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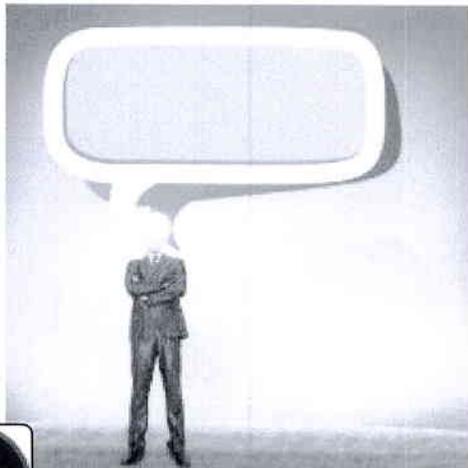
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Can You REALLY Tell a Good Story?— And Why It Matters

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Dianna Booher, Author, *What MORE Can I Say: Why Communication Fails and What to Do About It*

The new CEO wanted to hit a homerun at his first all-hands meeting. It meant the difference in capturing their allegiance for the big turnaround he hoped to achieve with their organization. In addition to the approximately 3,000 people seated in the auditorium in front of him, he knew employees would be tuned in to the broadcast from around the world. Although already

four months into the job, this would be his first big opportunity to win their confidence as a group that he could handle the job left vacant by his popular predecessor.

"So you said you plan to open with a story about your time in Germany as a young sales manager and what you learned from failure with a client there. Let's hear it," I said in our coaching session together. He took his place at the front of the room. I flipped on the video to record, and he began.

"So what do you think?" he asked after finishing.

"Passionate delivery. Good energy. We can work on the gestures and dialogue." I said. "It's not exactly a story yet."

He looked dumbfounded. I went on to explain the difference between an anecdote and a

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story.

His face turned red. “Am I the only executive who’s missed that difference during their entire career?”

He was not, and he became a quick-study. He took the situation from his experience in Germany, and we shaped it into a great story to use in his “debut” speech to illustrate the value of taking a risk. From all later reports by those in his organization, he’d become an outstanding storyteller.

What you’ve just read above is an anecdote—not a story. Anecdotes are not nearly as powerful as stories.

So What’s the Big Difference Between Anecdotes and Stories?

An anecdote is an incident that can be amusing, odd, or even tragic. Typically, the anecdote illustrates a point. Other biographical or autobiographical anecdotes serve to reflect someone’s personality, attitude, or philosophy.

Stories, on the other hand, have an “official” literary definition that you may recall from English class: A hero or heroine struggles to overcome obstacles to reach an important goal. (Of course, that “hero” might be an organization struggling to stay afloat and avoid bankruptcy. Or the “hero” might be a new product developed on a shoe-string budget struggling to become number one in the market. Or the “hero” might be a team fighting to prove its worth and avoid being laid off during a merger.) You get the idea.

So why should you care? As a leader, CEO, politician, coach, speaker, entrepreneur—why nit-pick about this issue?

4 Reasons Stories Have More Persuasive Power Than Mere Anecdotes

- **Stories engage emotions on many levels.** The details necessary to set the scene and structure the story involve multiple senses: The physical scene. The appearance of people, things, or places. Desire. Greed. Fear. Embarrassment. Envy. Hearing—conversations, disturbances, arguments, laughter. Withdrawal. Mockery.
- **Stories involve the listener in the struggle.** As the hero overcomes this and that setback, the listener identifies with similar problems—or at least the frustrations and disappointment such problems cause. Empathy sets in. Listeners (strategic partners, employees, suppliers) begin to identify with the hero in the story, trying to solve the problem or reach the goal.
- **Stories bring satisfaction on a significant goal.** Listeners actually feel a sense of closure after the story “ends” in much the same way they feel at the end of a movie. Whether the movie or story ends “happily ever after” or butts up against some harsh reality, still there a truth to be processed and internalized.

- **Stories stick in the memory because of their structure.** A story stays in the psyche because it has a definite arch that is always the same: Beginning, middle, end. Not so with an anecdote. Anecdotes can simply be a slice of life.

Warren Buffet tells stories about his investment strategies and philosophies. Presidents and world leaders tell stories about what they've achieved while in office and where they want to take their countries in the future. If you need to inspire your strategic partners, your employees, and other industry leaders to achieve great things, ... if you plan to launch a new vision, ... if you want to command attention from the public, perfect great stories.

About the Author

Dianna Booher is the bestselling author of 46 books, published in 26 languages. She consults, writes, and speaks on leadership communication, executive presence, productivity, and faith. Her latest books include What MORE Can I Say: Why Communication Fails and What to Do About It, Creating Personal Presence: Look, Talk, Think, and Act Like a Leader and Communicate With Confidence. National media such as Good Morning America, USA Today, the Wall Street Journal, Investor's Business Daily, Forbes.com, Fast Company, CNN International.com, NPR, Bloomberg, Success, and Entrepreneur have interviewed her for opinions on critical workplace communication issues. www.BooherResearch.com 817-283-2333.

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