

'*Stories for Work* will give you everything you need to be more inspiring and effective in your business communications. A must read business book!'

—Michael Ebeid, CEO & Managing Director, SBS

stories *for* work

the essential
guide to business
storytelling

Gabrielle Dolan

WILEY

Storytelling in business offers a powerful way to stimulate emotional connection, where real conversations can inspire and motivate effective employee engagement. With informed analysis, recommendations and case studies, *Stories for Work* is a comprehensive and practical 'how-to' framework for business professionals looking to maximise the impact of storytelling to achieve desired results.

Michael Ebeid, CEO & Managing Director, SBS

I work in companies and communities all over the globe. The capacity to translate strategy and business imperatives into authentic narratives that massively accelerate authentic execution is critical. Gabrielle's ability to unleash everyone's capacity to be influential through their own stories is extraordinary. *Stories for Work* is an essential and accessible guide to storytelling in business.

Colin Pidd, Global Partner and Managing Director Asia Pacific, Conversant

The power of storytelling to connect, inspire and create change can never be understated. Gabrielle's latest book provides wonderful insights and practical examples of how you can use this important skill in both your personal and professional life. We all have stories to share and Gabrielle has given us the tools to really bring this to life.

Christine Corbett, Chief Customer Officer, Australia Post

One of the biggest gaps in leadership today is storytelling. As businesses are continually required to move faster, leaders need to do a better job in helping to point the way and bringing people along with them. It requires a more sophisticated leadership approach; it requires storytelling. Gabrielle Dolan's *Stories for Work* will help you unlock the art of storytelling in business.

Joe McCollum, Group Human Resource Director, Spark New Zealand

If you think storytelling in the workplace is simply about 'once upon a time' then you couldn't be more wrong! Gabrielle Dolan successfully and very quickly teaches us something much more powerful ... presenting is auditioning for leadership and using personal stories for business purpose is demonstrating authentic leadership.

Jac Phillips, Head of Brand and Marketing, Bank of Melbourne

Gabrielle Dolan is the bomb. She explodes into your world like a force

majeure, real, grounded and inspirational. Clearly she is Australia's leading corporate storytelling expert and her latest book, *Stories for Work*, is brilliant. The story wheel alone is an idea that opens your mind to the possibility of storytelling to influence and inspire greatness in your people. Gabrielle Dolan is a true thought leader.

Matt Church, Founder of Thought Leaders Global, Author of *Amplifiers*

If you care about meaningful progress (beyond the default), you need to harness the power of storytelling. This book is a perfect place to start.

Dr Jason Fox, best-selling Author of *How to Lead a Quest*, Keynote Speaker of the Year and Advisor, pioneering strategy, leadership & culture

Gabrielle's book highlights the different ways you can use stories to drive and achieve business goals. We have used storytelling to bring Bupa's purpose and values to life through our leaders sharing personal stories, to demonstrate what our purpose and values mean to them. This approach was hugely impactful for Bupa, with people quickly living our values, and I'm sure this approach would work equally well in other organisations too. Read, absorb, and start telling stories!

Dean Holden, Managing Director, Bupa Australia and New Zealand

Gabrielle Dolan is a master storyteller. In *Stories for Work* Gabrielle shares her in-depth knowledge, giving you the inspiration and know-how for you to start successfully using stories in business. It truly is the essential guide to business storytelling and a must-read for anyone in business.

Janine Garner, Founder and CEO, LBD Group, Author of *From Me to We* and *It's Who You Know*

In *Stories for Work* Australia's leading expert in business storytelling pulls back the curtain on the art of sharing great stories. Gabrielle Dolan reveals the science behind what makes stories the most effective tool in a leader's communication kit and the step-by-step process for crafting the different types of stories you'll need. She's also included dozens of real life business stories that will not only illustrate what she's talking about, but will make you laugh out loud, and possibly tear up a little too. Compulsory reading for any leader wanting to get their message across more effectively.

Peter Cook, CEO of Thought Leaders Global, Author of *Implement*

Gabrielle Dolan is more than just a story-teller, she's a story-doer. Watching Gabrielle deliver her business storytelling expertise is an adventure worthy of a rollicking page turner — and this is it!!!

Dan Gregory, CEO, The Impossible Institute and Co-author of *Selfish, Scared and Stupid*

Stories *for* Work

***the* essential guide to business storytelling**

Gabrielle Dolan

WILEY

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About the author

Gabrielle Dolan is a global thought leader on authentic leadership and business storytelling.

She's worked with thousands of high-profile leaders from around the world, helping them to become better leaders and communicators using the art of business storytelling. Gabrielle is a highly sought-after international keynote speaker, and works with some of Australia's top 50 ASX companies, including National Australia Bank, Australia Post, Telstra and ANZ, and multinationals such as Accenture, Bupa, Ericsson and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

In the past, Gabrielle has held various senior leadership roles at National Australia Bank in change management and organisational change. She also co-founded One Thousand & One, one of Australia's leading storytelling companies, before launching her own practice in 2013.

In 2015 Gabrielle became an Australian and New Zealand partner of Thought Leaders Global, where she works with organisations to help them gain a competitive edge through thought leadership. In the same year, she was also nominated for Telstra's Business Woman of the Year award, one of the most prestigious business awards in the Asia-Pacific region.

She is a graduate of the Harvard Kennedy School of Executive Education in both the Art and Practice of Leadership Development and Women and Power: Leadership in a New World. Her other academic qualifications include a master's degree in management and leadership from Swinburne University and an associate diploma in education and training from the University of Melbourne.

Gabrielle is also the best-selling author of *Ignite: Real Leadership, Real Talk, Real Results*, which was published in 2015 and reached the top five of Australia's bestselling business books. Her other published books include *Storytelling for Job Interviews*, published in 2016, and *Hooked: How Leaders Connect, Engage and Inspire with Storytelling*, published in 2013.

She is passionate about changing the way we communicate in business and is the founder of the Jargon Free Fridays global revolution #jargonfreefridays (jargonfreefridays.com).

When she is not writing or working, she can be found wandering in her vegetable garden at her 25-acre rural property on the southern coast of New South Wales. She believes the world would be a better place if there were more manure in gardens and less in business.

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This book was written in a short time frame but I feel like it is bringing together my work and passion from the last decade. Without the support of many people this book would never have been possible.

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I particularly need to thank all the people who contributed their stories for this book. It goes without saying that the book would not be a reality without you being so willing to share your stories. Thank you!

Doing the work I do, I get to hang out with some great mates such as Matt Church and Pete Cook, who run the coolest tribe you would ever want to be a part of. Thank you both for your inspiration, love and care, and for creating the commercially successful and creative space that is Thought Leaders Business School.

Another cool mate I get to hang with is my 'chief of stuff', Elise Turner. Massive love and gratitude to you for everything you do for me, including the

support of this book. From doing the initial edits to managing the whole marketing campaign and all the time spent keeping everything else ticking along. I could not have done it without you.

And talking about hanging with people I love, a final huge acknowledgement goes to my husband, Steve, and my very cool daughters, Alex and Jess (who have made me promise to include our dog, Digger, in here). They continue to support me, give me the time to write and also let me write about them. Love you.

Introduction

I once had the pleasure of working with a wonderful woman, Merrin Butler, who confessed to sleeping or reading through the safety instructions on her regular Sunday night flight from Dublin to Glasgow.

She told me that catching the same flight every week for work made her, understandably, very blasé. So she'd either fall asleep or read the paper as the crew pulled on oxygen masks and pointed out the exits.

One night on her regular flight, after giving her usual lack of attention to the pre-flight demonstration, they hit some rough weather and the pilot had to abort the landing as they were coming into Glasgow. The plane circled around and tried again, but the rain and wind were getting worse and so the pilot abandoned the landing for the second time. Before making the third attempt, the captain announced, 'We'll make one final attempt to land but before we do, the crew will go through our safety instructions again.'

All the passengers sat bolt upright in their seats, their undivided attention on the crew. People asked questions about the oxygen masks, checked for their life jackets under their seats and physically counted out the rows to their nearest exit.

Thankfully, Merrin lived to tell the frightening tale, as did everyone else on the plane.

When she shared this story with me, long after the incident, I was helping her to implement a major organisational change at National Australia Bank. It was going to be a two-year process that would affect all the Human Resources professionals across the company.

I asked Merrin what was the one message she wanted to get across to her team when we announced the change. She said they'd all be thinking, *Here we go again ... another change or restructure*. But Merrin felt that it was more than that — although the change would be a long, intensive project, everyone would receive lots of information about it and, while at the time they might think it was boring or irrelevant, they needed to pay close attention because it was going to personally affect each and every one of them at some point.

As the Communications and Change Manager for the project, I suggested she share her story about flying into Glasgow. Her initial reaction was, 'What has that got to do with anything?' I convinced Merrin to share the story, however,

knowing it matched her message — often we think information we’re receiving may not be relevant, but it does have an important purpose. I was confident the story would work ... well, maybe not confident but optimistic.

The next day, Merrin shared her flight story with her team of HR professionals. I watched and waited for the response in the room (I’ll admit, by this stage the optimism had turned to hope). I should have been confident, because this became the first time I really noticed the positive impact of a personal story when delivered as a business message. Not only did her team immediately react with smiles and understanding, but they also continued to refer to the story months later.

I wasn’t aware of it at the time but that was a sliding-door moment for me. I realised the power of storytelling and this knowledge completely changed my career — and my life. From that point on, I noticed that all the leaders I found inspiring and engaging used stories to explain their actions and choices in some way.

I left my corporate career on a mission — a mission to change the boring and bland way we communicated in the business world with inspiring and engaging stories that hit the hearts and minds of leaders and their teams.

Over the last decade, this work has taken me all over the world — from Australia to Malaysia, Europe and the US — but no matter where I am, I’m always faced with questions and comments like the following:

- ‘Does storytelling really work in business? I mean, *really*?’
- ‘What stories do I need and how many do I use?’
- ‘How do you find stories?’
- ‘I don’t have any stories. I just lead a pretty average and normal life.’
- ‘Where and when do you share stories in business?’
- ‘I’ve never thought of using a personal story to communicate a business message. Are we allowed to do that?’

Hearing these kinds of questions and remarks from so many different leaders, managers and executives at all levels, in all industries and corporations, all over the world was the catalyst behind this book.

My aim is to show you the science behind why storytelling really works — because it does work, as the many examples in this book will show. This book

also clarifies what types of stories are appropriate to use, how to find them and how to share them.

What I love most about this book is that it gives you a collection of tried and tested stories from people who have successfully used them in their business lives. I know from my own experience that hearing other people's stories helps to ignite story ideas of your own.

My intention is to help you generate your own stories, show you where and when to use them and, most importantly, give you the courage to share your own stories to get great results.

So put down your paper and pay close attention — you're about to fly into the wonderful world of storytelling.

Part I

Shaping your stories

Storytelling has been around since the dawn of time and humans have always communicated using stories. Evidence of this is seen from the paintings left behind by our cave-dwelling ancestors to the Aboriginal culture and Dreamtime storytelling, which continues to be passed down generation to generation.

It's only recently, however, that modern business has started to realise the power and potential of this ancient art.

In a world of information overload and short attention spans, business people are looking for a more effective way to get their messages across and to help them stand out from all the 'noise'. Combine this with an appreciation of being more authentic in the way we lead, and it is no surprise that storytelling has emerged as a powerful tool.

In this part, I take you through exactly why storytelling is so powerful in business, drilling down into the science behind it. I also cover the four main types of stories you will need, and how to find, construct and share your stories.

While the art of storytelling is an ancient form, the applications of storytelling in business are just being discovered.

Chapter 1

The science of storytelling

Sure, you might already be aware that telling a story makes good sense, but it is more than that. It is actually based on good science. In this chapter I take you through this science, explaining how stories build trust and heighten emotions.

The brain behind the story

Our brain has different parts, and each part has a different job. The left side of our brain, for example, helps us think logically and organise our thoughts, while the right side helps us experience emotions and recall personal memories. We also have a ‘reptile brain’ that makes us act instinctively and a ‘mammal brain’ that helps us connect in relationships. And our brains have a neocortex, which is connected to a complex series of nerves and networks called the ‘limbic system’. This is responsible for the development of the bond we feel between ourselves and another (like the mother–child bond).

In his international best-selling book *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman explains that our evolved neocortex is the reason our emotions are so powerful. He says,

“As the root from which the newer brain grew, the emotional areas are intertwined via myriad connecting circuits to all parts of the neocortex. This gives the emotional centres immense power to influence the functioning of the rest of the brain.

When we tell stories all the different parts and areas of our brain are stimulated and start to work together, combining words and logic and emotions and sensory images, so we see the whole picture and communicate our experience. Essentially, with all this activity going on, our emotions go into overdrive.

This means that stories provoke our emotions. Good stories make us feel something as we listen to them — excitement, anger, sadness, empathy or enthusiasm. Consequently, feeling these emotions means we feel something towards the person telling the story, which helps create connection — the bond like the ones our neocortex helps develop.

We love a good story

In the 2014 *Harvard Business Review* article ‘Why your brain loves good storytelling’, neuroeconomist Paul Zak revealed the powerful impact the love hormone oxytocin has on the brain when we tell stories.

Oxytocin is also often referred to as the ‘trust hormone’. Our bodies release it when we are with people we love and trust, when we hug, or even when we shake hands in a business meeting. And it’s released when we listen to stories. Oxytocin being released signals to the brain that everything is okay and it is safe

to approach others — essentially, that we won't be attacked or eaten, as would have been the risk back in the day.

So not only does a good story make us feel different emotions and a connection to the storyteller but, at the same time, the love hormone oxytocin is also signalling that we can be trusted, which in turn helps build our credibility.

Stories build trust and credibility

Neuroscientist Uri Hasson opened his 2016 TED talk with the following:

“Imagine if we invented a device that could record my memories, my dreams, my ideas and transmit them to your brain. That would be a game-changing technology, right? But, in fact, we already possess this device and it's called the human communication system and effective storytelling.

Hasson's research shows that even across different languages, our brains show similar activity when we hear a story, becoming what he calls 'aligned' or 'synchronised'.

In one study, listeners lay in the dark waiting to hear a story spoken out loud. The moment the story started, the auditory cortex of the listeners' brains, the area that processes sound, became active and aligned. Hassan calls this 'neural entrainment'.

It was only when the listeners heard the story in a coherent way that alignment started to happen. This did not happen if the story was played backwards, or the words or sentences were scrambled. But the story was still understood in a similar way when it was told in Russian to a group of Russian listeners as it was when told in English to a group of English listeners.

The participants were also shown a clip from the BBC TV series *Sherlock*. Months later, one participant was asked to tell another about the scene they watched. The results showed that the brain of the person telling the story aligned with the same activity their brain showed when they watched the show some months earlier. Furthermore, the brain of the participant who was listening to the story also aligned in a similar way.

So what does all this prove? Listening to a story being told is effectively like reliving that story as if it were yours. What better way to create common ground and a shared understanding with someone? And this is especially the case if you're making a presentation to an audience of 1000 strangers or even facilitating a one-on-one coaching session.

Emotions drive our decisions

Just some of the questions running through the minds of our audience when we are talking to them include the following:

- Do I buy from you?
- Do I get behind this change?
- Do I accept the role with you?
- Do I believe you?
- Do I take your advice?
- Do I follow you?
- Do I respect you?

Our audience will be forming these types of questions whether we're trying to get them to buy-in to an organisational change or motivating them towards next year's goals.

Usually, we try to influence them with a PowerPoint presentation of facts and figures or an outline of the pros and cons of whatever it is we want them to feel excited about. These strategies are all based on logic. Yet, science says that we make up our minds to the types of questions I listed based on our emotions and how we feel about something.

Research by neuroscientist Antonio Damasio shows emotion plays a significant role in our ability to make decisions. While many of us believe logic drives our choices, the reality is that we have already made an emotional decision and we then use logic to justify the choice — to ourselves and to others.

