

The Art of Verbal Storytelling

Storytelling for Sustainability

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“A good story has power. The power to inspire. The power to energize, and the power to move people to action. Good stories have the power to build understanding. To entertain. To teach. To humanize the big picture.”

-Andy Goodman

FACTORS	TECHNIQUES
<p>The Story. A good story flows naturally with a well-developed plot that takes the listener through an image-filled journey. It follows a theme and features characters that the audience can react or relate to.</p> <p>A good story leaves the listener with something to think about or remember; a call to action, an idea or a puzzle to solve.</p> <p>The Storyteller. The narrator breathes life to the story. When narrating in front of an audience, a good oral storyteller takes cues from the listener and responds accordingly.</p> <p>The Listener. The listener requires the most critical consideration for the storyteller. Every audience is different, influenced by the setting in which they hear the story and the circumstances that call for the story to be told.</p>	<p>While there may be more techniques applicable in verbal storytelling, three are most commonly used.</p> <div data-bbox="803 751 998 1045" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>Hero’s Story. Perhaps the most popular storytelling technique, the Monomyth (as it is also known) focuses on the main character that struggles, departs and overcomes the challenges to come back victorious. In the context of storytelling for sustainability, this allows the storyteller to present a positive outcome or achievement that may be offered as a replicable project or effort, deserving support.</p> <p>The Mountain Story. The storyteller maps out the tension and drama in a story, rising up to a climactic conclusion. Rather than the usual happy ending, the storyteller may end with a call for action. This allows the storyteller to indirectly request support for a program or an effort.</p> <div data-bbox="1279 1171 1529 1396" data-label="Diagram"> </div>
<h3>OPPORTUNITIES FOR VERBAL STORYTELLING</h3>	
<p>Opportunities to tell a story may not always be a planned event. Sometimes such opportunities present themselves when they are least expected, with little or no time to prepare. They also determine the settings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telephone Conversation • In Person Conversation • Presentations • Speeches • Meetings • Media pitches and conversations • Special events • Exhibits and Event Booths 	<p>Nested Loops. This storytelling technique layers three or more narratives within each other. The storyteller places the most important story, the core message, at the center and uses the stories around it to elaborate or explain that central principle. In the context of storytelling for sustainability, the narrator using this technique presents comparative or relative stories, linked together. The central story holds the key message for the audience.</p> <div data-bbox="815 1549 998 1726" data-label="Diagram"> </div> <p>The storyteller may choose a technique that would make the most impact on the audience.</p>

“Even if you have reams of evidence on your side, remember: numbers numb, jargon jars, and nobody ever marched on Washington because of a pie chart. If you want to connect with your audience, tell them a story.”

- Andy Goodman

TAILORING YOUR STORY TO DIFFERENT AUDIENCES	STRUCTURE	
<p>A story is only as effective as the way it is received by the listener. For this reason, the storyteller is obliged to consider the audience when relating a verbal narrative.</p> <p>Audience engagement has utmost importance. An audience that does not interact with a story will likely be unable to recall the story at a later time. Audience engagement does not necessarily mean an active, physical interface between audience and storyteller.</p> <p>What it does require is an emotional connection whereby the audience is drawn into the story, being able to relate to what is happening and react to the storyteller’s emotions.</p>  <p>A storyteller is often in competition for time and attention. Nowadays, people are more inclined to watch a video and view infographics rather than listen to an oral narrative. Attention spans are much shorter. The ability to see in one’s mind a moving picture of a verbal story is all but lost. A storyteller is therefore required to paint a picture in a clear, concise and stimulating manner.</p> <p>Learn more about your potential audiences. Be prepared to tell your personal story to them.</p>	<p>QUICK TIPS</p> <p>Put a face to the story. Data is meaningless unless you give it a touch of humanity.</p> <p>Keep it brief and simple. Don’t muddle the story. Craft your message, build it into a story and practice telling it. Avoid too many confusing details.</p> <p>Make it personal. Highlight your own experiences, struggles and successes. Use anecdotes and personal stories to get the message across. Don’t be afraid to show your vulnerability.</p>  <p>Connect your story to the big picture. Show how your story relates to the bigger issues in the community or society. Be relevant.</p> <p>Stimulate their senses. Make them feel, smell, touch, listen and see vivid pictures through descriptive language.</p> <p>Address the elephant in the room. There are challenges and barriers to sustainability. Be honest!</p> <p>Propose a positive future. Provide the listener with a glimpse of a positive outcome. Make them feel that they can be part of the solution.</p> 	<p>The heart of every story is the conflict or the struggle. Although the structure of stories may be divided into three distinct parts, stories are not always told in any particular order. In fact, some powerful oral narratives start in the middle of a conflict.</p> <p>The Beginning. Set the stage by introducing the characters.</p> <p>The Conflict. The middle part of the story is the conflict, where the “body” builds up to the “climax.”</p> <p>The End. Also known as the resolution. Conflict is resolved in the ending.</p> <p>Preparing to tell a story requires mapping out the storyline. This allows for an organized narrative that the listener can easily follow.</p> <p>One story may be told in different ways depending on the technique used by the storyteller.</p>
RESOURCES		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Sustainability Storytelling: Creating a Narrative that Matters http://www.bsr.org/en/our-insights/blog-view/sustainability-storytelling-creating-a-narrative-that-matters (2) Stories Worth Telling: A Guide to Storytelling for Non-Profits. http://capacitycanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/StoryTelling_Manual_CC.pdf (3) Classic Storytelling Techniques for Engaging Presentations http://www.sparkol.com/blog/8-classic-storytelling-techniques-for-engaging-presentations/ <p>Developed for the Family and Youth Services Bureau under contract no. HHSP23320095651WC, Task Order 25.</p> <p>Suggested Citation: Singson, J., & Garrido, M. (2015). <i>The Art of Verbal Storytelling</i>. Portland, OR</p>		