that with a positive story of what's possible. These two examples give the listener the opportunity to gain a new perspective and shift their position, without telling them what to think. At this point, a rational argument can now be effective.

Finally, where possible, ask for feedback about what people infer about you from your stories. Each time you recount an experience you're conveying your values, whether you like it or not. Sometimes it's hard for you to detect what's really being conveyed. You might think your story conveys the importance of persistence and attention to detail, but your listeners could infer you're inflexible and a nitpicker. You need trusted advisers to give you this frank feedback.

Good leaders are good storytellers. For the lucky few it is a skill that has stayed with them despite organisational cultures favouring rational argument. Everyone is inherently a storyteller, though some get it beaten out of them. Consequently, storytelling is not the exclusive domain of a naturally gifted few. Rather, it is a skill that every leader can, and should, re-discover and develop.

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- Shared vision
- Appreciate possibilities
- Future generations

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- Facilitate dialogue
- Appreciate differences
- Manage conflict

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