Damasio's research involved examining people with damage to their frontal lobe, which is the area of the brain where emotions are generated and that helps to regulate personality. Except for their inability to feel or express emotions, the participants had normal intellectual capacity in terms of working memory, attention, language comprehension and expression. However, they were unable to make decisions.

The vast majority of participants could describe in logical terms what they thought they should be doing, but they found it difficult to actually make a decision, including making a simple choice like deciding what to eat. This indecision came from them going over the pros and cons for each option again and again. Presented with a choice to make, we struggle to make a decision

without some form of emotion influencing it.

Influence and impact

Damasio's research does not stand alone. According to Christine Comaford, neuroscience expert and author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Smart Tribes: How Teams Become Brilliant Together*, 90 per cent of human behaviour and decision-making is driven by our emotions.

Not fully understanding this is often why we get incredibly frustrated when our team members do not do what we want them to do. In our mind, our request makes logical sense! But as best-selling author Dale Carnegie put it, 'When dealing with people, let us remember we are not dealing with creatures of logic. We are dealing with creatures of emotion.'

That's why it's important to note the difference between a case study and a story. Case studies are based on logic, facts and figures (as you'll see from those provided in chapters 13 to 15). They still play an important role in business, but not from the standpoint of connecting with someone on an emotional level.

Marketing executives and advertisers are acutely aware of the power of using storytelling and emotion in business to drive purchasing decisions. You only have to look at the latest car advert for proof!

A study of over 1400 marketing campaigns submitted to the UK-based Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) rated how effective marketing campaigns were, based on profit gains. The results showed:

- campaigns based purely on emotion rated as 31 per cent effective
- campaigns based purely on logic rated as only 16 per cent effective
- campaigns that combined emotion and logic rated as 26 per cent effective.

This research indicates that using logic alone has the least impact and using emotion has almost double the impact. (For more on this research, go to www.neurosciencemarketing.com/blog and search 'emotional ads'.)

Storytelling is deeply rooted in making an emotional connection with another person. That's why if you're looking to make an impact or influence someone at work, it makes scientific sense to use a story.

Attention, please!

Remember Paul Zak's research on oxytocin and storytelling? His research goes on to show that when we listen to a tense moment in a story, our brains produce the stress hormone cortisol, which helps us to focus.

In one of his studies, participants watched an emotional story about a father and his son. Both cortisol and oxytocin were released in varying degrees in the participants. When cortisol was present, the participants with higher amounts of oxytocin also present were more likely to donate money to someone they had never met.

The research showed that in order to motivate people to help others, a story must first sustain attention and then develop tension. If this is the case, listeners are more likely to share the emotions of the characters in the story and mimic the feelings and behaviours of those characters.

These findings have significant relevance in business. Zak's research shows that character-driven stories that provoke emotion result in a better understanding of key messages in the story. More importantly, listeners are better able to recall the main points weeks later. As Zak states, 'In terms of making impact, this blows the standard PowerPoint presentation to bits'.

Remember when ...

An investigation into autobiographical memories found that:

- emotionally charged events are remembered better
- pleasant emotions are usually remembered better than unpleasant ones
- positive memories contain more contextual details (which, in turn, helps memory)
- strong emotion can impair memory for less emotional events and information experienced at the same time
- emotional arousal, not the importance of the information, helps memory.

Anyone who works in business must sit up and take note of these findings, especially that it's emotion, not logical information, that helps us to remember messages. Too many leaders in business believe that having an important message to share, such as the new strategy or technical change, is reason enough

for their audience to listen. (For more on the preceding findings, go to www.memory-key.com/memory/emotion.)

Unfortunately, focusing on logical information usually produces the opposite effect. Without a story or a connection to how this new strategy is going to make listeners feel, the message is usually lost or slept through and forgotten. This is why you should use a story.

The safety industry has been decades ahead of the rest of business when it comes to memorable campaigns and messages — in particular, Air New Zealand. The airline is renowned for using humour and storytelling in their inflight videos to deliver crucial information when it comes to safety in the air.

In 2011, the first of these videos was launched starring American fitness guru Richard Simmons. ‘Fit to Fly’ shows a bunch of lycra-clad passengers working out as they buckle up and demonstrate putting on their oxygen masks. The video has had over three million views on YouTube — pretty amazing for a boring old safety video! Other Air New Zealand campaigns featured Bear Grylls (from *Man vs. Wild*) and *Golden Girls* actress Betty White. If you haven’t seen them, you can find them easily via a quick search on YouTube.

Australian airline Qantas is also starting to follow this lead. While they do not use humour like Air New Zealand, they do use stereotypical Australian characters and scenes outside of a plane to deliver the safety messages. (You can also find Qantas examples on YouTube.) Even Merrin, my friend from the introduction of this book who slept through the airline safety instructions, would agree these unusual videos and stories grab your attention much longer than the stock standard boring ones.

So if you lead a safety meeting as part of your role — or, indeed, need to impart other kinds of critical information — this is an opportunity for you to start sharing a story instead of reading out a list of bullet points about compliance with your team.

The research in this chapter proves that tapping into emotion not only aids our understanding of a logical message, but also helps us retain that information. We are more likely to remember a good story as opposed to a bunch of facts.

As American poet Maya Angelou famously said, ‘People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel’.

Make your stories work

This chapter showed you the science behind storytelling. You learned that stories:

- provoke emotions in our brain and body
- stimulate the release of the love hormone oxytocin
- make us feel something towards the person telling the story
- help build trust and credibility
- influence our audience into making a decision
- aid in focusing listeners on key messages
- help us to remember details rather than just facts and logic alone.

So what stories do you need? Do you need different types of stories? How many of these stories do you need? How long will it take you to find them? We answer these questions in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Four types of stories you need in business

What stories do you need? Do you need different types of stories? How many of these stories do you need? How long will it take to find them? These are all common questions I am often asked.

Various authors have suggested the correct number of stories you need is between six and eight. Stephen Denning in *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling*, for example, explores eight types of stories. So too does Valerie Khoo in *Power Stories*. In *The Story Factor*, Annette Simmons points out the six types of stories you need to tell in business, while in *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories*, Christopher Booker outlines seven basic stories. (Though apparently Booker worked on this manuscript for 34 years, which is a long time for seven stories and my intention is to help you find stories faster than that.)

Outlining the four story types

The reality is that no right or wrong answer exists to questions about the number or types of stories you need in business. However, I like to keep things simple and efficient so in my experience I can say that you only need four types of stories in your business Story Wheel.

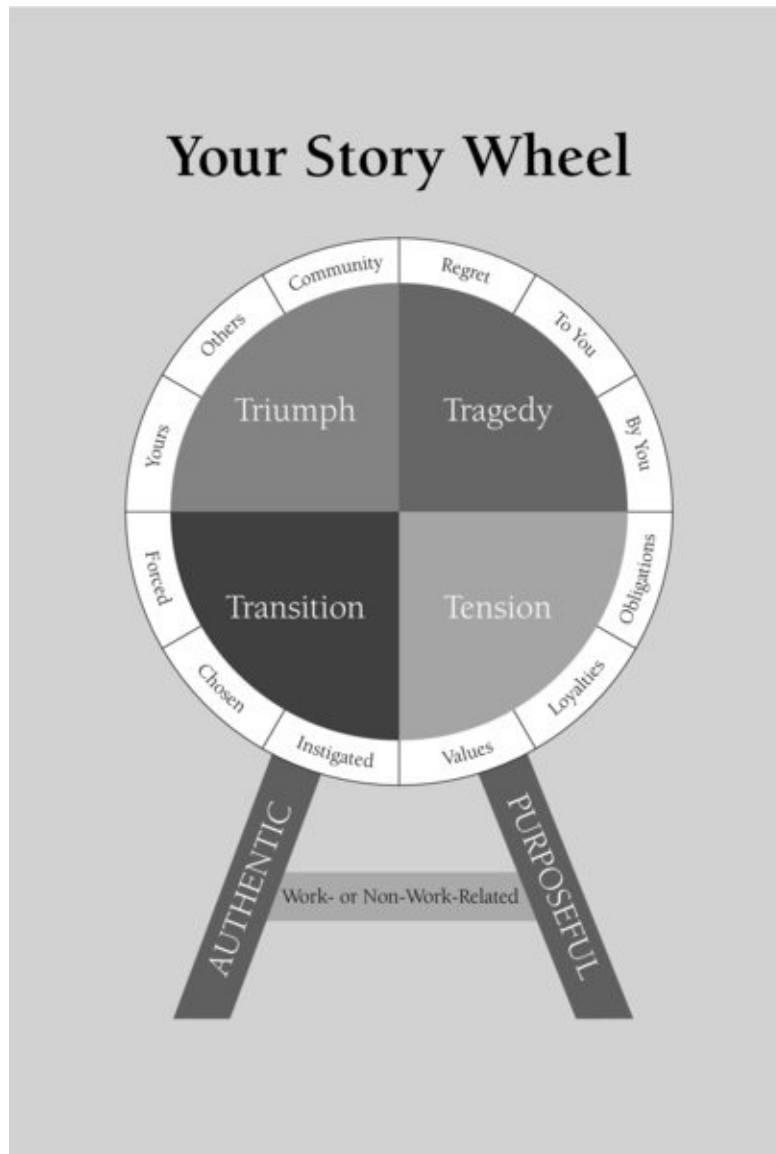
These are stories of:

1. triumph
2. tragedy
3. tension
4. transition.

All four types will include a mix of work and non-work-related stories.

Let's look at each story type, and the different elements within them, in more detail.

The four types of stories are shown in the following illustration.



Triumph stories

These are stories of achievement — the moments in your career and personal life that you are especially proud of. And looking for a variety of triumphs that are both work- and non-work-related is important.

Firstly, you will need to reflect upon **your** personal opinion of what a triumph is. Success looks and feels differently to various people. Your personal triumphs may not actually mean you won something; they may mean you had the courage to try.

Many of us can feel uncomfortable with sharing our triumphs at work for fear of sounding like we are arrogant or boasting. Try to get over this. Sharing these

types of stories doesn't have to be about bragging that you got a promotion or ran your first marathon. Focus on how much the experience meant to you personally and why the achievement was so significant. If you demonstrate vulnerability and humility, your story will hit the right note.

It's also important to look for stories that show how you have helped **others** triumph. Maybe you were part of a team that received an award or met its yearly targets. Or perhaps your story of triumph is about coaching your daughter's basketball team when they won the grand final. Or maybe they didn't win a game all year but every one of them improved. Focus on how this made you feel. Remember, this is about whatever success or triumph looks and feels like for you and is not just about winning.

You should also look for stories that demonstrate when you have helped the wider **community**. Have you volunteered through your company? Worked on a project that made a difference? Helped out with a children's fundraiser or stopped a high-rise development in your street?

It's important to have a combination of your own triumphs and those that came from helping others or being part of a team or community.

Tragedy stories

These stories vary according to your perspective of what you consider a disaster. Some examples may truly be about tragic circumstances, while others may be stories of **regret**.

Stories of regret may be when you didn't have the courage to do something. This could be going for a promotion or taking that overseas assignment. The regret could be about not asking the love of your life out on a date or feeling like you didn't spend enough time with your parents when they were older.

Other tragedy stories might be about things that happened **to you** through no fault of your own. The loss of a loved one or the bankruptcy of a company you were working for, perhaps. You need to avoid sounding like a victim, however. Sure, these events had an enormous impact on your life, but make sure you focus on what you learned from the experience as opposed to simply complaining about the circumstances.

You may also think of a tragedy story that was caused **by you**. Perhaps a decision you made that had dire consequences, like making an error while driving that led to a serious accident or providing advice to someone that in hindsight was incorrect.

When it comes to divulging stories, understand that you as the storyteller decide what stories to share and with whom you share them. This is the case with all four story types, but is especially so with those around tragedy because these stories in particular can evoke strong emotions that you may not be comfortable sharing in a work situation. That's fine. It's a judgement call that you are always in control of.

Tension stories

These are stories of conflict that are driven by your values, loyalties or obligations.

Tension stories that compromised your **values** might create conflict because you were forced to choose between two different beliefs. A popular example includes a story of a time when you did not stay true to your values. Ironically, sharing stories of when you did not uphold one of your values, and the regrets you have about that, demonstrates greater credibility than you may think. If you share a story about how you treated someone at work with disrespect and how much you regret it, for example, that story shows that respect is something you value highly.

Tension stories can also be about a situation when you were torn between two **loyalties**. Maybe you had to choose between two highly capable individuals in your team for a promotion. Or maybe you chose to take a long-deserved break with your family.

Tension stories are often closely related to your **obligations**. They may involve a situation when you felt tense about accepting an amazing work opportunity that would be great for your career, but that would mean unsettling your kids who had just started in a new school. Look for the day-to-day too — tension can come from having to choose between working late to meet a deadline and getting home early so that you can cook dinner as promised.

Regardless of what you are torn about, don't just focus on the decision you made. Make sure these stories focus on your inner struggles and the internal or external tension the event caused.

Transition stories

These stories are about key transitions in your life. If work-related, they might include events such as changing jobs, companies, industries or careers. Non-work-related stories, on the other hand, may include moving countries, getting

divorced, going back to study or having children.

You don't need to get too hung up on whether your stories are technically classified as work-related or not. For example, taking a career break or going back to full-time study could be seen as either work-related or non-work-related, depending on how you look at it.

The most powerful transition stories take the audience through what you were thinking and feeling at the time. Spending time highlighting the anxiety you felt when you made the decision is crucial, as is outlining your fears or level of excitement. A story that just goes through the logistics is not a story — well, not a very engaging one anyway.

Another thing to look for is transitions that may have been **forced** upon you. For example, being made redundant at work or moving countries as a child.

Your aim is to pick a variety of different transition stories so look for those when you have **chosen** the change as well. Did you have to decide between two different jobs or whether to take on an assignment overseas? Were you deliberating over having children, moving to the country or disclosing your sexual orientation?

Also think of stories that demonstrate when you **instigated** a transition. Maybe you decided to resign, took a sabbatical or dropped out of university to take a gap year.

Unlike the other three types of stories, where day-to-day events like changing cars or swapping from a PC to a Mac can be very powerful, it's important you choose transition stories that rely on very significant changes and events. (Whether you knew you were going through it at the time or not.)

Stories that work

To be successful, each and every story in your personal Story Wheel must demonstrate two things:

1. authenticity
2. purpose.

Authenticity

Your stories must be authentic and true — each and every one of them, all the time. It is not worth risking your career or credibility over the potential backlash and damage to your brand that making up stories or claiming other people's as your own can do.

Not a single professional circumstance exists that would make this okay. If you make up or steal stories and people find out later you lied, they will feel you have manipulated them and you will lose all trust with them. This can be especially harmful if you're a leader or in a position of influence. And once you read through the next chapter on how to find stories, you will realise that your life is rich in stories and you have no need to make them up.

Purpose

Sharing stories is about having purpose. Why are you sharing this particular story? What does it prove? How does it relate to the business situation you are in?

Purpose also means having a clear message and target audience, and identifying how your story relates to a business context. Telling a story about washing the dishes may simply be an irrelevant story about washing the dishes unless you can link it back to your business situation and draw a conclusion.

Different situations will also call for different stories, depending on why you're sharing them. If you're trying to build credibility in your area of expertise, stories of triumph will do that more successfully than tragic stories of regret. Whereas if you are trying to build rapport and trust quickly with a new team, your tension and tragic stories could be your most powerful tool.

Make your stories work

In this chapter, we identified the four types of stories you need in business. Stories of:

1. **triumph:** moments that you are proud of, including when you've helped others or your community
2. **tragedy:** circumstances you regret that may have been caused by you or happened to you
3. **tension:** events that compromised your values, loyalties or obligations
4. **transition:** times of significant change where you may have faced a choice, or that may have been instigated by you or forced upon you.

