

Story-Telling Basics - 7 Powerful Steps to Telling Great Stories!

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Throughout time, the greatest orators and teachers have illuminated their lessons by telling powerful stories. Story telling is a great way to engage your audience and show them how your topic, point or lesson relates to them specifically. Unfortunately, not everyone is born a great storyteller, and some stories are better than others. Follow these 7 steps to deliver great stories every time!

1. Know your audience and make sure your story is appropriate

When telling stories it is really important to know who you are telling them to and have an idea of how they might react to them. Age group, professional level and culture are extremely important factors; make sure your story is appropriate for your audience. Even when you are telling a "tried and true" story, what might be appropriate and funny for one group, could be distasteful and unacceptable for another. Take care when choosing the topic of your story and the language you use to deliver it.

2. Make your story easy to relate to

The topics of stories should be broad enough that anyone can relate to them. This tactic is also used in stand-up comedy. The funniest comedians take every-day situations that everyone experiences and make light of them. This is what a good story does. It has a plot that everyone can relate to, a subject that is simple, straightforward and illustrative of the lesson. If you've chosen the right story and delivered it correctly, you will actually see the light bulbs going off above your listeners' heads. If you have to say, "I guess you had to be there," you have not told a clear and effective story!

3. Write out your story when presenting for the first time - and cut it in half

I have seen way too many speakers go on and on about things where I just want to stand up and yell, "Can you make this long story short?" When you plan to tell a story for the first time, write it out the way you want to present it - and then cut it in half. Remember the KISS philosophy: Keep it Short and Simple. Give us the nuts and bolts and nothing else. Sometimes storytellers get wrapped up in the details, usually because they experienced the situation and find those details relevant. But usually the details of what you were wearing at the time and where you bought that outfit are not adding to the lesson or plot of the story.

4. Have a clear link between your story and your lesson

A story is only worth telling if it has an obvious link to the subject being taught. We all know from common conversation how annoying it is to listen to someone's long-winded story just to wonder at the end of it why it was shared. Effective speakers have a very clear link between the moral of their stories and the topic at hand. If this link is missing, the story is useless, and your listeners are left wondering what it was for.

5. Engage your listener by engaging the senses

A good storyteller engages all of our senses. We might listen to you tell a funny story about ice cream, and that will be enjoyable, but what if you could make us taste that ice cream, feel its creamy consistency on our tongues, visualize the mess that's made all over your face as a child, and so on. That's what will make your story great and memorable.

6. Be aware of audience cues when telling your story

As a speaker you should always be aware of audience response. The attentive speaker will always know when the audience is losing interest and make appropriate changes to the delivery of the story, the language being used, the topic or even the final moral or punch-line. Different audiences won't always react to the

same story the same way. No matter how well you do your homework, you can still run into problems. Be flexible and have a back-up plan if your story isn't going as well as planned.

7. Deliver your story with some feeling!

The key to an amazing story is in its delivery. A passionate storyteller will get a much more enthusiastic response from the listeners than a boring one! Use variations in pitch, volume and intonation to make the story interesting to listen to. Be sure to pause at the right times for dramatic effect, and pull the audience in with mystique and excitement.