

Story Telling Template¹

Story = Situation/Desire - Complication/Obstacles - Solution/Outcome

a) Get the audience's attention fast. One way to do so is to begin the story *where the audience is*. According to Andy Goodman: "This is your story's 'hook'—the description of a place, circumstance, or premise that everyone understands and with which they readily identify."²

b) Focus on the protagonist or the character. Ask yourself what the protagonist desires, leading to the major dramatic question of the story. It is important to personalize the protagonist, make the protagonist seem real so the audience begins to feel a personal stake.

c) Hone in on the problems, barriers, or the antagonists that are keeping the protagonist from achieving his or her desire. "The people in your story have to want something."³

d) What would you like the audience to do? You might need to identify the kind of action you want the audience to take or identify how they can help. By the end of your story, the audience should feel compelled to help or to take whatever action you would like them to take because they now have a personal stake in helping to find a solution.

e) Keep stories short (3-5 minutes each).

f) Place stories strategically in an introduction to warm up, in the middle of your talk to punctuate, and at the end to summarize and to bring the audience to action.

g) After your talk is over, the audience should be able to answer, "What was the story all about?" in just a few sentences.

¹ Stanford Graduate School of Business: How to Tell a Story: M-323(A)

² Andy Goodman, *Storytelling as Best Practice*, p. 16.

³ *Ibid*, p.38

Story Types and Underlying Themes

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| Historical Narrative | "We have a history that makes us proud, and we want to apply our high standards to the current situation." |
| Crisis | "We have to respond to the danger facing us." |
| Disappointment | "We made a decision based on the best information we had available, but now we know it wasn't the right decision, so we have to try something else." |
| Opportunity | "We know something now that we didn't know before, which presents us with a new possibility if we act." |
| Crossroads | "We've been doing fine on the path that we're on, but now we have a new choice and we have to decide which path to take." |
| Challenge | "Someone else has achieved something amazing, do we have it in us to do the same?" |
| Blowing the Whistle | "Although it appears everything is going fine, we have a serious problem we need to fix." |
| Adventure | "We know that trying something new is a risk, but it's better to take a risk than to stay in a rut." |
| Response to an Order | "We've been told we have to do this, so we're here to figure out how to make it happen." |
| Revolution | "We're on a path to disaster if we don't radically change what we're doing today." |
| Evolution | "If we don't keep up with the latest, we'll fall behind." |
| The Great Dream | "If we can only see our possibility, we can make it our reality." |

Source: H. M. Boettinger, *Moving Mountains*

Seven Questions to Sharpen Your Stories

1. **Who's the protagonist?** Just as a car needs a driver to get where it's going, stories need someone to drive the action. Traditionally structured stories follow protagonists in pursuit of clearly defined goals.

2. **What's the hook?** Another technique for drawing people in is beginning the story *where the audience* is. This is your story's "hook"—the description of a place, circumstance, or premise that everyone understands and with which they readily identify.

3. **What keeps it interesting?** "The stuff of storytelling," says Robert McKee, a renowned Hollywood script doctor, "is the grasp between what we think will happen when we take action, and what actually happens." Take another look at that success story of yours and see if you can recall any barriers or surprises that cropped up along the way.

4. **Where's the conflict?** There is no drama without conflict, and comedies, for that matter, also fall flat without it. Heroic action always comes into sharper focus when juxtaposed against villainous misdeeds.

5. **Have you included telling details?** A single, telling detail can replace a paragraph or more of description, and good stories have just enough telling details to set the scene and people it with colorful characters.

6. **What's the emotional hook?** The audience wants an emotional experience that makes the time worthwhile. In return for their time and attention—an increasingly valuable commodity, not so incidentally—they expect more than a recitation of facts.

7. **Is the meaning clear?** Finally your story should have a crystal clear moral, a reason for taking this particular journey.

Source: Andy Goodman, *Storytelling as Best Practice*, pp. 16-17

The 10 Immutable Laws of Storytelling

1. **Stories are about people.** Even if your organization (a) is devoted to saving flora and/or fauna, (b) toils in the dense thicket of policy change, (c) helps other organizations work more effectively, human beings are still driving the action. So your protagonist has to be a person. And since this person also serves as the audience's guide through the story, it's essential to provide some physical description.
2. **The people in your story have to want something.** A story doesn't truly begin until the audience knows precisely what the protagonist's goal is and has a reason to care whether or not it is attained. Do this within your first paragraph or two.
3. **Stories need to be fixed in time and space.** The moment you begin telling your tale, the audience will want to know when and where it is taking place. If you help them get their bearings quickly, they will more readily follow you into the deeper meaning within.
4. **Let your characters speak for themselves.** When characters speak to each other in a story, it lends immediacy and urgency to the piece. Direct quotes also let characters speak in idiosyncratic voices, lending authenticity to the dialogue.
5. **Audiences bore easily.** Within the first paragraph or two, you have 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 must run into obstacles, surprises, or something that makes the audience sit up and take notice.
6. **Stories speak the audience's language.** According to national literacy studies, the average American reads at a sixth grade level. So if your ads, posters, and publications are meant for mass consumption, plain speaking is the order of the day.
7. **Stories stir up emotions.** Human beings are not inclined to think about things they do not care about. Stories stir emotions not to be manipulative, not simply for melodramatic effect, but to break through the white noise of information that inundates us every day and to deliver the message *this is worth your attention*.
8. **Stories don't tell: they show.** Your audience should see a picture, feel the conflict, and become more involved with the story.
9. **Stories have at least one "moment of truth."** The best stories show us something about how we should treat ourselves, others, or the world around us.
10. **Stories have a clear meaning.** When the final line is spoken, your audience should know exactly why they took this journey with you. In the end, this may be the most important rule of all. If your audience can't answer the question, "What was the story all about?" it won't matter if you followed rules one through nine.

Storytelling within Your Organization

Storytelling within your organization can be inspiring and unifying or demoralizing and divisive. The outcome is entirely up to you.

In her book *Corporate Legends and Lore: Storytelling as a Management Tool*, Peg Neuhauser recommends identifying a 'Story Bank', or group of stories that can be your organization's unifying force. These stories will vary from group to group, but will generally include:

- How the organization was founded, including the need for your work
- Emblematic victories that demonstrate the organization's effectiveness over time
- What-we-learned-in-defeat story (if only to remind your team that occasional misfires are inevitable and should be embraced with what they can teach you)
- An employee performance story (to show the commitment your people bring to a challenge)
- One or more stories about the fundamental nature of the problem you are tackling

Once you have collected these stories, look for regular opportunities to share them with your team and identify the best people to tell them. The objective is to find people to (a) bring the stories to life, and (b) share them often enough that any member of the staff can tell them.

And what about those not-so-happy tales already circulating in the hallways? Considering how intrinsic storytelling is to human communication—and how we learn—managers interested in greater organizational effectiveness should pay more attention to the inside stories. In them, they may find the answer to internal problems, but it won't be as easy as digging out and telling the good stories while squelching the bad. Organizations with healthy cultures, strange as it may sound, purposefully tell both.

Source: Andy Goodman, *Storytelling as Best Practice*, pp. 12-13