We also clarified that each and every story in your personal Story Wheel must be based on two things:

1. **authenticity:** they must be true
2. **purpose:** they must be linked to a business outcome.

In the next chapter, we explore how to find these four types of stories that you can share at work.

Chapter 3

How to find stories for work

At the start of my workshops I usually hear something like, ‘I don’t have any stories because I’m just normal’. This is quickly followed by, ‘Where do you find your stories?’ So, in this chapter we are going to spend some time exploring a variety of ways you can find your stories.

Everyone has stories, regardless of what you do, who you are or how ‘normal’ you think you are. In fact, the ‘normal’ stories can often be the most effective. Once you learn how to uncover your stories, you will also discover that you have lots of them — way more than you ever thought possible.

Have you ever been at the beach and seen someone with a metal detector? They walk along, waving the detector over the sand to uncover what is hidden just below the surface. Finding stories you can share is very similar. Most of your stories may not be visible at first but are waiting just below the surface of your memory.

One way to find your stories is to literally do a brain dump of all the significant things that have happened in your life. When I say ‘significant’, I don’t mean they have to be major, life-changing events or sliding-door moments. You certainly want to capture these major stories but don’t ignore the simple or ordinary life experiences that you have collected across your lifetime. These can be significant too.

The key to good stories is having a variety of them, which includes a combination of work- and non-work-related memories and events. You also want your stories to encompass the four story types covered in chapter 2:

1. triumph
2. tragedy
3. tension
4. transition.

Two ways of finding stories

Over my years of working in this industry, I have found you can use two effective approaches to finding your stories.

Approach 1: Finding work-related stories

The first step in finding the four types of stories you have that are related to a work situation is to grab a piece of paper and divide it into five rows. Label each row (top to bottom) as follows:

1. job
2. triumph
3. tragedy
4. tension
5. transition.

List all the jobs you've ever had in the first column, starting with your very first job and moving through to your current role. Don't leave out any job, no matter how small or insignificant it feels now, and include any work experience or a casual job you had for a short time when you were young. I had a casual job working in Woolworths for two weeks when I was 17, and I have so many stories from that short experience.

For each role, now think carefully about specific events that stand out for you in relation to the four types of stories. The key to this approach is to sit with one job experience for a while. Don't dismiss it too quickly by thinking something like, *That was boring, nothing happened there* or *I was only in that job for three months*. Remember, you are a metal story detector and the stories will be just below the surface so you need to be patient and thorough when investigating.

Also think about how you came to take on the role and then leave the role. Was there anything significant in that process? Did the role involve moving locations? Was taking the role or leaving it a big decision at the time? Why did you leave? These questions could end up providing good transition or tension stories.

What success did you have in that role? What achievements did you or your team enjoy that you are particularly proud of? Did you win any awards? Did you

struggle with one aspect of the role or one person in your team that you worked through? Asking yourself these questions can bring up potential triumph stories you could use.

Do you have any regrets from that job that could form tragedy stories? Did you take a course of action or make a decision that ended up being the wrong call and something you regret? Was a strong relationship with one of your peers or clients destroyed that you wish hadn't been? Did something happen to one of your colleagues that had a devastating impact on you, which you still think about today? Did you learn a valuable lesson from a mistake? Remember, tragedy stories don't always have to be about significant loss; they can be about regret and the lessons you learned.

The table on the following page shows an example of how you might start to fill out your work-related stories table. Don't worry if not every role you've had gives you as much detail as this. As you move through all the jobs you've had, more stories will come.

Approach 1: Work-related Stories

Job	e.g. 2011 – 2014 Operations Manager, Technology ANZ
Story Type	Specific Events
Triumph	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After a very challenging 6 months and a terrible review, I changed my approach to this leadership role dramatically. • I started opening up to my team about my personal life to create better connections. • More importantly I started checking in on each team member by asking questions about how things were going for them, both professionally and personally. • I forced myself to be a better listener and also encouraged greater collaboration. • My next review improved dramatically with excellent feedback about my leadership and creating a cohesive team environment.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within the first year of working in this job, my sister, Ellen,

Tragedy	<p>was diagnosed with breast cancer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This was very challenging, as I couldn't visit easily as we lived in another state. • I felt like I was not able to support her like I would have if I were still back in Adelaide. • There were many times when I questioned if I had made the right decision in relocating away from our extended family. • It felt like a very long year both professionally and personally. • To help me through this guilt, I used to Skype Ellen on a regular basis • Thankfully she has been in remission now for 3 years.
Tension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When I started the job I tried to match my leadership style with what I thought it was to be a leader. • I thought I needed to show everyone who was boss by being authoritative and I didn't show any emotion. • This made some working relationships very difficult and I was devastated when I received terrible feedback from my team after a few months. • I also felt like a fraud because it wasn't my natural personality. • It wasn't until I received such negative feedback from my team that I realised I needed help and approached a colleague for mentoring and support with my leadership style.
Transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This job required my family and I to relocate from Adelaide to Melbourne. • It was a big step-up as it was my first real leadership role. • I felt out of my depth at first and I was also trying to get my head around living in a new city. • My children had to start over at a new school and we no longer had the support of family who were back in Adelaide.

- I left my old job as I felt I had accomplished everything I could and I wanted a challenge.
- Not knowing many Melbourne people in the workplace and also in my personal life made me feel quite isolated at times.

Approach 2: Finding non-work-related stories

Now it's time to find some personal stories you could use. Use a fresh sheet of paper and again divide it into five columns, this time with the following labels:

1. experience
2. triumph
3. tragedy
4. tension
5. transition.

Next, think through your past — from your earliest memories to your most recent — and write down the significant events that have happened in your life. Remember, you can determine what is 'significant'. The fact that you remember these experiences probably indicates that they are significant to you, even at an unconscious level.

Try not to analyse the experiences that emerge; just write them down. Just because you have added them to your table doesn't mean you will necessarily share them. One of the key rules of storytelling in business is that you as the storyteller determine what stories you share and with whom. So you may be willing to share a particular story with your team or in a one-on-one coaching conversation, but not necessarily with a client or on stage to 500 people.

Once you have lots of different events and memories, put a tick in one of the four columns to indicate what type of story it may be: triumph, tragedy, tension and/or transition. You'll likely find one story could be two of the four types of stories. For example, a story could be both a tension and transition story, or tension and triumph story. No right or wrong answer exists, so tick both columns the story applies to. Try not to tick more than two types of stories, though, because this will just make things confusing.

The following illustration shows an example of how you might start to fill out your non-work-related stories table.

Approach 2: Non-work-related Stories

Experience	Triumph	Tragedy	Tension	Transition
Falling off my bike and breaking my arm when I was 4 years old.		✓		
Fighting with my parents as a teenager about attending a concert.			✓	
Travelling overseas alone at the same time as the 9/11 attacks.				✓
Achieving my first marathon at the age of 40.	✓			

Reviewing your tables

Once you have completed approaches 1 and 2, count up the number of work- and non-work-related stories you have for each of the four different story types. You don't need an even number of work- or non-work-related stories, and you don't need a perfectly even spread across the four types. Rather, this step will help you to see if you have any major gaps — if you have too many of one type of story or not enough of another.

For example, you would not want all your stories to be about tension because this could indicate you are indecisive or overly stressed. Likewise, you wouldn't want to have only triumph stories or your listeners will think you're bragging — real life is a mixture of positive memories and challenging ones.

Revisit your tables if you have any gaps, and add some more memories if you need to.

At the end of this process, you will have a valuable collection of story 'gems' that you can potentially share in business — but don't just stop here. I encourage you to keep adding to this collection as time goes on. Other significant events will happen and you'll have even more great stories to choose from.

Adding to your collection

Once you experience the power of stories, you will start to notice stories that you can add to your collection everywhere. Things will just happen to you as you go about your life and you'll naturally start to see how you might be able to use them in a business setting.

Children or nieces and nephews are a fantastic story source — they work so well for me that my kids have suggested I pay them \$5 every time I use them in a story. I think that is a pretty good deal.

One such example from my youngest daughter, Jess, comes to mind. When Britain's new Prime Minister, Theresa May, came into power shortly after Brexit was announced, I was driving the kids to school, listening to the news on the radio. News reports kept replaying her cry of, 'Brexit means Brexit'. After a few minutes of this Jess, who was 12 at the time, asked in a very confused voice, 'Mum, why is everyone so obsessed about breakfast this morning?'

And I thought to myself, *That story is going straight into the collection.* I knew that I could use it to highlight how easily miscommunication can happen — and \$5 is going straight into Jess's bank account.

What story, when?

Of course, you will not share all the stories you collect and you'll need to decide which story is the best to share when. So how do you decide? That's a good question and my answer is the same as the Cheshire Cat's reply to Alice in Wonderland when she asked about which way she should go: 'That depends a good deal on where you want to get to'.

Ultimately, what is your purpose? What message are you trying to get across to your audience? What do you want them to take away from the story? Once you determine these aspects, you are then in a better position to choose the most appropriate story for your message.

From trivial to triumph

When I went to the hairdresser's recently, I realised I had inadvertently scheduled a meeting afterwards that meant I needed to get out of the hair appointment quicker than usual. I told my hairdresser, Paul, this and he said, 'I'll see what I can do'. When he got to drying my hair, he used two hairdryers in one hand to halve the time it would take to dry! I often share this story as an example of excellent customer service or process improvement. It is also a great example that you can find stories absolutely anywhere!

Stories about cooking Christmas dinner or making sure your sideburns are trimmed evenly may seem trivial at first, but with the right business message behind them they can easily be turned into stories of triumph, tragedy, tension or transition. Ironically, these day-to-day stories that may seem small and insignificant to you can actually turn out to be the most powerful.

Regardless of how you find your inspiration, you will need to develop your idea into a well-constructed story that you can speak about and tell. This will ensure your story is engaging to the listener and effective in getting your business message understood.

When sharing stories in business you cannot afford to ramble and go off topic. You need discipline, which comes with planning and practice. It is important to spend time writing out the stories you have decided to share before practising them out loud. This may feel like a big investment in time but you will get the best return on your investment.

Make your stories work

In this chapter, you learned to find stories using two approaches:

1. finding work-related stories
2. finding non-work-related stories.

You then reviewed your stories for any gaps — checking whether you had too many of one type of story or not enough of another. And you were reminded to keep adding to your collection of stories as time goes on, no matter how trivial your memories or events may seem at the time.

The next chapter takes you through a process to plan, write and construct your chosen stories.

Chapter 4

How to construct and share your stories

Now you know the four types of stories you need, and you've come up with a list of potential memories and stories that you can use. This serves as your 'go-to' list. As you identify a business message or situation where you need to use a story, you can look at this list and craft the relevant story you need.

Of course, it's a good idea to pick a few stories to get you going. As you'll soon see, preparation is key when it comes to effective storytelling.

So let's walk through how you construct and craft a story. First, you'll need to write or type out your story before you hone it and practise presenting it. This will help you craft a story that is succinct and relevant, and means you'll have something to keep referring back to over time.

To begin crafting your stories, let's look at some storytelling advice that has withstood the test of time. Aristotle, the Greek philosopher, invented this simple three-step story structure back in 350 BC:

1. beginning
2. middle
3. end.

Let's look at each in more detail.

The beginning

How do you start a story? Often, the best approach is with time and place. Some examples include:

- ‘When I was a kid, I lived in Switzerland ...’
- ‘This morning when I was taking the dog for a walk ...’
- ‘In grade 3, I had a best friend called Lizzy ...’
- ‘When I was kid, we would always go camping on holidays ...’
- ‘On 9 December 2007, I received a phone call ...’

Stories that start with a specific date, and sometimes an exact time, often indicate that what you are about to share is something quite significant. I would, therefore, try to only start a story with a specific date and/or time if the story is genuinely significant (most likely a triumph or tragedy story) or the information is relevant.

Referencing time and place is a great signal to your audience that you are about to tell them a story (rather than bore them with a bunch of facts and data from last year’s conference). As you’ll remember from chapter 1, as humans we are not only hardwired to tell stories, but also hardwired to listen to stories. As soon as your audience starts listening to your story, their brains will start reliving your experience as if it were theirs.

Try to avoid starting with something like, ‘Let me tell you a story ...’ because this can come across a bit condescending. Can you picture the eyerolls? And if you flag it as a ‘true story’, your listeners will think that all your other stories are lies. Remember, one of the keys to your stories is authenticity.

A successful story will quickly establish time and place to hook and maintain the attention of your audience. One of the most common mistakes people make with the beginning is to ramble. They either waffle on with too much detail or fail to decide between facts — for example, ‘12 years ago when I was travelling to Australia, actually it was more like 13 years ago. Oh, I remember, it was about 11 and half years ago because it was just after my thirtieth birthday and I am about to turn 42 ...’ This kind of beginning is a sure-fire way to lose the attention of your audience before you have even started your story.

The point of the opening is to be short and succinct, and set a little context. It’s

not meant to provide your working history or a thorough background on what you are about to talk about. Be clear and to the point.

The middle

After a short and sharp beginning, you move to the crux of your story. Some key factors here determine whether your story is successful or not.

Be disciplined with the detail

When crafting the middle of your story, keep questioning whether the detail you have included is relevant to your message. If it is, you can leave it in; if it isn't, you need to delete it.

Storytelling in business is a discipline. You need to have the discipline to leave out the irrelevant details of the story, even if you think these details might be funny, or you enjoy sharing them. If you put things into the story because you like sharing them and they're not related to your message or your audience, then your storytelling becomes about you and not about your listener. Don't be self-indulgent with the stories you share in business.

You may have a great story that you could use for several different business situations. You need to pick the details that are relevant to each individual story and message. So you may use the same story but with different details — if the business message is different, you may not need all the same details. The key is to tweak your story for each different situation where you use it.

Also avoid unnecessary facts and figures in your story. When you include too much logical data, you reduce the chance that your audience will be able to emotionally connect to what you're saying.

During a recent workshop, for example, I had a participant share the following:

“ At 7.30 last Wednesday night, I was sitting on the couch when I heard a large crash. We live approximately 150 metres from a main intersection and when I looked out my window I could see that two cars had collided. I ran to the crash and arrived first at the scene about three minutes later. About two minutes after me, other neighbours started to arrive.

See how all the numbers and details included force your brain to work really hard to follow the story?

An alternative might be:

“ Last Wednesday night I was sitting on my couch and heard a large crash. I

live really close to a major intersection and when I looked out the window I could see two cars had collided. I ran to the scene and I was the first to arrive with other neighbours arriving within minutes.

This is clearer, concise and far more engaging.

Name the main characters

Your stories will always include people, so name them. If you are talking about your children, name them. If you are talking about your partner, name them ('the wife' or 'husband' doesn't count). If you are talking about your best mate at school or favourite teacher, name them — Doris, Bob, Jane, Jim and so on. (It's okay to call your parents Mum and Dad, or your grandparents Pop, Nana or Grandma.)

The trick here is to name the main characters, not each and every person who gets included. For example, a client of mine once shared a beautiful story about a mechanic he had met on a family holiday. He started his story with, 'Last year I went on a family driving holiday with my wife, Sue, and our three children, Harry, Lucy and Tom, to the Gold Coast'. However, Sue, Harry, Lucy and Tom weren't mentioned for the rest of the story, because the story was about Rob the mechanic. In this instance, you would simply start with, 'Last year we went on a family driving holiday to the Gold Coast'.

Unless your story is from a long time ago (involving, say, your grade 1 teacher), make sure you ask for permission to use someone in your story. Most people don't mind — in fact, they often feel quite honoured, especially if the story paints them in a good light. However, you can also offer to change their name — after all, you're not providing key identifying features such as their surname, age and tax file number. A first name is not usually an issue. If you do change their name, you don't need to spell it out to your audience that this is not their real name. Doing so is unnecessary, interrupts your audience's experience and often just leads everyone to try to work out who the story is about and if they know them.

