



What's your story?

The Art & Science of Storytelling

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Are you a gifted storyteller? Do you use stories to engage others and drive emotion? Do you use stories to express your unique personality and your desire to stand out in a crowded marketplace? Do you use stories to get a point across? If so, you are using a potent and powerful communication vehicle to drive results.

Ever since human beings sat around the fire in caves, we have told stories to help us deal with the perils of life and the struggle to survive. So, what is storytelling? It is your ability to use words to stimulate the listener's imagination...to paint a picture.

Lester Morales, CEO of Next Impact, LLC, an insurance and marketing consultancy conveys that "Stories are bridges for knowledge and understanding that engage the audience far beyond facts. Humans love stories. They are how we make sense of the world. Stories present events and actions in a manner that enables us to capture the cause and effect. And, if a story is interesting enough, the listener wants to hear more. A great storyteller evokes emotion and inspires change in the world through his or her creativity and connectivity."

Remember "The Three Little Pigs?" The fable begins with the title characters being sent out into the world by their mother to "seek their fortune." The first little pig builds the house of straw, but the wolf blows it down and devours him. The second little pig builds a house of sticks, which the wolf also blows down, and the second little pig is also eaten. We vividly recall that the pigs sang, danced, and played all day. Each exchange between the wolf and pig featured the phrases:

"Little pig, little pig, let me come in."

"No, no, not by the hair on my chinny chin chin."

"Then I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in."

The third pig was diligent and builds a house out of bricks, which the wolf fails to blow down. The wolf then attempts to trick the pig out of the house by asking him to meet him at several places but is outwitted each time. Finally, the wolf decides to come down the chimney, where upon the pig who owns the brick house lights up a pot of water on the fireplace. The wolf falls in and is boiled to death. Would you agree that this story creates emotion and enables our imaginations to wonder? Did your heart race and get goosebumps? What moral did you take away from the story? As a child or an adult, have you applied the reality that a sound and enduring structure requires hard work and the right components?

In journalism, a human-interest story presents people and their problems, concerns, or achievements in a way that brings about interest, sympathy, or motivation in the reader or viewer. The content of a human-interest story may feature a person, object, situation, or culture that celebrates successes or explores troubles and hardships. Importantly, human interest stories are conveyed in a manner that puts you at the heart of the event by driving emotions to create thought leading to action.

The Art of Storytelling

It is more important than ever to captivate your audience. Why? So you may persuade them to take action. The art of storytelling comes to life when we watch TED talks and listen to inspiring podcasts. As an artist designs, creates, and inspires, so does a gifted storyteller. In his Major League Mindset Talks, Andy Neary reveals that "Good storytelling is the most effective way to touch your audience emotionally. You capture a buyer's attention with emotion when you have them saying, 'this person gets me and is just like me.' Stories give your audience the ability to put themselves inside the story. When they do that, your ideas and solutions become more realistic, giving the audience the confidence to take the next step. Selling is a game of who knows you, likes you, and trusts you. Telling stories will enhance your knowability and likability."

So, what is your story? What drove you to come into the business of insurance and risk management? What is your WHY and how does it support the best interests of those whom you serve? When you convey a story about how you deliver something that matches your purpose, passion, values, and ethics, people can feel the authentic you.

Happier (www.happier.com) is a social network focused on collecting and sharing happy moments. Its founder, Nataly Kogan, suggests that all stories should be written like screenplays. "There are three acts," she says. "In the first act, you meet the hero and his or her obstacle. In the second act, he or she overcomes it. In the third act, you realize that the original obstacle was

just part of what the hero has to overcome. The best third acts have some triumph, some real honesty.” Here is Nataly’s Happier story:

“Happier is on a mission to make millions of people happier. When I was 14 years old, my family escaped from Soviet Russia. After months of living in refugee camps in Europe and then living in the projects on welfare and food stamps in Detroit, I decided to make up for the hardship by chasing the American dream of becoming happy. Over the next 15 years, I had a series of impressive jobs that made a lot of money -- all of which I thought would make me happy and none of which did. So, I turned to the science of happiness, had a holy crap moment about having done it all wrong, and was inspired to start Happier to get people to stop saying ‘I’ll be happy when...’ and start saying ‘I’m happy now because...’ Research shows that appreciating and capturing a few positive things every day and sharing them with others makes you happier and healthier. Our first product, an IOS application and online community, encourages people to do just that.”

You will note that Nataly’s story conveys Happier’s past, present, future, values, and vision. Importantly, this story elicits emotion and inspires action.

The Scientific Elements of Storytelling

Today’s marketplace is overwhelmed with products. Each and every day, you are flooded with information that is supposed to move you into the purchasing mode. Tons of content is delivered by social media. Are you aware that back in the year 2000, a person’s attention span was about twelve seconds? Today, it has fallen to eight seconds.

How often do you find yourself bored by the data and facts contained within PowerPoint presentations? While each is composed of relevant bullet points, the delivery does not inspire or engage...even if the presenter is animated. What is missing? A story. When a speaker delivers those same facts and figures in the context of a story, your brain is activated because the message is richer and more connected. It is interesting to note that scientists have discovered that chemicals such as cortisol, dopamine, and oxytocin are released in the brain when we are told a story. Cortisol assists with formulating memories. Dopamine keeps us engaged. And oxytocin is associated with empathy.

The scientific research evidences that stories empower you to examine your own truths and beliefs. And they challenge and expand perspectives through the exploration of how others see and understand the world through their lens.

The I⁵ System for Storytelling

Storytelling requires creativity, vision, skill, and practice. An impactful and memorable story consists of connection points that resonate with the audience. Robert McKee, the world’s best-known and most respected screenwriter, lectures to writers, directors, producers, and actors on the art of storytelling. McKee’s students have written, directed, a produced the likes of *Forrest*

Gump, The Color Purple, Gandhi, Monty Python, and Nixon. McKee alumni have won 60 Academy Awards, 200 Emmy Awards, 100 Writers Guild Awards, and 50 Directors Guild of America Awards (mekeestory.com). McKee believes that you will engage listeners on a whole new level if you toss your PowerPoint and learn to tell good stories instead.

Below is a brief overview of the Beyond Insurance I⁵ System for storytelling:

- Step 1: **Introduction.** Set the stage for what is to come. Create intrigue through the setting and character(s).
- Step 2: **Issue.** Define the struggle or complication. What issue(s) was impeding progress? In screenwriting, it is called the "inciting incident" that throws life out of kilter. The opposing force.
- Step 3: **Implication.** What was the implication of the issue(s)? What impact was the struggle or complication having on the character(s) and/or setting?
- Step 4: **Intervention.** What action was taken to deal with the struggle or complication? What issues did you work through to create separation from the issue(s)?
- Step 5: **Influence.** Define the capacity you now possess to impact others as a result of your ability to effectively deal with the struggle or complication.

Tell your story... it will capture the attention and drive the emotion of those whom you serve!

About the Author

Scott Addis, CPCU, CRA, CBWA is the CEO of Beyond Insurance and is recognized as an industry leader having been named a Philadelphia finalist for *Inc. Magazine's* "Entrepreneur of the Year" award as well as one of the "25 Most Innovative Agents in America."

Beyond Insurance is a consulting firm that offers leadership training, cultural transformation, and talent and tactical development for enlightened professionals who are looking to take their practice to the next level. Since 2007, the proven and repeatable processes of Beyond Insurance have transformed individuals and organizations as measured by enhanced organic growth, productivity, profitability, and value in the marketplace.