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TEN STEPS TO EFFECTIVE BUSINESS STORYTELLING



By
B&T MAGAZINE

IN THIS EXTRACT FROM HIS BOOK *WINNING CONVERSATIONS*, SYDNEY-BASED STRATEGY AND DECISION MAKING CONSULTANT, BRYAN WHITEFIELD (PICTURED BELOW), OFFERS HIS TOP TIPS TO ENSURE YOUR BUSINESS IS GETTING ITS STORY ACROSS...

Most often the stories we remember from our childhood and teen years have heroes and villains, or at least challenges. There is a start, a 'journey' and a sad or happy ending. Okay, occasionally some artistic type likes to leave you with an unresolved ending. Not my cup of tea, and certainly not one I would recommend if you wish to influence someone.



For the purpose of creating your stories of influence, let's keep it very simple. Here is what a story consists of:

- i. A character: Characters can be people (real or imagined), animals or objects (for example, the story of a tree that grows from a seedling, produces food for the forest animals and eventually dies). Multiple characters can make the story more entertaining or Too many can get confusing.
- ii. An incident: Something must A good story often has plenty of sub-incidents that you can choose to bring in or leave out.
- iii. A point: Every story must have a point to it — or rather, you use it to make a point to your audience. Most stories can be used to make more than one point, but don't try to make too many!

How do you construct your stories and get them match fit for the game of influencing?

i. **Collate**

You have lots of stories. You just need to bring them all to mind, collate them and store them in one place. I store mine in Evernote, tagged as 'story'. As a strong memory comes to mind, write just a few words about it. For all your personal stories you can move on to step 2. For your non-personal stories, you will need to do some research about a well-known figure to find a great story about them, assuming you don't already know one. Ultimately you will have a long list of potential stories. You need only one good story to get you going, but if you can find the time now you should work up about a dozen to give you a broad base from which you can select to suit any influencing situation.

■ Characterise

Write down the main character and any supporting characters for each story. Add a few points about them that provide you with material to embellish the story and give it colour. Perhaps note what they were wearing, what they were doing, where they were or where they were going.

■ Analyse

Set down the main incident, any key ancillary incidents and a few points about each.

■ Conceptualise

For each story, think about concepts you might be able to link it to. For example, my story about my daughter giving me Reinbeers for Christmas could be linked to ideas around simple

gift giving, ingenuity, resourcefulness and many more. Write down a few for each of your stories.

■ Compose

Now it's time to compose your story. While you need not actually write up three-minute, one-minute and 30-second versions, keep in mind that in some circumstances you may need to leave out much of the detail to make your point quickly and concisely. One trick is to first write up the 30-second version and then embellish the story to give it some colour, for example adding more detail about characters or the incident. You could use a metaphor or analogy — feel free to use a thesaurus to find new ways of expressing a point.

Once you have finished, put it aside for a few days then review it cold to see how it strikes you then. My father-in-law was in advertising well before the days of personal computers. He would often write a piece and mail it to himself. While in the post it was out of sight, out of mind.

■ Stand

Okay, you have stories and ideas of what you could link them to. Now it's time to identify your audience and pick a story for them. First you need to stand in their shoes so you have a good understanding of them. Then use the Story Impact Wheel.

■ Impact

Based on your analysis of your audience and how you want to influence them, decide what impact you are aiming for.

For example, if the person is a senior executive in another business unit, you may want to get them to *feel* differently about your project. Maybe their blinkered view blinds them to the possibilities, so you want to get them to *think* differently. Perhaps you got off to a poor start with them, and you want to persuade them to *like* you and your project. Or maybe, given how important your project is to you and the organisation, it is going to take such a leap of faith for this executive to buy in that you need to find some *love*.

■ Select

Now select a story from those you have collated. If, for example, you want the executive to *think* differently about the project, you need to surprise them into a different thought pattern. You could use a personal story or one about a well-known person.

In my first book, *DECIDE*, I wanted to make a point about working hard and smart versus just working hard or avoiding the hard work altogether. I found a story about Mark Twain and the Linotype machine, invented, not by Twain, in the late 19th century to mass produce newspapers. (The Linotype machine was still producing the New York Times until 1978, almost a century later.) In the story Twain invests in a similar machine, James Paige's Paige Compositor. They came second in the race to invent a mass-producing machine and this was a major contributor to, if not the cause of Twain's bankruptcy. Both Paige and the successful inventor, Ottmar Mergenthaler, worked hard, but Mergenthaler worked smarter and designed a machine that was cheaper and more reliable and was in the market three years earlier than Paige's. Paige was guilty of trying to create the perfect machine, which resulted in his machine having 18,000 parts and being markedly more expensive! I now use the story to impress on internal advisers that the secret to blue ribbon is simplicity in design.

In my experience, if you look for stories in your fields of interest you will more easily find something you can use to make a person *feel* or *think* differently. You will enjoy the process of discovering the story and enjoy it even more when you use it. Because you are able to share that joy, you will also draw people to *like* or maybe even *love* you and want to follow in your footsteps.

■ Check

Check you have not picked the wrong story, and that you are above the line on the Story Ladder.

■ Practise

The more you practise your stories, the better you will get at delivering them. You can practise by yourself in front of a mirror. Better still, practise on friends and colleagues.

What should be the focus of your practice? This story should help guide you.

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BRYAN WHITEFIELD

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