You may find you don't know the names of some people in your stories. Avoid saying something like, 'Let's just call them James'. This implies the story is not authentic or real. Saying instead that you can't recall their name or that you were never introduced is okay. In some cases, this is a lot more powerful because it shows that even though you don't know their name, you remember the incident.

The following is a great example of how to craft a story if you don't know your

main character's names. It's a story told by Jack Percy, former managing director of Accenture, Australia and New Zealand.

When I was 20 and in my second year of university at Trinity College, Cambridge, I was doing a subject on non-linear differential equations. One day the tutor, who was from King's College, told the story of how the King's College bar was losing money. Since it shut at 10 pm someone suggested keeping it open until 11 pm wouldn't cost much more and they'd then have an extra hour in which they could sell stuff. So they did that and they made even less money.

Someone then suggested they keep the bar open until midnight — which was abruptly ridiculed by the linear thinkers, who believed that if keeping the bar open for one more hour lost them more money, then keeping it open for a further hour would increase losses further. My tutor then explained that the problem was not in fact linear, as it appeared to be, meaning the solution should also be considered in a non-linear way. The midnight trial went ahead and they started making lots of money.

What had happened was that all the other college bars closed at 11 pm, so with King's open until midnight people would leave the other bars as they were closing and go to King's and, in fact, many started going there in the first place so they would not have to move on when all the other bars closed.

I cannot recall the tutor's name or much of the subject. However, I still remember the story in detail to this day. And I remember the message it carried, which resonated with me and went some way to shaping my view of the world. Throughout my personal and professional life I have often recalled this story and the message behind it to help guide me in finding the non-linear solution to problems that often appear linear, but aren't.

This to me highlights the power of storytelling. A story helps people truly understand what you are saying, helps them remember it and can have a lasting impact. As leaders, parents or friends, in every aspect of our lives, we often have important messages to share — and storytelling is the perfect vehicle to get those messages across in a way that connects, engages and inspires.

Keep your language real

Your stories have no room for corporate jargon — ever. Remember, the reason

you are sharing your story is to create an emotional connection. Your audience needs to feel something and visualise your experience. To help you achieve this, you need to try to keep your language as real as possible.

Saying 'my objectives were not met' is no way to describe the bike you missed out on at Christmas when you were eight. Neither is saying the 'project was delivered on time and under budget' if you're talking about the birth of your first child.

Too often in business we use language that is safe and try to avoid describing our emotions. We use words like 'anxious' instead of 'scared'; 'disappointed' instead of 'sad'. The point is to connect with your audience in an authentic way and that means using genuine, heartfelt everyday words we can all relate to.

The end

Ending your story and making sure it links to a clear business message is one of the hardest aspects of storytelling. A successful story ending consists of three parts:

1. *bridge*: to bring your audience's attention back to business
2. *link*: to transfer your message
3. *pause*: to let the message sink in.

Let's look at each in a bit more detail.

The bridge

A bridging sentence brings your audience back to a business context and is critical when you've used a non-work-related story. It is not as necessary if you are sharing a work-related story.

Simple bridging sentences include:

- 'I am sharing this with you because ...'
- 'When I reflected on this it reminded me of what we are trying to do ...'

The link

The link is the final one or two sentences in your story that connect the story back to your purpose, but without you being too direct or repetitive.

Examples of a link include:

- 'Imagine what we could achieve if ...'
- 'Just think of what we could do if ...'
- 'I invite you to ...'

To ensure your ending is more inviting and respectful, try to use 'we' instead of 'you'. 'Imagine if we could do this' is far more inclusive than 'Imagine if you could do this'. 'I invite you to ...' is also more inclusive and respectful than 'I ask you to ...' or 'You need to start ...'

Never end your story with, 'The moral of the story is ...' When you end your story like this you are telling people what the message is when you should allow

them to reach their own conclusion.

The pause

The final part of your story is the pause at the end. You need to stop talking and pause for effect.

The pause only needs to be one or two seconds long. You could even try the strategic move of taking a sip of water, which allows for a longer pause.

The pause is where your audience connects to your story. You need to be prepared for the usual awkwardness that comes from a little bit of silence and know that the pause is where the magic happens.

Practice makes perfect

It is really important to practise sharing your stories. When you speak your story out loud, you identify different areas for improvement from when you read it to the person in your head. You pick up words or phrases that don't feel 'right' for you, or are not the normal way you talk or describe something. Phrases that feel unnatural can trip you up when you're actually presenting your story on the day — remember, you won't be reading from a piece of paper!

Practising is also important because you don't want to forget critical bits of the story. You want your bridge and link to flow smoothly, for example. You also want to make sure you practise pausing for effect at the end, because this will make sure your story is as effective as it can be.

Where to share your stories

Last year, I bought a new pair of shoes — well, actually I bought quite a few new pairs of shoes last year, but this is about one particular purchase. At first I really liked them, but when I started looking closer I realised I loved them! I felt like they were made for me because the story behind the brand was written on the leather that formed part of the shoe. The story read:

“ The Django and Juliette footwear brand is the brainchild of Kerrie Munro. With the arrival of her twin nephew and niece in 2001, who were uniquely named Django and Juliette respectively, a distinctive footwear brand was born in Melbourne, Australia, at the same time.

This same story is also used on their website, and it helps explain where you can share your stories (as well as where you find them). The reality is you have so many places to share stories and, as Django and Juliette have shown, you can get creative with where you share your stories. If a story can be shared on a shoe, it can be shared pretty much anywhere. Whenever you need to build rapport or credibility quickly a story will help. Whenever you need to get people to think of something differently, a story will also help. What's more, if you really want your messages to be fully understood and remembered, a story will support you to do this.

Make your stories work

As you saw in this chapter, Aristotle invented a brilliant three-step story structure that has withstood the test of time:

1. beginning
2. middle
3. end.

Use this structure to write or type out the stories you select from your memories in chapter 3.

You then need to refine and practise speaking your stories out loud to ensure they are succinct, relevant and have impact. Once you've done that, you can look at where you can share your stories.

The chapters in the next part provide real examples from real people and real stories that they have used in one of several business contexts:

- presentations
- organisational change
- sales
- company values and vision
- personal brand
- coaching
- job interviews
- newsletters and blogs.

Part II

Sharing your stories

My intention for the following chapters is to inspire you to think about where you can share your stories — and the reality is your stories can be shared anywhere. If you are doing a presentation, you should open with a story that gives you credibility on the subject you are about to speak on or shows your passion for the subject.

If you are in a sales meeting you should use stories to quickly build rapport, demonstrate your values or explain your product or offering in a better way.

When implementing organisational change, especially in large organisations, you can share a story — lots of stories, in fact — to cater for different stakeholder groups and the variety of messages you'll be required to communicate.

And you simply can't communicate your company values without stories. Sharing a relevant personal story will help those around you connect and engage on a much deeper level with what your company values.

The same is true for your own values. Sharing stories that demonstrate your personal values is much more credible than simply telling people what your values are. Stories also help establish your very own personal brand — what you stand for and what you want others to think of when they think of you.

In coaching and mentoring sessions, stories can encourage others to see things from a different perspective. Stories can open up your audience's once-closed minds. This approach is much more effective than just telling them what they should do and why. Let them come to their own conclusions based on their own values and judgement.

When you are going for a job interview, you should use a variety of work and personal stories to help you connect with your interviewer and stand out from all the other candidates. This is a great opportunity to demonstrate your values and capabilities in an engaging way — instead of simply regurgitating the information from your resume.

Stories also work in a written format — newsletters, blogs or on your website (like the Django and Juliette example from chapter 4 shows). Online is a great

place to start sharing stories if you don't feel comfortable or confident enough to share your story in person yet. The positive reaction you will receive from a well-written blog can give you greater confidence when sharing a story face to face.

Read the examples in each of the following chapters, which have been used many times by the people who provided them. The stories have come from leaders, professionals and executives at all different levels of organisations and in a variety of industries. They show how much flexibility and creativity you have around where and how you share your stories and with whom.

Chapter 5

Stories that work for presentations

Ever had to sit through an hour-long PowerPoint presentation of mind-numbing facts, figures and stats? Now imagine if that data had been brought to life with an interesting and engaging story instead.

It doesn't matter what type of presentation you have to give or to whom, the most memorable presenters usually start with sharing a personal story — just look at the popular TED talks, for example.

Start well ...

A well-crafted and purposeful story will capture your audience's attention from the get-go, show off your passion for the subject you're about to talk about and give you instant credibility.

Why would you waste your valuable opening moments — the time when someone will decide whether they are going to listen to you or continue checking their phone — with impersonal details and objectives, or explanations of where the toilets are located?

The most memorable and engaging speeches or presentations are always the ones linked to a story. You may remember, for example, when anticipation was growing for former president Bill Clinton to take the stage in support of his wife Hillary's nomination for presidency at the 2016 Democratic National Convention. He walked onto the stage and opened with: 'In the spring of 1971, I met a girl ...' He then proceeded to share a very personal story of how he met and fell in love with his wife.

This visibly affected the audience and an immediate connection was formed, not just to Bill but to Hillary as well. The speech went down as one of the most memorable in that political campaign (although the Clinton defeat obviously shows that even storytelling has its limits!).

... And don't stop there

While stories are a very powerful way to start any presentation, ending on a story is just as effective. You also don't have to stop at using one story. Using one main story and referencing back to this with several other stories is a more advanced technique but is really powerful when you pull it off, like Sheryl Sandberg did in May 2016 at the UC Berkeley commencement.

Sandberg is the chief operating officer at Facebook and author of the best-selling book *Lean In*, and during her 25-minute keynote speech at the commencement she referenced an astounding 10 stories! From a story about her grandmother, who attended Berkeley in the 1970s and became the first college graduate in her family, to a story about the death of her husband.

This tragic story showed courage and vulnerability, and what she had learnt during times of adversity. While the story of her husband was only a couple of minutes in length, she referred back to it several times throughout her speech to bring to life the messages she wanted to communicate. Sandberg also effectively used humour to lighten what could have been quite a sombre speech.

The following stories have also been shared during presentations to communicate, engage and connect with the audience in a unique and memorable way.

Money matters

Suzanne Smith is general manager of Group Insurance at MLC. The following story about her mum opened a women and money event, and was designed to stress the importance of taking control of your finances. As it was the first speech of the day, it was really important she set the right scene and tone for the following presenters and the rest of the event. She had a lot riding on this story, in other words.

Story

I was delighted to be asked to host the event today as financial literacy for women is very close to my heart.

As a young girl, I grew up in a single-parent household with a devoted mum

whose focus was to work to make ends meet and provide for my older brother and me. This was during that time in the 1970s when there was no compulsory superannuation for women and receipt of any maintenance payments from the other parent was at best random.

Mum worked in aged care nursing as a career and her salary was on the low side so we lived from pay to pay and my brother and I got part-time jobs to have pocket money to buy the extra things we needed.

In her 50s, Mum was lucky enough to get a modest inheritance, which enabled her to purchase her own home. This also gave her some security in retirement. Mum did retire with a small pot of superannuation, but the global financial crisis did its best to wipe out a large part of that, meaning that she is now down to the pension and help from me.

I often think about how things might have been different for Mum if she had accessed some advice around investing to plan for retirement early in her life to give her a sense of discipline around budgeting and smarter management of money. I don't think she ever thought she had enough to save or had enough that warranted seeing someone for financial advice. But in reality we all know the value of putting that little bit away, or effective budgeting. It is a lesson I now instil in my children as my 15-year-old daughter has recently got her first part-time job.

Today we are going to hear from some financial experts who will share information about strategies and programs that would have made a huge difference to my mum and who can make a great difference to women who want to know more about financial literacy and who are prepared to be serious about investing in their own financial accountability.

Outcome

Many women approached Suzanne straight after that story, thanking her and also sharing similar stories from their own experiences with their family. She also received an email from the organisers of the event, referencing the story:

Your personal stories about your mother at the beginning really set the tone for the event and then you pulled it all together to finish by sharing your small but simple and effective strategy you had implemented to give your daughter and son a great start. It was really inspiring and very well received.

As Suzanne says, ‘This reinforced to me the power of stories and has given me greater confidence to use storytelling to connect and deliver messages’.

Big blue whale

Erika Lanza is the marketing manager at the Bank of Melbourne. Erika was asked to present to the executive leadership team on their task for the next three months, which was to sell over 65 tables and sponsorships for their upcoming gala dinner to their customers. Erika felt they were going to need a little bit of inspiration to reach the target, so she wanted to reassure the leadership team that with a little bit of planning and time commitment over the next few weeks, the big task of selling tables wouldn’t seem as daunting. This is her story.

Story

It was the start of term 3 in Grade 4. My teacher set the task of completing a project and told us we could pick any topic we liked. I chose my favourite ocean creature, the big blue whale. It was due at the end of term 3 — 10 weeks away.

I did all the research up front — read encyclopaedias, borrowed library books — and followed Mum’s advice to do little bits at a time so it was easier to manage and not left to the last minute. The end of term 3 was in 10 weeks — I had plenty of time, right!

However, as the weeks went by I got lazy and didn’t prioritise my blue whale project over having fun with friends and family. I got to the last week and I still had a lot of my project to complete. I worked on it all weekend and rushed through it; I didn’t put in as much effort as I could have and let myself down. My whale drawings were scrappy and my content was disjointed, and on top of all that I didn’t get to enjoy the last few days of term 3 with my friends.

The gala dinner might seem like a big blue whale of a project, but it can be easier to manage if we do little bits at a time.

If we all prepare and plan our time now and work on the things that matter, like selling tables, we can spend the last few weeks focusing on how we give our customers and guests a quality experience. Our big gala whale will be a

huge success.

Outcome

The event was a tremendous success, with 68 tables sold. Erika says of the experience,

It was quite daunting to share this in front of the leadership team, and I was a little nervous going in. The best advice I received was to practise with a friend or colleague so that I could be more confident when speaking and be clear with my business message. It was also important to find my own way to tell the story, using my own tone and language so that it didn't feel too rehearsed or unlike me. It's important to show a more personal and human side in these stories to ensure the message will resonate.

Trust your horse

Michelle Sales is a leadership speaker, coach and trainer. She often shares this story at the end of her programs and keynotes to leave her audience with a sense of empowerment and energy about what is possible when you believe in yourself and have confidence.

Story

In December last year, I took my partner horse riding for his birthday. He grew up on a farm and loved horses but hadn't ridden for 30 years. I grew up in the city and had never ridden apart from a couple of little trail rides when I was about 12.

It was a weekend ride in the high country of Victoria. I had a beautiful horse called Cleopatra, or Cleo for short. The first morning we started slowly. It soon dawned on me that I was the only person who had no real idea of how to ride so I was down the back with Sharon. Sharon was a high country horsewoman; a rough diamond. She was the leader of our group and she gave me the nickname 'Golden Girl'. She rode right behind me and got me trotting by lunchtime on the first day.

Over lunch she took me aside and told me the plan to be cantering by the afternoon. We were going to head up the mountain and back down again,

The Man from Snowy River style. I was shitting myself! But we headed out.

I could almost feel Sharon at my back. She explained to me the technique and I'd start and then stop. I'm sure Cleo could tell I was nervous and so she didn't really get going either. I was being left behind. And then all of a sudden Sharon comes up really close behind me and says, 'Okay, I'm going to give Cleo a big whack and you're going to canter to the top of the mountain. Are you ready?'

I agreed, meekly. So Sharon whacks Cleo and I take off, with Sharon yelling 'Golden Girl — have confidence in yourself and trust your horse!'

I was off. I cantered to the top of the mountain yelling, 'Woohoo!' Feeling so light and as if anything was possible.

