

# Storytelling

INSTITUTE





### Why Tell Stories?

#### ● To Really Connect with Your Listeners!

Telling a story that you care about face-to-face, in real time, spans the divide between you and your listeners. Across that bridge of story, you can send images, feelings, intentions, and meaning. The connection you make with your listeners fosters trust, empathy, and openness – all of which creates the perfect context for learning, understanding, and change.

### What are Stories?

**Stories are the most effective, time-honored way to communicate with others.**

Story has been the engine of social networking for all of human history – it's how we chronicle change and create meaning within our communities. In fact, what makes stories so effective is that they not only document change, they give us tips on how to navigate and survive it. A great story grabs us, transports us, awakens our senses, and opens our hearts and minds to new worlds and experiences. When you tell an in-person story you are communicating in a uniquely human way:

- You are using language and gesture to evoke images and emotions.
- You are sequencing those words and pictures in specific sequences or structures.
- You are making an in-person connection with your listeners.
- You are creating meaning and fostering understanding.



### How Do I Get Stories?

#### Pay Attention!

Life gives us stories every day. Watch for moments when you experience an emotion – when you are scared, surprised, grateful – or when something happens that captures your attention. What stories do you find yourself telling others, or what stories do others tell about you? Think of times when you learned something important, when you were changed in some way – large or small. Those are the moments of transformation that are central to good stories. Never think your story is too small. It's a wonderful truth that the more everyday a story is, the more power it has to transcend social and cultural differences.

### How Do I Put a Story Together?

#### Structure is the key.

When you apply structure to your experiences you create stories. To be most effective, stories must be consciously shaped. Solid story structure makes it more likely that the meaning you intend will come across. It also gives you a way to be concise and not ramble. Use these simple structuring devices to organize your story.

- **Beginning, Middle, End:** Yes, the old standby. The beginning sets the context: where are you, who are you with, when did it happen. The middle tells about the conflict or change at the center of the story and how that change got addressed. The end says why it's important to you, what you learned, or why you will always remember it.
- **The Five Ps\*:** To create a picture in your listener's mind, you must tell the People, the Place, the Problem, the Progress, and the Point.



- The Inverted World\*: Describe the normal world of someone's experience, then the trouble that came to that world, how the world turned upside down, how someone learned something new or got some help, and finally describe the new normal world.
- From That Day On: An easy way to transform an anecdote into a story is to complete one of these sentences:
  - From that day on I always . . .
  - From that day on I never . . .
  - After that I knew . . .
  - From all of that I learned . . .



### How Do I Tell My Story Effectively?

#### A Few Tips!

- Decide on how much time you want to spend on each element of story structure. If you have three minutes to tell your story, then use one minute each for the beginning, middle, and end.
- Use concrete images and incorporate the senses: color, size, sound, taste, temperature, texture.
- Incorporate dialogue. Actually say what people said to each other, don't just summarize it.
- Know exactly how you want to begin and end the story. If you can get in and get out, the middle will take care of itself.
- Make sure the feelings are resolved. The stories that have the most impact are often about things that were hard for the teller to experience. It's okay for listeners to see your emotion. If you find yourself getting emotional in the story, just take a moment. Your listeners will wait. If you can't tell the story without breaking down, you need more time before you tell it.
- Imagine yourself in the context you will be telling in. See yourself having a good experience, your story going well, doing its work to connect with the listeners.



#### Nervous?

#### That's natural. It means you care.

Remember, it's not about memorizing or perfection. It's about being genuine and sharing your story with a sincere intention to connect with others. Here are some things that can help:

- Know as much about your audience as you can before you tell.
- Choose or create stories that you like and that are important to you.
- Practice your story so that it comes easily to you.
- Be clear on your intention. Why are you telling this story at this time?
- Know that your listeners are rooting for you. Seriously – they have an investment in your success.



#### Stories are powerful!

All of our ancestors knew that story is the key to establishing connections, deepening learning, fostering harmony, and moving others to action. Now, you know it too. Go forth and tell stories to change your world.

*\*Adapted from the work of Donald Davis.*

*Once upon a time.*

## SOUTH MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE STORYTELLING INSTITUTE

The Storytelling Institute offers customized training and workshops, college coursework and certificates in storytelling, and an annual calendar of innovative events.

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