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The Value of Storytelling for Sales

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Everyone sells all of the time. Are all sales pitches a form of a story? What constitutes selling? The hard pitch of a used car salesman? The contractor giving an example of what could happen if a structure isn't built correctly? Effective presentations incorporate stories as a means to connect with the person on the other side of the table. Talented presenters and writers can read a room to see if they're speaking to a peer group or to outliers.

The best performers and tall-tale balladeers know how to shift their voice to correctly meet their audiences' expectations. Whether audible or written, the audience can still hear subtle differences in tone and feeling within their minds. Even great writers focus their vocabulary and tenor to reach particular interest groups. Up on a stage or in front of a client, that chameleon-like ability combined with charm and rhetoric with a focused tone will win applause and perhaps a new project.

Because great storytellers have diverse areas of interests, they can usually create sports, cultural or historic analogies on the fly. And stories must be appropriate to age, specific interests and vocabulary of regional/ethnic cultures and groups. A story about Kennedy to a bunch of 20-year-olds will have less impact than it would with a room full of gray hairs.

Life lessons and how-tos should always be passed on either attached to a story or in parable form. A statement of fact about a product or a project sounds like, "We used titanium for the cladding." A story might sound like: "We wanted to use titanium for our new building. We researched the costs, how it would wear and asked various users about their experiences, and in the end we felt our building really couldn't support that expense. Then one of our board members went crazy wanting to see our building as a design statement in the community. He spoke at Rotary functions, at city planning meetings, along with many other organizations, and eventually the whole town got behind his idea: we raised the funds for titanium. This project made everyone proud."

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Keep in mind if the presenter speaks in a monotone, then the best story in the world will fall flat. And stories told well need to be grammatically correct. That means one should try and use mainly active verbs. A passive example is: The wrecking ball is going to hit the building. Is, was, were and are are examples of passive verbs. A sentence with an active verb looks like this: The wrecking ball hit the building.

Do all stories have a beginning, middle and end? The answer is yes. At least a compelling story does. Stories, to be memorable, should explain the challenge or problem, then the journey or quest or how a discovery came about in order to solve a bad situation, and then finish with a happy or sad conclusion. The solution saved someone's life or the situation ended in a tragedy. We can learn from this example for future work or we discovered a new way to construct a building because of this whole escapade.

The most successful leaders have a bag of stories that they can call upon for a myriad of reasons. Learning how to develop a powerful story constitutes a lot more than the three sections, along with excellent writing and presentation skills. Experience tops the necessities list, where hard lessons can be told with great feeling. Some people use children stories as examples that parallel issues currently under the microscope. The best storytellers utilize a wide spectrum of emotions and help listeners see, hear and taste the situation. Try and incorporate issues that illicit empathy on the part of the reader or listener.

Marketing people all know that a world-class ad should focus on one individual instead of a group; and it should have a baby or dog (preferably a puppy) and it should be attached to some kind of event that brings about a reaction of awe. Ultimately there has to be a difficulty to overcome with various options to work through to finally reach a positive resolution. Again, don't forget, bad endings can be turned into a means to show others what never to do again which

turns a negative into a positive. Once you begin to insert the story lines into all types of submittals, client pitches and presentations, you will soon reap huge rewards.

Remember facts tell and stories sell.

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