So when I think of what I was able to do on that horse, with trust and confidence, I think of all of you. Imagine what would be possible if you had trust and confidence in yourself. What ride would you choose to take that you may not have already considered? What was previously out of reach that can now be yours?

Outcome

I have seen Michelle present this story several times, and each time it moves her audience in more and more powerful ways. Many have tears in their eyes at the end, because it is a story that really seems to hit a chord and ignite something in their own heart.

Don't be a donkey

Lynne Cazaly is a speaker, author and trainer. She uses this story at the start of her presentation on agile cultures, VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) and leading change. Lynne believes this story helps explain the abstract concept of 'change' — what it really looks like and feels like — in real language that everyone can understand.

Story

I was on the twentieth floor of a building in the Melbourne CBD, waiting to go into a meeting with a leadership team. I'd signed in to the security area on that floor and I was waiting to receive my access pass from the security

guard, Joe. I'd met him a couple of times previously so I asked him, 'How are you, Joe?'

He replied, 'You know what, man? It's crazy out there' (he gestured out into the building). 'There is rumour and gossip, comings and goings and job insecurity. And I don't mean you need to get a job in security, like me!' he laughed.

'The world's gone mad,' he continued. 'It's crazy out there ... cray-cray. One day the shit is going to hit the fan.'

I agreed with him wholeheartedly and we had a laugh about 'cray-cray'.

Given I was speaking to the leadership team that day about how they could respond in this volatile and crazy world, I asked Joe what he thought our best response was in these weird, changing times.

His advice was, 'Don't be a donkey.'

'A donkey?' I asked. 'What do you mean by that?'

'You know, a donkey — whingeing, whining, "Eeyore, Eeyore",' he said, referring to the pessimistic and negative donkey character in the Winnie-the-Pooh books by AA Milne.

'Don't be a donkey! Do something!'

With that piece of advice delivered, Joe farewelled me and directed me through to the meeting area to meet up with the leadership team and begin my work.

Outcome

Lynne loves this light-hearted take on 'stop whingeing about change'. When she shares this story on-stage she uses a different voice to mimic Joe. Her audience always laughs and applauds, like he's a character they can all relate to in their lives. People often come up to her at the conference or event where she has used the story and say things like, 'I love Joe' or 'Don't be a donkey!' or 'He sounds great that Joe, he's real!'

Make your stories work

As you've just seen, stories really help to bring a presentation to life. They are a great way of personalising and bringing character and humanity into everyday situations.

In the next chapter, we look at how you can use stories to build trust and help you communicate an organisational change or drive a behavioural change in your team.

Chapter 6

Stories that work for change

One of the biggest challenges facing organisations and leaders today is change. This may mean implementing an organisation-wide change or a change within your team. You may also need to get an individual to do something differently — to change a behaviour, mindset or their priorities.

Regardless of the situation, the problem is that we are often so used to ‘the way things are’ that we dig in our heels and refuse to move, or even listen to another’s point of view.

In the past, organisational change was managed via a very thorough, albeit drawn-out, process. This process consisted of months of planning and off-site strategy sessions, followed by collaboration sessions designed to increase employee engagement, and a detailed stakeholder management and communication plan, where scripted messages would be filtered through the organisation via beautifully designed PowerPoint presentations.

Many say this rarely achieved success. The rapid rate of change in today’s world means that our PowerPoint decks are out of date long before they’ve even been spell checked, and most of our audience are usually asleep at the click of the first bullet-point slide.

When it comes to encouraging others to adopt a change, especially if the change relates to a habit that they have been doing ‘forever’, it’s not uncommon to be met with stony silence and disengagement.

Leaders are now forced to communicate change in a more agile and personal way, to cut through the ‘noise’ and information overload that employees deal with every day. So you can probably see why storytelling is so critical for communicating a challenge or change.

These days, employees want fewer facts and less information, and more emotion and meaningful connection. What does this change really mean? How will I personally be affected? Why should I care about yet another change? Why should I change the way I work just because you tell me to do so?

An authentic story related to a business message can make this connection more powerfully than a list of points, ‘you should do this ...’ remarks and pretty

images.

Storytelling for organisational change

Over the last decade, I have worked extensively with a variety of different corporations and industries to help skill leaders in storytelling that is directly related to organisational change. Through this, I have identified three key factors for effective storytelling:

1. An organisation needs to have a culture that is comfortable with their leaders demonstrating vulnerability and emotion.
2. An organisation needs to invest in skilling senior leaders across the organisation in storytelling, as well as skilling key support staff such as those in corporate affairs and HR.
3. The CEO and senior executive team of the organisation need to role model both storytelling and story listening.

Christine Corbett, chief customer officer at Australia Post, sponsors one of corporate Australia's largest organisational change initiatives (explored in chapter 13). Christine sees storytelling as a critical part of this change:

“ When leaders communicate in their own words, in a story that means something to them, others remember and relate to this story and re-tell it over and over again. To have this effect, you need to invest the time in getting out and talking to your teams and hearing their stories. They are the ones who really know what works and will make a difference.

The ripple effect

Since stories create an emotional connection, we are more likely to remember them, understand them and re-tell them to other people. This creates a ripple effect in an organisation, similar to how the grapevine works (which we see in chapter 8), where stories are shared between employees by choice and help to break down any barriers against the behaviour or organisational change.

This is key when it comes to driving change of any kind.

Over the next few pages, you'll find some examples of real stories that leaders have used to instigate an organisational change or encourage others to do something differently, changing a behaviour, their mindset or priorities.

Surf's up

Paul Quickenden is the CEO of Putti, a New Zealand company that provides a low-cost, high-quality platform for fast production of mobile apps and websites. Paul often has to encourage his worldwide team to keep an eye on the market so that they can change and adapt quickly. This is the story he shares with his leaders and business units.

Story

Last summer, my two eldest kids and I were at the beach boogie boarding. As the surf was up, I was out in the water with them and helping them catch the waves. Everyone was having a great time. We were swimming between the flags and three lifeguards were on duty.

At one stage, I had my son out in the breakers and I looked to see where my daughter, Alex, was after her last ride. I noticed that she'd drifted quite a bit along the shore, so I yelled out for her to come closer. Then I turned my attention back to the waves, watching for the next big set for my son. But instead of seeing regular lines of waves, the water was all churned up. Something was wrong.

I turned to my daughter, but this time I really looked. While in the shallows and genuinely trying to get to me, she was even further away from me. My alarm bells went off. Right then my son, Danny, and I, plus a 10-year-old girl swimming close by, got caught in the same rip. The speed and the power was quite something.

Danny and the girl swimming close by hadn't recognised it. I looked at the lifeguards, but they hadn't noticed we were in trouble. So it was just me. I yelled to Alex to quit trying to get to me, and get to shore. She already knew something was up, and my tone of voice confirmed that it was serious. So she changed tack, got her feet down and got to safety. I had hold of my son, who was still goofing around, but tied to a floating boogie board. The girl was just swimming, and was getting further away from us. Despite her efforts, she couldn't close the gap. She began to panic. It was time for drastic action.

So I got my son on top of his boogie board and told him if he let go of it, he would never use an iPad again. Now he knew it was serious. Then I let go of him and made my way to the girl. I grabbed her, and pulled her toward my son, grabbed him and then pulled them both into shore. Crisis averted.

For most people, including the lifeguards, it was a crisis that never was.

They simply hadn't recognised it. The people who should have seen it were wondering, 'What happened?'

The reason I am sharing this with you is because it reminds me of the market we are playing in. Within a blink of an eye, conditions can change and if we don't see them, we could be sitting on the sidelines wondering what happened.

Outcome

'The personal aspect of the story really worked. People connected with it much more profoundly than I thought they would. It is the same message that every strategy book or consultancy peddles,' says Paul, 'but the story seemed to have greater impact'.

Paul also comments that a lot of people use your typical sporting analogies in the context of handling pressure but this story is unique and has much more impact.

Pay it forward

Barbara Hepponstall is a manager at Accenture, where she recently took on a new team leader role. She was dreading her first meeting with her new team because it coincided with the re-organisation of her team in another location. She didn't know how her team would perceive these changes and thought they would be fearful of their own jobs.

It was her first day in the role, so she had not yet been able to establish a relationship with her team, let alone build any trust. She wanted to let them know that, irrespective of the constant change in the organisation, she would be by their side, supporting, guiding and mentoring them in any way she could to enable their success.

Story

Arriving in Australia as a migrant in 1989, I had no idea it was going to be so difficult to find employment. My background and work experience was in hospitality; specifically, the airline industry.

Eight months later, after several temporary assignments, I considered myself extremely fortunate when I was offered a permanent role with a global

accounting firm, which I accepted gratefully. While it wasn't exactly what I'd had in mind, it was the first opportunity I'd had to get the much sought-after 'Australian work experience' I'd been told I was missing at each previous interview.

A year later, having gained additional and relevant skills for office administration, I was offered another opportunity for an internal role as an EA, supporting a high-profile leader and her team. I was thrilled and honoured that someone thought I fitted the bill — but terrified I would let them down.

With the fear of failure in the background but the determination to succeed even stronger, I embarked on what would turn out to be a life-changing decision. It was the beginning of my own journey of self-discovery and became the reason I am still with this employer.

Despite my obvious lack of experience in the role, Jane, the executive I supported, patiently showed me how to navigate my way through this new environment. Jane played a significant support role in my life down the track. She saw something in me I didn't see in myself and shared her wisdom by coaching, guiding and mentoring me with the grace and sensitivity I love and respect her for. Jane gave me the opportunity to grow professionally and, when I hit several painful snags in my personal life, Jane gently but firmly steered me toward recovery until I could resume living as usual and working once more.

I am sharing this with you because, as Jane supported me, my promise to you is that I will be here to support you. I invite each of you to let me know what you expect from me and what you need from me. I am paying it forward in honour of Jane, whose authentic leadership changed my life and career experience.

Outcome

Barbara reports that she received resoundly positive feedback for her story, which was a totally different outcome from what she was expecting. 'To my utter astonishment, the two most experienced men in the team shed tears and were choked up as they and each of the team responded to my questions at the end,' she says.

Resting grumpy face

This next example is from Nathan Jenson, who works in a safety leadership role at the environment group, AECOM. Some of the challenges he faces when presenting is that people have a closed mindset when it comes to safety. He shares this story to help change their mindset and behaviours around safety issues in the organisation.

Story

At the turn of the millennium, I was studying environmental science at Queensland University of Technology. While I was studying, I took a job on my friend's flower farm, helping out with horticulture and plant production.

About 10 people worked on the farm when I started — men and women of all ages, shapes and sizes. Most people were friendly. I do, however, distinctly remember one of the more mature ladies, whose name was Neola. Neola had a resting facial expression that made her look ... very 'concerned' and angry.

My first impression was that Neola seemed a bit gruff. I was young and fresh out of school, so you'll have to excuse my mindset, but I remember thinking that I would be better off avoiding Neola because she was probably mean and grumpy.

What I didn't realise until later was I had adopted a belief that if someone looks mean, they are a mean person and I should avoid them. I couldn't have been more wrong. Neola was actually one of the kindest and gentlest ladies I have come to know and I learned a lot from her.

One winter, Neola kindly took quite a lot of time to show me how to properly prune a rose bush, so that the flowers grow long and straight. It's a skill that comes in very handy in the lead-up to Valentine's Day.

I've now turned my old view around and believe that people can be beautiful on the inside even if they appear gruff on the outside.

I mention my friend Neola because, just as I adopted disempowering beliefs around people with grumpy faces, I realise that myself and others on job sites carry disempowering beliefs about safety stewardship.

I was guilty of this when I started my safety stewardship journey five years ago. I didn't realise that I was operating by a few disempowering beliefs —

for example, ‘Safety discussions are boring’, ‘Safety discussions take too long’ and ‘People just want to get on with their job’.

Now that I’m older and so much wiser, I have changed these around to ‘Safety discussions can be fun’, ‘Safety discussions can be brief’ and ‘People don’t want to be injured while they work’.

In the same way I flipped my belief about people with resting grumpy faces to one that serves me better, I know it would serve us remarkably if we found and flipped some of our disempowering beliefs about safety.

Outcome

Nathan feels he has better discussions about safety results when he shares this story, compared to when he doesn’t. As a result, he continues to share this with the teams he works with, because ‘I need to get the audience to understand where I am coming from and I need to get this done in just a few minutes’. Using an emotional story that has a clear purpose helps him achieve this.

Know your priorities

Dermot Crowley is a productivity expert and author of the best-selling book *Smart Work*. He uses a lot of personal stories in his keynotes and workshops when he is trying to encourage a behaviour change. The following story illustrates the power of making the really important stuff stand out in your to-do list.

Story

My father died suddenly in 2001. I am originally from Dublin, but I was living in Sydney at the time, so I was not there when he died. He was the head accountant for an energy company and was a serious man, a man of few words.

My dad had a cabinet in our dining room that no-one was allowed to touch. This was where he kept his important papers and God only knew what else. So, after the funeral, I, my brother and my sister could not help ourselves. We found the key to Dad’s cabinet, and got stuck in.

As expected, there was not much of note, bar one thing that absolutely

floored us. In fact, about 20 things. We found 20 small black journals — journals that he had been keeping on and off for over 40 years! Even my mother did not know about these.

As we flicked through them, we saw that he only ever wrote a couple of lines each day. Just footnotes to the day, really. What the weather was like, that he went for a walk or some other everyday comment. He always wrote with the same neat script, and always, always in black pen.

Except for one day. On a day in the mid-1950s he wrote an entry in red pen. It was the only day he ever deviated from his pattern. And on that day he wrote, ‘Today is the day that I met the woman I am going to marry!’

That was my mother. The thing I learned about my father that day was that he knew how to make the important stuff stand out. Now, I know that your task list might not be quite as dramatic, but the same principle applies. If you find a way to make the really important stuff stand out, you will be more likely to get this stuff done, and to fight for your priorities.

Outcome

‘I love telling this story, and have to hold myself back from using it sometimes in situations where it would not serve. But when used in the right way with the right audience, it creates a memorable moment, and really lands an important productivity lesson,’ Dermot says.

Whenever Dermot shares this story he makes a powerful point about the importance of priorities, without the accompanying lecture that this subject usually lends itself to. It often elicits a gasp or even a tear from the audience, and Dermot believes that it’s this emotional connection that makes an ordinarily dry topic a memorable one instead.

Make your stories work

As you have seen from the examples in this chapter, well-crafted stories can deliver a message around change in a much more compelling and motivating way than simple logic will ever do.

In the next chapter, we look at how to share authentic stories to help you with making a sale.

Chapter 7

Stories that work for sales

In chapter 1 we saw the important role emotion plays when faced with a decision. Those of us who are very good at sales, therefore, know that people buy on emotion — not logic. Emotion is the key to a sale, no matter what the facts state.

Usually in sales conversations, you spend a lot of time on ‘small talk’ and swapping random personal stories to try to build rapport with your customer or a potential client. Building rapport with someone before you launch into what you really want them to buy not only is good business sense, but also makes scientific sense, especially when it comes to storytelling.

Stories are the fastest, easiest and most natural way to build rapport, and establish trust and credibility with someone. However, the stories you share in a sales context must have purpose and be authentic (as covered in chapter 2) because random small talk has not been properly thought through. Stories or conversation with no purpose are hit and miss.

A funny story you tell about getting angry with your teenager on the weekend because he came home drunk at 4 in the morning, for example, could backfire on you and demonstrate your lack of parenting skills or anger management issues. Link the story to a clear business message, however, and it will help develop some common ground with your customer.

Three ways to identify stories for sales

You always have room for spontaneity, especially when it comes to selling, but the trick here is to prepare. The three steps to using stories in sales are as follows:

1. show how others have benefited from your product or service
2. demonstrate your values
3. address any potential concerns the client may have.

Let's look at each step in a bit more detail.

