

Introduction

Communicating to **influence, persuade, educate, and encourage people to collaborate** is of great interest to leaders and managers. Increasingly **storytelling** is seen as a communication tool to achieve organisational outcomes. It is a handy addition to every leader's and manager's toolkit.

My interest in this area extends far back into my career, which included roles in internal communications and change management. I therefore seized on the opportunity to attend Stephen Denning's Storytelling Masterclass. Steve, a 'master and leader in the value of storytelling' (1), was in Australia recently, and he taught us how to use and apply storytelling techniques.

In this email, I can only scratch the surface and raise your awareness. I draw extensively from Steve's excellent resources.

About Storytelling

Storytelling is a technique which helps you to lead, inspire, persuade and communicate more effectively. In the art of persuasion and influence, it is most effective if you can tap into both hemispheres of the listener's brain. Relaying just analytical facts and theoretical lists will not always achieve this so well. Including a vivid, compelling story, which is interesting and takes little effort to listen to, takes the audience on a journey of what is possible – the story connects them with reality and the possibilities of the future. It provides an easy link for listeners, who become absorbed in the subject and begin to 'live inside the story'.

Presenting ideas in the form of stories 'unites idea with an emotion' and engages the listener's energy. They connect at an emotional level; this is where change is inspired.

Quotes

- ==> "A good story takes people outside of themselves in order to gain new perspectives" (2)
- ==> "Stories are how we remember; we tend to forget lists and bullet points." (3)
- ==> "Executives can engage listeners on a whole new level if they toss their PowerPoint slides and learn to tell good stories instead" (3)

Why Does Storytelling Work?

- * Communicates complicated change ideas
- * Is natural, easy to do
- * Enhances and changes perceptions
- * Engages the listener's feelings
- * Complements abstract analysis
- * Helps the listener to see new perspectives
- * Stories are interesting and memorable, easy to spread as listeners take on the story themselves.

When To Use Storytelling

Steve Denning suggests that these areas are particularly applicable:

- * Persuading people to change
- * Getting people working together
- * Sharing knowledge
- * Taming the grapevine
- * Communicating who you are
- * Transmitting values
- * Leading people into the future

Elements of a Story

Drawing from Steve Denning's Springboard Story technique:

- * Intelligible
- * Interesting
- * Short
- * An authentically happy ending
- * Change message is implicit
- * Brief with not too much detail
- * Listener identifies with the protagonist
- * Story deals with a specific organisation or person
- * Truth is better than invention - "genuine persuasion is about an idea that is true"

(It is particularly interesting to note that the Springboard Story ends on a positive note. This taps into what motivates humans. Negativity can breed concern, worry, and low energy levels. Positiveness leads to the higher energy levels of hope, optimism and inspired action.)

Recent client examples where storytelling is helpful: (1) CEO articulating vision, found Business Plan and Strategy was not understood by staff; and (2) preparing for interview, need to reveal 'who you are' is more easily achieved and less personally daunting, by wrapping it in stories of actual work scenarios.

References

(1) Steve Denning is former program director of knowledge management at the World Bank and author of the acclaimed book, *The Springboard: How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organizations*. His new books are *Squirrel Inc: A Fable of Leadership Through Storytelling*, and *Storytelling in Organizations: How Narrative and Storytelling Are Transforming 21st Century Management*.

(2) "The Art and Science of Story or 'Are you sitting uncomfortably?'" by David Snowden, *Business Information Review*, Issue 17 (3) September 2000

(3) Happy Tales: The CEO as Storyteller. A Harvard Business Review conversation with screenwriting coach Robert McKee. <http://hbsworkingknowledge.hbs.edu/item.jhtml?id=3583&t=organizations>

Other:

<http://www.gurteen.com/gurteen/gurteen.nsf/0/E0528920C8562B4680256A740052782D/>

<http://www.stevedenning.com> and <http://stevedenning.typepad.com/>

<http://www.grohproductions.com>

http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/knowledge_management/km2/storytelling_toolkit.asp

<http://www.creatingthe21stcentury.org/>

About This Article

My aim is to provide you with information to assist you at work, with your own development, and in developing your staff. The theme for 2004 is 'Building Collaborative Workplaces'. Each month I concentrate on an area based on topics raised by my clients. Material is drawn from journals, books, articles and shared experiences.

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