Show product benefits

Showing how others have benefited from your product or service is probably the easiest to do. Don't fall into the trap of just listing the benefits, but rather explain the benefits of what you are offering by sharing stories about what other clients have experienced. This may involve looking at other case studies you have and adding some flair and a story or anecdote to bring them to life.

When I meet with new clients, they often want to hear about the work I have done with other clients similar to them. I choose companies I have worked with that are similar in size or industry, as well as those facing similar challenges that I have helped them successfully deal with.

I also often share small anecdotes or sound bites that participants in my workshops have said to me about how useful they found the training. And I share specific stories about the results people have had after attending my training.

Demonstrate your values

Demonstrating your values or your company's values is not done enough in sales meetings, and it's so important that we will look at this in more detail in chapters 8 and 9.

For now, keep in mind that we often tell others what we value in a dry statement: 'We value customer service' or 'I value trust and am trustworthy'. These statements mean nothing. A client you have worked with previously has had the benefit of time to get to know you and what you value, but you are a complete stranger to any new client you meet. You must demonstrate your values quickly

— and one of the most effective ways to do that is through an authentic and appropriate story.

Think about:

- why you joined the company
- how the company went beyond the call of duty to fix a problem
- what you think is good about the company or product you are selling.

Then think about the stories you can share that illustrate these ideas.

Address any potential concerns

Addressing your client's potential concerns is often overlooked in early sales conversations because it can be the hardest step, especially if you don't know the person.

I know from my own experience that one of my clients' concerns is something along the lines of, 'I hope this storytelling stuff is not all fluff because the leaders in my organisation are a bit cynical about it and if this does not work, it is my career on the line'. Of course, they never actually say this out loud to me (until afterwards) but in our early conversations I share the following story to alleviate their fears:

“ I don't know if you are feeling this, but most people are a little bit concerned that this might be fluff. I imagine your senior leaders have pretty high expectations of the external trainers you bring in and if storytelling isn't relevant to them, you are going to hear about it.

I had one client who had these concerns, so she attended the first workshop with the executive leadership team. Within 15 minutes, I had the whole group engaging in the power of storytelling — and the relief on her face was visible.

The workshops were such a success in that organisation and she received so many accolades for organising them, including a promotion. She said to me a while ago, 'The best career decision I ever made was bringing you into the organisation'.

The following are some more stories that have been used in real sales situations to sell a product or service and its benefits to someone who may be internal or external to the organisation.

Baby cries

Keith Chittleborough has one of the toughest sales jobs in the world: selling a product people need, but don't want. He is an audiologist, hearing aid provider and clinical development consultant for the world's only extended-wear hearing device, the Lyric™.

A particular stigma is attached to wearing hearing aids — unlike glasses, with frames made by companies such as Prada and Armani, hearing aids are not seen as a fashion accessory. New patients often come to Keith with excuses already prepared for why hearing aids are not going to work for them. So, Keith has to not only explain complex technologies, but also get his patient enthusiastic about something they are resisting. This is one of his favourite stories to help with this.

Story

A big, burly 40-year-old bloke comes to see me; his biceps are the size of my thighs. He's nervous, but already excited about the product, having done a bit of his own research. He's found out, because Lyric™ is so deep in the ear canal and the battery lasts for several months, it can be worn even in bed.

Shyly, he tells me he's going to be a dad in a few weeks and he wants to be able to hear his newborn baby cry at night.

He's been wearing Lyric ever since, and his daughter is now nearly three years old.

Outcome

In just a few sentences, Keith's story sums up a particular product feature (24-hour amplification) and how it changed one of his patient's lives.

'Not only is the technology explained, but the emotional connection also demonstrates the value of the technology,' says Keith. He also believes that this story shows patients that hearing aids are not just for the elderly, which helps to break down some of the stigma attached to using them. All of this is achieved in just a few sentences, highlighting that stories can be just as effective when they are short and sharp.

Can I test drive you?

Jane Anderson is a personal brand expert, speaker and author. She helps and mentors clients to become better known in their industry so that they can increase their sales and results. She shares the following story to highlight this.

Story

Last month, I found myself looking for a new car. It was late on a Friday and I was rushing around, trying to find the best deal. I'd done all my online research and ended up at a particular dealer. He sensed I needed to decide on the car quickly, because it was the end of the financial year, and to my surprise, he let me take it home for the weekend to try it out.

This certainly eased some pressure for me. I didn't have to rush my decision; I could drive the car for the weekend and return it on Monday. The dealer wasn't pushy. He was helpful, listened to my needs and made the whole process easy. As a result, I decided to keep the car.

According to Forbes, 60 per cent of a buying decision is made before the customer buys from you. Similarly, the CareerBuilder Survey found that 58 per cent of recruiters extended a job offer because they got a good sense of the jobseeker's character and personality.

One of the best ways to encourage people to test drive you is to write a blog. It's a bit like being allowed to take the car overnight. Your posts take the reader from their world into yours. They give the reader your insights and perspective. Too often, we want the customer or recruiter to make a decision there and then, and we risk looking pushy, salesy or just like we're feeling weird about the whole situation.

Seth Godin, author of many books including Tribes, says, 'We're in the connection economy. People want to connect and buy you, but they will buy when they're ready.'

We've all come across the stereotypical car dealer who just wants to get their commission. But we need to get to know the car first. 'Will it give me what I need? Will be it economical enough? Do I like it? Is it safe?' Your client or recruiter is asking these same questions. Organisations don't have extra cash floating around if things go wrong anymore, so every dollar matters.

So allow people to get to know you. Give samples of your work through your blog so there is less pressure on you to sell. As F. W. Woolworth, the founder of Woolworth Corporation, said, 'I am the world's worst salesperson so I must make it easy for people to buy'.

Outcome

The preceding story comes from Jane's blog, but she also shares something very similar face to face when she meets potential new clients (focusing more on the story about the weekend test drive, rather than the figures and quotes). Jane says, 'The story seems familiar to them, so I believe it makes the point easily'.

Jane adds that she often uses stories in a sales meeting because 'stories can demonstrate that you have understanding and compassion for your clients' problems, which I think builds respect and credibility'.

Lessons from Dad

Christina Guidotti is a mentor, speaker and author. While she now predominantly works helping women to achieve their potential, before this she ran a very successful real estate agency in Brisbane. This is where she developed some extensive skills in sales and leadership. One of her key messages to potential clients is the importance of delivering on the promises you make and avoiding making excuses, which is something her dad taught her.

Story

My dad was born in 1943 in Chios, Greece, and was the third son of seven children. He was raised on a farm in a house with no running water. When Dad was eight, the family left Greece to migrate to Australia. They sold everything they owned in Greece and came over with just one suitcase each, in order to start a new life. The only money they had was used to buy the boat fares, and the trip took 46 days. It was a long, tough journey to an unknown life, and Dad remembers when the children got lice, and were washed down with kerosene and water, which burned their skin.

Life in Australia was not easy, because Dad did not speak English. As migrants, the family had to get work quickly, which they found on a farm and

an asbestos factory. They were amazed that homes had running water in Australia and the living conditions were much better than in Greece. After a couple of years, they had saved enough money to buy their own house.

When Dad was 10 he bred and sold pigeons, guinea pigs and puppies for extra income. He would push a wheelbarrow full of vegetables door-to-door, selling whatever he had to offer on the day. He arranged horse rides for the kids at school for additional money. He also remembers dancing the Zorba as a young child, attracting crowds who gave him coins for the entertainment. He loved to dance; it was his joy.

The family managed to buy their own grocery store and Dad finished school at age 14 to work in the family store. A strong work ethic was instilled in Dad from a very young age. He demonstrated strength of character, a no-excuses mindset as well as an amazing amount of resourcefulness, which would go on to serve him well throughout his life.

At the age of 29, Dad opened a real estate office and 14 years later he had expanded his business to 14 offices. So his childhood was not the average for a child in Australia. He went from not knowing how to speak the language, to creating a very successful life. Dad's strength of character, enthusiasm, optimism, ability to see opportunity, and sheer hard work were key drivers of his success, both in business and in life.

My father taught me about work ethic and the mindsets of optimism, enthusiasm and persistence — essential tools for success. Over the last few decades in my own business I've worked on the principle of under-promise and over-deliver in my relationships. Be dependable and you will get asked more often. As Dad taught me, 'You can let them down once and you may be forgiven. Let them down twice and you may get one more chance. Let them down often and you lose'.

Being dependable is the promise I make to you.

Outcome

Christina obviously values the same work ethic as her father. When she shares this story she often gets comments along the lines of, 'You can absolutely tell you are your father's daughter', and, 'This explains why you have equal amounts of compassion and a no-excuses attitude'.

Christina believes this story is important for her in attracting the right mentoring clients, because she does not want to mentor anyone who does not

know she will take no excuses from them.

David and Goliath

Jason Garner is a retailing and property executive. He often finds himself in tricky situations where he has to collect lease payments from retail tenants. Obviously, he wants to keep the tenants as clients, but he also has to find a way to recover the money owing. The tenants may be under financial pressure and often go into meetings with Jason feeling like it's 'David versus Goliath'. This is the story Jason shares in these situations.

Story

My dad was a printer and I remember as a kid I didn't see him a lot because he worked seven days a week, holding down multiple jobs. He worked really hard to build his business and he would often miss key family moments because of this. I recall many birthday dinners when Dad wasn't there. But I am really proud of Dad and the upbringing he gave us because I know he did all of this for us and to keep the family going.

He was actually really instrumental in teaching me the importance of not only hard work but also respect for others. I followed in Dad's shoes and worked in retail for many years, so know firsthand the demands of business — the pressure of sales, the small margins and making sure bills are paid on time — and I know how heavily that can weigh on you and how it affects every part of your life.

I guess the reason I am sharing this with you is because I want you to understand that while I may not fully understand what you are going through, I am here to help you. If I do anything less, my Dad will kill me.

Outcome

Jason says this story always seems to alter the conversation for the better. 'I remember one time when that story changed the mood of the meeting completely,' he says. 'The retailer could see that I was not 'Goliath', but someone he could work with to overcome this issue. After that, the relationship between us became a partnership rather than a transactional one, which ensured mutual success for all.'

Make your stories work

Stories for sales are a fast, easy and effective way to build rapport, trust and credibility with potential clients and customers.

The next chapter builds on more of these concepts to show you how to use stories to communicate your company's values or vision.

Chapter 8

Stories that work for values and vision

With more leaders now embracing the philosophy of authentic and values-based leadership, it has become more important to find ways of encouraging others — both internal and external to your organisation — to understand and connect with not only your personal brand and values (which we look at in chapter 9), but also your company's vision and values.

The 2011 *Harvard Business Review* article 'The business of communicating values' stated,

“ If a company doesn't take the time and effort to communicate its values in a meaningful way, then it's like the old tree-falling-in-the-forest cliché: It makes a big splash, but no one is around to appreciate its impact.

Vision and values are worthless unless they are understood by everyone in the workplace and evident within your organisational culture. They cannot be an afterthought; instead, they should drive decisions and behaviours across the business. The very essence of 'values' is that they must connect with everyone on a personal level.

Bringing your company's values to life, so that they are more than mere words on a website, poster or coffee mug, is an ongoing challenge. The good news is that storytelling helps because, like values, the very essence of storytelling is to connect, engage and inspire on a personal level.

Where's the value?

In my work, I have found that when leaders take the time to identify what their company values mean to them, on both a professional and a personal level, they are in a better position to communicate these standards to others.

Furthermore, when senior leaders take the time to learn storytelling skills for business, they find it easier to identify their own personal stories that demonstrate why their company values resonate with them. It's a knock-on effect: create a personal connection to the ethics of your company and you'll generate more and more stories that you can actively share within the workplace to demonstrate your commitment to the values.

In the 1980s and 1990s, communicating organisational values followed a similar format, often called the 'rollout'. Corporate values and mission statements adorned beautifully designed wall posters, mouse pads and coffee cups. Business cards had the mission statement printed on the reverse side. The 'rollout' was more of a communication cascade of hieroglyphics, filtered through the organisation from the CEO or corporate affairs team.

While the intentions may have been good, and some companies did experience success with this, all this effort usually meant was employees could recite the organisation's values and mission statement whenever they sipped on their coffee. It's like learning the words to a song, but never really understanding what the song is about. It's also similar to the approach teachers once took to get their students to learn the times tables. While employees could say what the company's values were, they couldn't actually ever say what the company really truly valued.

These messages were often also 'lost in translation' when people tried to explain them to others, especially those outside of the company.

Heard it through the ...

The evolution of communicating values is not dissimilar to that of hardware and software. Each new version should bring a better way of operating, through offering enhancements and fixing bugs of the past. For organisations to communicate their values successfully today, they need to move away from the 'rollout' mindset and towards the 'real thing' mindset, and upgrade from PowerPoint presentations to what I call the 'grapevine'.

Every organisation has a grapevine, which every employee is a part of, engages in and is affected by — whether they realise this or not! The grapevine is the hidden, interrelated network of stories that is passed from employee to employee. Yet, despite its importance, very few organisations or leaders give the grapevine the attention it deserves.

If the grapevine were a piece of hardware, the software would be stories. Left unattended, the vast majority of stories in the grapevine are negative. You can't control the grapevine, but you can certainly influence the stories that are fuelling it. That's why great stories around the company values need to be introduced into the grapevine. You can influence the grapevine by deliberately sharing stories that highlight individuals who are living the values of the company or demonstrating the desired behaviours.

The following examples demonstrate how real leaders have shared stories of their company's values and how they align to their own personal values.

Go to the moon

Angela Middleton is the group executive of sales at ME Bank. In 2015, ME Bank launched a new set of company values and each of the executive team was asked to talk about one value and what it meant to them. The talk would be videoed and shared throughout the organisation. Angela chose the value 'go to the moon' and shared the following personal story.

Story

When I first saw the values, they all immediately resonated with me. But at first sight the one I loved the most was 'go to the moon'.

Then when I looked a little closer and actually saw what this value meant,

my initial excitement started to waiver.

I loved the fact that it stood for doing things differently and changing the world. I could even relate to the fact that it stood for getting out there, getting in among it, and even that it stood for being brave and breaking new ground. But — don't be afraid to fail? Now that one scares me a little. Yet here I am talking to you about it ...

When I started to think about not being afraid to fail, I realised I'd actually done a few things in my life where I didn't think twice about failing.

I remember a time when I was living and working in Perth. I grew up in Adelaide and moved to Perth for work in 2003, but after two years there I was still struggling to fully engage with the local community. I had to travel every week to the eastern states and that was starting to take its toll. In addition, with all the travel I found it really hard to make new friends and establish a social network.

One Saturday night in 2005, I was at home, watching more reruns of Sex and the City and thinking, What am I doing? I had always wanted to live in Melbourne and the only thing that was stopping me from doing that was me.

So after 10 years working for this company, I went into work the following Monday morning and told my boss I was resigning. He asked me what I would do in Melbourne and I responded with, 'I don't know'. And I really didn't know but I did know that I needed to break new ground.

I quit my job and left for Melbourne.

I had two suitcases, one person in Melbourne I knew, no job and no idea what I was doing, but thought, What could possibly go wrong?

I remember the plane taking off and you know that little ding you hear when they turn the seatbelt sign off? It was at that exact moment I thought, Oh crap, this is really happening and there's no turning back now!

I admit, I still feared failure, but I was also excited about doing something different. I suppose, looking back, you could say I was also a little brave.

Living in Adelaide most my life and then moving from Perth to Melbourne did literally feel like going to the moon, but you know what? I can honestly say it absolutely changed my world.

I settled into the Melbourne way of life and within days was loving it. If I hadn't left Perth, I wouldn't have had the fantastic opportunity to work for

ME and be here today.

I can think about other situations throughout my life when it's felt like going to the moon, and this made me think that every day we have the opportunity to go to the moon.

It may not be moving from one side of the country to the other but it may result in changing our world or changing the world of our customers.

So let's not be afraid to fail. I tell myself this regularly. Let's be brave and break new ground.

Let's think about how we can do things differently and not only change our world, but change the world for our customers.

Outcome

'I'd been told many times that people relate better through stories,' says Angela. 'But I still felt quite vulnerable.' She adds:

Afterwards, staff would comment that they could really relate to my story and, in some cases, they used my story to help them make decisions that affected them personally or at work. I checked in with my EA at the time, because I was concerned I was sharing too much and that my story would not relate. She said it was quite inspiring and had no idea that I made such a decision.

Mosquito nets and Borneo

This next example is from Stefani Adams, head of Partnerships and Engagement at the Australia Post Accelerator. I love this story because it highlights the power in sharing a story about a time when you didn't live a value. Ironically, sharing a story about regretting your behaviour (a tragedy story) gives you more credibility, because it shows your capacity for self-awareness and the desire to uphold your values. Stefani shares this personal story to show how the company respects everybody who works for them and with them.

Story

In two weeks' time, my 14-year-old son, Henry, is going to Borneo on a

school excursion. Last week I found myself at the parent information night, late, with a whole lot of other parents after work, feeling quite agitated as we all waited to find out what was going to happen to our kids in the jungle.

This VERY young, friendly, bouncy teacher called Emily was running the session. A lot of the parents started asking specific questions like, What kind of sleeping bag do they need? What kind of mosquito tent should they bring? Should they be vaccinated for rabies?

Emily was giving quite short, non-committal answers, which obviously wasn't the kind of answers we as concerned (and tired!) parents wanted or expected, and I could feel myself starting to get a bit tense as well.

I was worried about whether Henry should have rabies shots or not. All those things you worry about as a parent and I didn't feel like Emily was giving me the kind of answers I was looking for when I asked her.

So I was sitting there and there were still a lot more questions and the general mood in the room had started to become quite negative, I guess, towards the young teacher.

In frustration I turned to Henry and whispered, 'This is just a waste of our time, Henry. Seriously — I'm not learning anything from this!'

He looked at me and he said, 'Mum, you know, just give her a bit of respect. She's only young, she's really trying'. There was a bit of a pause and then he said, 'And she's the only one here who has ever been to Borneo'.

I felt embarrassed. I felt embarrassed that my 14-year-old actually had shown more awareness and respect for someone else than I had in that moment.

I pride myself on being someone who respects everyone and I'd look at that value and say that I absolutely live that every day. Yet, my son Henry showed me, in a really polite and loving way, that it's not always the case and I need to pay attention to it.

Outcome

Stefani's story was videoed and sometimes I use it in other storytelling training with clients. I notice that people get visibly moved by this story. It's not overly emotional, but it seems to really resonate with many of us, as we are reminded of times where we have not lived our own values — and we regretted it.

Make our nanas proud

Matthew Ricker is the retail general manager for Victoria West and Tasmania at National Australia Bank. Matthew has been sharing this story for a while, but has started sharing it more often to communicate NAB's new vision of being the most respected bank in Australia and New Zealand. Note that this story is considerably shorter than many of the others in this book. Stories can be just as powerful when they are short and succinct.

Story

Over 20 years ago, when I found out I got the job at National Australia Bank, I could not wait to tell my mum and dad. When I got home to share the news, my nana was there and she was so pleased for me.

I still remember her saying, 'That is good news, Matthew, and if you work really hard, one day you could become a bank manager and bank managers mean something in our society'.

I look back over the last 20 years and how the finance industry has evolved and I don't think too many grandparents are proud that their grandkids work for a bank.

I am excited about our new vision of being the most respected bank, and what that means to me is that we will make our nanas proud.

Outcome

Matthew says,

I continue to share this story with my teams, and whenever I get to speak internally and externally about NAB's vision, because it always receives such a great response. I remember when I had my story filmed, my nana died a few weeks later, so I am always glad I get an opportunity to share it and remember her.

Speak up

Miranda Kovacic is a senior executive at a major Australian bank. As a

senior woman, she is passionate about supporting other women and gender diversity, and is often asked to present at women's events. Miranda shared this story at one such event where the topic was about disrupting the norm.

Story

I need to confess that I am an AFL tragic. I know, and I look like a relatively normal person. Last year, I went to the Hawthorn and West Coast Eagles grand final. For a football tragic and, in particular, a Hawthorn football tragic, it was looking to be a fabulous experience.

The weather was great (32 degrees), the sun was shining and I am wearing a brown-and-yellow scarf. I had front-row seats in the second tier and Hawthorn were looking good.

My friend and I had a lovely family sitting next to us with a boy, probably about 10 years old. Unfortunately, someone sitting in the corporate area had obviously had WAY too much corporate hospitality. I had no issue with him abusing Victorians and I could even, if only barely, stomach the rude comments about Hawthorn players.

However, I could not sit back and allow him to continue making the misogynistic comments that started when one of the players came off bleeding. Trust me — the comments do not bear repeating. But they were extremely demeaning to women.

I had seen the SMS number for reporting antisocial behaviour in the football guide and, having previously accepted some similar behaviour as the 'norm', this time I decided to do something about it. So I texted the anti-social number. I was really pleased with their response as they had someone down to speak to the 'gentleman' within 15 minutes and he moderated his behaviour very promptly. No-one needs to see that sort of behaviour and the last thing I wanted was a young boy thinking that sort of language was okay. Only by taking a stand do we even start to address such appalling behaviour and prevent it from being viewed as an 'acceptable' norm.

I'm telling you this story because it aligns with one of my favourite quotes from Madeleine Albright: 'There's a special place in hell for women who don't help each other'.

Help can take many shapes and forms. It could be not letting the misogynistic comment go by or even just offering some moral support for another woman who looks like they have had a bad day. And I thank all

those women who have helped me over the years and given me the help I needed to 'disrupt the norm' as a senior executive in ICT.

Outcome

Miranda receives very positive responses on not only the content of this story but also the delivery. 'People wanted to know where I had learned the storytelling technique and other women said there were many opportunities for them to use it to convey their messages and to help other women,' she says.

Thanks to this story, Miranda now uses storytelling more and more, from conferences and team meetings to coaching and day-to-day life.

Make your stories work

These stories show how you can bring your company's values to life through a story that explains what that value means to you personally.

In part III of this book, we look at three organisations that have successfully implemented storytelling in their business to drive connection to their values and vision.

First, though, let's move on to the next chapter and look at how you can use stories to communicate your own personal brand — what you stand for and why.

Chapter 9

Stories that work for your personal brand

Whether you realise it or not, you have a personal brand. Your personal brand is unique, it is you — what you do, how you do it, what you value, and how you communicate that.

These are all very important things to consider in business, especially if you're a leader or in a position of authority. Stories can help you keep 'on brand' when you're communicating — either in person or online.

So what do we really mean by 'personal brand'? Tom Peters, business management expert and best-selling author of *The Brand You 50*, coined the term 'personal brand'. He said, ““Brand You” is a pragmatic, commercial idea. It's how to survive as the shit-hits-the-white-collar fan. But it's also about opportunity. And liberation’.

Author and speaker Ron Deal says your brand 'tells the world what you stand for, what your values are, what your expertise is, and ultimately why the world should even care'. Whereas Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, summarises your brand as 'what people say about you after you leave the room'.

I agree with all of these ideas but, when it comes to storytelling, I believe your brand is the stories people share about you when you are not there. This is obviously influenced by the stories you share with them.

Remember, every story you share will affect your brand. That's what you have to be most aware of and why you need to select the right stories in the right situations (which you will know how to do by the end of this book).

SEA your brand

If your brand is the stories that people share about you, you need to take control of your brand and be selective about the stories you share with people.

A strong brand — your SEA — is built on three elements:

1. strategy
2. evolution
3. authenticity.

Let me explain in more detail.

Strategy

You must be strategic about what you want others to feel about you, and then you have to make sure your brand aligns with that. You need to be clear and confident about what you stand for and why.

I have knocked back jobs because I did not think it was the right fit for me or my brand. That's how deliberate and confident you must be!

Evolution

Your brand will evolve and change over time, and you need to be conscious of this. Very few people have the same brand now that they had 20 years ago. Your evolution is a constant but gradual process that changes with time.

I remember being given feedback throughout my schooling career that I was too quiet and should speak up more in class. Now I am a keynote speaker. Go figure.

Authenticity

As Oscar Wilde is often quoted as saying, 'Be yourself; everyone else is already taken'. Although no record exists of Oscar Wilde actually saying this, the argument remains. Pretending to be someone else or deciding on a brand that you could never live up to or sustain is pointless.

Pretending to be someone else is hard work. People will also see through this, and being seen as unauthentic can significantly damage your credibility, your image and your brand. It's not worth being anyone but yourself, and it's not worth being anything but authentic and sharing stories that are authentic (see

chapter 2 for more on this).

It takes three

I see many people who are evolving and being authentic but who are not being strategic about their brand, which is not commercial. Others are strategic and authentic but don't evolve with time, and so run the risk of their brand not being aligned to their current or future career ambitions. The most dangerous combination is to be strategic and evolving but not authentic. This does nothing but damage your brand.

Put simply, you need to be all three. Once you've nailed this, you open yourself up to a wonderful world of storytelling possibilities.

Stories for your personal brand can actually be used in several different ways, including those mentioned in the other chapters — including face-to-face coaching, job interviews, presentations, and online via blogs or newsletters. That's why the following stories could have easily been included in other chapters.

Here, however, they help show how to share a certain experience that will influence your brand and how others perceive you.

Father's Day

This first example comes from Stephen Purcell, managing partner of Australian law firm DibbsBarker. Stephen shared this story as a LinkedIn post not long after he started at DibbsBarker as their new managing partner. His primary message was to illustrate the importance of informal mentors and ongoing learning, but when you read the story you will also see that it demonstrates a lot about Stephen, giving you a clear understanding of his brand and what he stands for.

Story

We hear a lot these days about the importance of having good mentors to work with throughout our careers. Finding those people who can teach us, guide us, encourage us, inspire us and challenge us as we move through different stages of work (and life) is invaluable.

But good mentor–mentee relationships don't necessarily have to come from structured programs or formal requests. Sometimes, the best mentors might

be the ones who sneak up on us, the ones we learn from even if we don't realise it at the time.

It was the summer of 1977. I was 17 and had just finished the HSC. I found myself debating my future with two very different university opportunities on the table. The first was a teacher's degree, which would last three years with a paid (!) scholarship of \$2500 indexed per year. The second was a combined economics/law degree at Sydney University, which would take five years and didn't come with any payment attached.

I remember pondering the choices I had ahead of me and talking them through with my dad. He finished school at the end of what we now call Year 9. He was a carpenter who started out as an apprentice in a building company (which he later went on to own).

At first, I was leaning towards the teacher's scholarship. Why? Because in my eyes it paid a 'fortune' for me to study, I wouldn't have to work part-time to put myself through uni and my HSC mark was just barely enough to get me into economics/law — I would be up against some kids who came top of the state and I didn't think I would be able to cut it against them. I was afraid I would fail.

I chose economics/law. Why?

My dad (and mum) asked me the right questions and I knew they would support me unconditionally with whatever I chose. Do you think you will like teaching? Do you want a part-time job? Why don't you think you are good enough to do economics/law? Where do you want to be when you are older? Which possibility inspires you more?

Over the last few days, I have been reflecting a lot on what happened in that summer. Maybe it's because my son is now approaching his own HSC this year, or because it's Father's Day this weekend, or because I just started my new role as managing partner of DibbsBarker one month ago. Maybe it's all of these things.

I didn't realise it at the time, but my dad was mentoring me. Rather than telling me what to do, he was teaching me how to think in a way that was different, confronting and challenging. From that experience I have learned so much that I have been able to apply throughout my career, including the importance of:

- *asking the right questions*

- *listening — really, truly listening*
- *avoiding taking the easy route*
- *thinking bigger picture, and longer term*
- *challenging yourself and having a go.*

In the years that have passed since that summer, I've learned that these things can come into play at so many turns — choosing a career path, taking a new job, forming new client relationships, going after new business opportunities ... the list goes on.

While I've had many other mentors along the way, and I hope to continue being a mentor for others for years to come, I'll always remain grateful for that early experience that challenged me in the right way at the right time.

Here's to you, Dad, and happy Father's Day.

Outcome

Stephen has had a very positive response to his story and believes this is because it resonates with many people who have had a similar experience. 'It feels great to get good feedback and, as a result, I will be sharing more stories,' he adds.

Marathon mindset

This example is from Debbie Psychoyos, founder and CEO of a fabulous organisation called Fundación ProEd based in Panama, which supports the advancement of education to teachers and students in Panama. You'll see this is clearly an example of a triumph story, which Debbie uses in a variety of situations, including those covered in other chapters in this book.

Story

The organisers told us to trust them on the information they were about to share before the starting gun sounded. 'Drink water at every mile stop. Stay at your race pace. And throw your hands in the air, look up and smile when you cross the finish line.'

These words had no meaning for me as a first-time marathon runner. One year of training, which included 3 am starts, long runs, carb-loading, and

more pedicures than I've ever had in my life, seemed like reasonable requirements to check another life goal off my list.

It was a harmless pact when my friends and I challenged each other to push our physical limits and run 26.2 miles in the next NYC Marathon. What we learned was that the mental impact of this challenge was far greater than the impact of our broken-in running shoes pounding the pavement through five boroughs around the streets of New York.

So how does a non-runner one weekend decide to run 10 miles the next weekend? And how do 10 miles turn into 26.2 miles a year later? Answer: marathon mindset.

There are guidelines to follow. Rules to modify. Disciplines to endure. And most of all, there is personal determination and a commitment to self. I never dreamed of running a marathon (as a mother of three at the age of 39). I never dreamed of completing my doctorate (at the age of 52), or starting a nonprofit NGO to support public education in a developing nation (after the 9/11 tragedies). I also never dreamed that I could not do any of these things — if my mind was prepared and determined to do so.

I drew upon the inspiring words of many others to prepare my 'marathon mindset'. It was Henry Ford who said, 'Whether you think you can or you can't — you're right'. Then there's the Nike 1998 marathon mantra, 'Adrenaline will get you through the first half. Stamina will get you through the next 10. Courage will bring you home'. These words strengthen my mental muscle every day, even now my marathon running days are over.

My marathon experience has fuelled my mental determination, and while I did not 'win' the NYC Marathon, because physically I just could not, I did throw my hands in the air, look up and smile when I crossed the finish line at 4:23:19.

The impact of running my first (and only) full marathon did not end at the finish line. As a matter of fact, it created a beginning. Triumph during a marathon is 95 per cent mental and 5 per cent physical. So too is success in most things in life.

It's amazing how the mind is able to put 'physical pain' in a place — like the physical pain of childbirth (there would be many more 'only children' otherwise), and the physical pain you feel the day after a marathon (professional marathoners are champions at putting that pain away). Equally amazing is how our mental capacity is strengthened by emotions like

elation, pride and triumph.

Over the past 16 years, I have crossed many finish lines thanks to my marathon experience in 1998. In the first few years following the marathon, my family would joke (not sure if they were really joking ...), ‘Oh no, I feel another marathon story coming on’. And they would patiently let me live through those moments again.

Years later, some of the memory from the marathon moment has faded and I am not as verbal about the experience, but I am just as inspired and impacted by my 4:23:19 triumph.

Outcome

Debbie often shares this story with her team to highlight the importance of maintaining rigour and discipline when working towards a goal, and to encourage them to think about the next goal when that one is achieved.

She adds,

As a nonprofit organisation in a developing nation in Latin America, we are often managing obstacles that seem to come from places we never imagined — from fundraising to ministry accreditation — so we try to stay focused on our proverbial finish line. While we’re running toward our goal, with patterned breathing and sustainable strides, we sometimes have to drop our pace to manage an unforeseen obstacle (which is like a side-stitch or a cramp for a runner). Our challenge is to keep our sights on the finish line, without losing too much time or energy. Marathoners know that time and energy are essential conditions for a successful run.

Life is too short to iron tea towels

Aishwarya Rao is a management consultant at Accenture. Aishwarya shares this story in a variety of mediums at work and with friends to encourage them to embrace life as it is. This story demonstrates her brand and what she values most. It’s also a great example of a transition story.

Story

In 2013, I was diagnosed with an extremely rare blood disorder that left me battling systemic treatment, ranging from corticosteroids to chemotherapy, a

22-kilo weight gain and clinical depression.

Since then, my days, nights, weekends and life plans have revolved around medications, tests, appointments, hospital admissions, diet restrictions, complications and tricky procedures.

Before one of those particularly tricky procedures, as I slumped on a disinfected hospital bed in my ‘Darth Vader-ish’ breathing apparatus, I overheard my doctor say to my partner, ‘You both understand there is a fifty–fifty chance of survival? Do her parents live overseas? I’d recommend you inform them’.

A fifty–fifty chance. A coin toss.

As I drifted into an anaesthesia-induced sleep, my entire life didn’t flash before my eyes. Instead, it was a fleeting thought that if I survive, I will change the way I live. I’ll work on living a full life with people, adventures and work that bring me happiness.

Life is not quite rainbows, cupcakes and butterflies, but it is too short to do things that don’t bring us joy.

From talking to my friends who work in a variety of industries, I know their challenges are not too different to mine. In our daily jobs, we put up with so much — bad behaviour, mundane projects (aka ‘taking one for the team’), pay cuts, sometimes even discrimination and harassment.

I urge you to stop; stop and think about the big picture. Change the way you see and do things. Move teams, move organisations, and remember it is okay to say ‘no’ to your colleagues. Start that business, pack those bags, call your family, take time out to relax and care for yourself. Who knows how long, or how little, time we have to get around to doing the things we want to do and living the way we want to live.

*One of my favourite authors, Bryce Courtenay, put it brilliantly in *A Recipe for Dreaming*: ‘Life is too short to iron tea towels’.*

Let the wrinkles go and start living.

Outcome

‘One person was so moved after hearing this story that she came up to me, with tears in her eyes, gave me a hug and said not everyone had to go through a near-death experience to make a change to their lives’, says Aishwarya. ‘She called me her superhero and while I still feel undeserving

of that comment I am glad to have survived — to share my story and encourage people to be brave and have fun.’

The disruptive butterfly

Mark Truelson is an author, speaker and mentor on disruption. His passion and purpose in life and work is all about ‘building disruptive capability’. He shares the following story when he wants to show his passion and why what he does is so important to him. It’s a wonderful example of how powerful vulnerability can be.

Story

Not so long ago, I was suffering from complete dismay for my own life. I left a successful corporate career with the dream of bringing passionate work to people in corporate life.

Suddenly, my world turned upside down. My wife left me. I lost everything in our separation. My time with my three wonderful children was cut in half. I lost my identity in everything that I thought I was. In turn, I began to lose my zest for life and my deeply held passion for helping people. I became a shadow of myself, and suffered a total breakdown.

One day, my brother took it upon himself to ‘disrupt’ what my life had become. He gathered family and friends and staged a loving intervention. From that day forward, they gave me the support and determination I needed to disrupt my path of self-destruction, so I could rediscover my passion for life.

Along the way, I realised the professional talents I had built in disruptive capability were exactly what I needed to rebuild my life from the inside out!

People often ask why my brand logo is a butterfly. The butterfly always reminds me of the power of self, of family and of reinvention. It also represents a personal metamorphosis to me — from my successful corporate career to a breakdown. I had established a hard, protective cocoon that needed to be broken open so I could be reborn again.

Once I acknowledged my purpose, with a little bit of help from my family and friends, my caterpillar-form liquefied and regrouped anew.

The four wings of the butterfly also represent my four children, including my stillborn, Carla, whose tragic passing was represented by the butterfly at her funeral.

I share this with you because I know my own journey has helped me build the disruptive capability in myself. I know I can help provoke the entrepreneurial mindsets and creative mentalities of your people and inspire them to connect to a passion for life, entirely.

Outcome

‘When I emerged from my mental breakdown, I made a pact that I would not hide behind it,’ Mark says of this story. He adds:

I would put it on the table. I would not be ashamed. I would be truthful. I have always been referred to as someone who is positive, passionate and high energy. It dawned on me that if I could succumb to depression and anxiety there must be a tonne of people out there who are suffering in silence. I said to myself that if the mind could become so negative and paranoid it could also become productive and rich.

Make your stories work

All the stories you have read in this chapter have been shared verbally in presentations, sales meetings and mentoring sessions, as well as online on websites and blogs and more. Though their intention may have been to inspire others into action, they also are a great representation of how you can use stories to demonstrate your own personal values and brand to connect and engage with others.

In the next chapter, we look at how you can use stories to help you in coaching situations.

Chapter 10

Stories that work for coaching

Coaching involves helping people improve, develop or reach certain goals. You may be a qualified coach or may find coaching your employees is part of your job. If you are a manager, you will no doubt play the role of a coach at some stage with your team members.

In any case, the key to coaching is motivating. What better way to do this than with a story?! Storytelling is a great method for getting your team member or group inspired, even excited, or thinking about something differently, with a new perspective, and as an opportunity. We are more likely to take individual responsibility and ownership for something if we're motivated towards it than if someone simply tells us to do it.

Sometimes the people we are coaching do not agree with the message we're giving them, or they're not interested in our point of view. This is especially true in a performance management conversation. However, use a story and whomever you're coaching is more likely to suspend their own judgement and challenge their thinking. This process is less about telling the person what is wrong and what they should do to correct it, and becomes more about allowing them to come to the realisation themselves.

Sharing a story that demonstrates empathy and understanding for someone's unique situation is also effective. This will involve you showing some vulnerability. For example, if you are coaching someone who lacks confidence, you could share a story about a time you lacked confidence. Vulnerability opens up communication — which is the very essence of storytelling.

Over the next few pages, you'll find some examples of stories that real people have used in real coaching situations at work. What stories have you got from your own personal and professional life that you could bring into your own one-on-one or group coaching sessions?

Fortune favours the brave

Georgina Laurie is a marketing and communications manager at professional services company Accenture. She was invited to speak at a virtual meeting

to a group of alumni who had participated in The Leadership Connection — a program that I co-facilitate to support women in, or seeking, leadership roles. The main message that Georgina wanted to get across to these women was that it's up to the individual to implement and practise what they were taught during the two-day program (which, of course, included storytelling). This is the story she shared.

Story

Like most of us, I learned to drive a car in my last year of school. Probably unlike most, I only learned on an automatic.

After my being away at university and returning as an impecunious student, my parents generously bought me a car. However, there was a catch. It was manual. This car sat in our driveway for three months, gathering dust (but no miles), until a brave uni friend offered to 'coach' me. That generosity was short lived.

Soon after we took off from home, with me at the wheel bunny-hopping along while attempting to seamlessly change gears, we managed to narrowly avoid an accident (or two). With nerves frayed, the car was quickly returned to the driveway.

A few more months passed, until late one evening my mother said it was 'high time' I learned to drive a manual car and that it was 'absolutely ridiculous' having this car sitting idle in the driveway. She reminded me of a saying — 'fortune favours the brave'.

Next morning, up early, I hopped in the car and set off. About 10 minutes from home I came across a two-lane roundabout with fast-moving, peak-hour traffic. It was soon my turn to enter the roundabout. I managed to stall twice and roll backwards. The traffic was building up behind me and drivers — understandably becoming impatient — tooted their horns. My heart was pounding fast! This was the last place I wanted to be. Anyway ... third time lucky. I managed to synchronise the clutch and accelerator, and leapt forward. It wasn't long before I soon mastered the technique.

For many years since, I've really enjoyed driving a manual car. In fact, that manual car taught me a valuable lesson. In life, we can be fortunate enough to be given things to make life easier, but we can procrastinate and leave them unattended until we finally take the plunge and apply ourselves, using those resources at our fingertips.

At Accenture, we are tremendously fortunate to have a wealth of tools and assets at our disposal. We are all individually and collectively responsible for using these resources to grow and develop, professionally and personally, as we strive to drive business value.

Outcome

Georgina received really good feedback about the story and has now used it on several more occasions. She says telling the story has become easier with practice (much like driving a car). She says, ‘Each time I tell the story, and during the presentation, I make myself visualise the experience. I believe this helps me to emphasise specific words that help create a lasting impression for listeners’.

Strike three, you’re out!

This is an example from my own Story Wheel. I share this story when I coach people around an upcoming presentation they have to undertake and are lacking confidence in. When you lack the confidence to do something, I find it feels a little bit like the chicken and the egg — which comes first? Do you first need the confidence to do the presentation or do you just need to do the presentation to get the confidence?

I believe it is a bit of both. When I mentor people to present on stage for the first time, a common thought is, *It’s only my first time so I don’t need to be that great; the audience will understand.* This is the story I share in those situations.

Story

In my twenties, I played softball and as part of playing you always had to umpire other games. An experienced (often paid) central umpire would call the balls, strikes, home runs and ‘YOU’RE OUT!’ Then the line umpires, like me, who had limited experience with umpiring but knew the rules, would only look after first or third base.

After several years, I was asked to do a central umpiring role. I accepted the offer because I knew I could do it — and because a part of me looked forward to calling the strikes and the ‘YOU’RE OUT!’ with all the theatrics you see on American baseball shows.

However, by the morning of the game, I was starting to falter in my conviction. Logically I knew I could umpire the game, but the reality was I had never done it before so I started doubting myself. I spoke to Lillian, a very senior coach and president of our club, explaining to her I was a bit nervous. I told her that I intended to pull the two teams together at the start of the game and explain that this was the first time I had been a central umpire so they would need to take it easy on me. She looked at me and said, ‘You will not say that. You will go out and umpire as if you have done it for years and you will make the calls and you will make them loudly and confidently’.

This was priceless advice that sounds a lot like, ‘Fake it until you make it’ — or, as TED star Amy Cuddy says, ‘Fake it ‘til you become it’. It took me about 10 minutes of faking it before I became it and gave the best ‘STRIKE THREE, YOU’RE OUT!’ American baseball call of all time.

It seems madness to me now that I even contemplated letting the players know of my doubt. They would likely have either tried to take advantage of that or felt a bit ripped off that they did not have an experienced umpire controlling the game.

I’m sharing this with you today because it is exactly the same when you walk on stage. Your audience are expecting and wanting you to be the professional you are. Own that and ‘fake it until you become it’.

Outcome

I have a pretty good strike rate (pardon the pun) with this story because everyone can understand the sound advice in what Lillian said to me. This is an example of how the best coaching stories display a level of vulnerability. These types of stories also show you have empathy for the person because you have been in their exact situation before, thought the same and felt the same anxiety.

Seize the moment and cherish it

This is a powerful example of a tragedy story from Shane Nottage, who is a HUB owner at Spark in New Zealand. Shane learned the hard way about work–life balance and uses this story to coach his team about the importance

of nurturing both your personal and professional life. He wants his team to work hard, but he also wants them to keep in mind that work is only one part of their life.

Story

I never really had an education and my first job was working in a petrol station. I met my wife, Pip, there as she was a customer and would drive out of her way to fill up with petrol from me. Years later, we bought a petrol station and managed it together, which involved working very, very long hours — every weekend and we never took holidays.

But we had a plan: to have our kids, grow our business, retire early, tour the world, have fun with our kids, grow old together and die in each other's arms in our sleep.

The plan didn't eventuate. While we were still working long hours, my wife started getting migraines and was diagnosed with brain cancer. She had emergency brain surgery and months of chemo and radiation. It looked like it was beat, but it wasn't. Six months later, at home with our family around her, she died. We had never spent more than four days apart in over 29 years.

Four years on, things are different now. My children have grown up, own their own homes and are starting families of their own. I delegate more, spend time putting good people into roles so I am not required as much, take two trips overseas each year, five weeks off at Christmas, and dedicate time to travelling around New Zealand and overseas with family and friends. It's not the same without Pip. Unfortunately, we left it too late.

I want you to know that you are not indispensable at work. Life will throw you curve balls so don't wait to seize the opportunities. But, above all else, don't think that work is your world — your life and experiences are. Work is just a small part of it. Don't make the same mistake I made. Don't spend all your life making a living, and forget to make a life.

Outcome

Shane had to wait over a year before he felt he was ready to share this story and says it is still hard to do so.

Sometimes as I near the end of the story, it becomes very difficult and the tears and pain swells once more. However, I feel I need to share the story not only with my team but also with friends and family. The message of

‘seize the moment and cherish it’ is just too important for me not to share Pip’s story.

The cost of trust

Paul Worth is a productivity expert and author of *Getting [eOrg@nised](#)*. Paul uses the following story with great effect to emphasise the impact that trust has on the speed and cost of transactions and relationships. He uses it in one-on-one coaching sessions or training workshops.

Story

Back before 2001, we had a high level of trust in our airports. When we went to the airport to go on a plane journey, we would quickly pass through security where maybe two or three security staff would be on duty. Most of the times these staff members would be friendly and the whole process would take no more than a few minutes. There was a high level of trust, very low costs and very quick service — the belief of most security staff was that people going to the airport were doing so for business or pleasure.

Then in 2001 the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers changed all that. From that day forward the assumption of our security staff became anyone could be a potential terrorist — from a 90-year-old grandma, to a well-dressed businessman or pregnant mother with two kids. Anyone and everyone could be a potential terrorist.

Now when we go to the airport, we join a long queue to the scanning area where at least five or more security staff scrutinise us. We have to remove laptops, phones and liquids from our bags. No aerosols and, just for good measure, you usually have to take off your shoes. The scanner then goes off because we forgot to remove our belt, so back we go. After passing through a second time, holding our trousers up, we collect all our possessions and go to leave, only to be stopped by some other officer who wants to test our bags for explosives. Low trust, high costs and very slow service.

Back in April 2011, I had the misfortune of being in the Sydney Qantas lounge waiting to board a plane to Melbourne when an announcement came over the system asking us all to evacuate the airport. All passengers waiting for their flights were escorted from the airport. But wait, there’s more — they

off-loaded all the planes that were at the gates and all the retail staff from the shops were escorted from the building. This involved thousands of people!

Then they proceeded to rescan everyone back into the airport. Keep in mind we also had new travellers arriving all the time, both by air (held on the runways) and by car (huge traffic jams). Can you imagine the cost and disruption to airlines, travellers, shopkeepers and businesses?

‘What caused this security breach?’ you may ask. What could have caused this immense cost in money, time and disruption? One of the scanners had had a power failure and 16 — that’s right, 16 — people had passed through without being scanned in a five-minute period. But, even for just 16 people in five minutes, we couldn’t take the risk.

I am sharing this with you because it highlights to me how low trust can equal high cost and slow service.

Outcome

Paul says he normally shares this story to start a conversation about trust. He gets his audience to think about what is happening in their systems and relationships at present, perhaps because a lack of trust exists. He says he has better discussions when he shares this story, as opposed to when he hasn’t in the past.

Make your stories work

The examples in this chapter show that you do not have to limit sharing stories to one-on-one coaching and mentoring sessions; they're also applicable in the training room and beyond.

In the next chapter, we look at how you can use your four types of stories in a job interview to help you land your dream job.

Chapter 11

Stories that work for job interviews

Do you feel like you go for hundreds of job interviews and never seem to get anywhere? Have you ever considered that you may be presenting yourself in a boring or bland way?

As we've seen, experts have scientifically proven that stories connect with people on an emotional level. They are great at highlighting how you have practically dealt with certain situations and problems from your personal and professional life, but in a way that is engaging and shows off your personality.

At the moment, you likely don't use any stories in job interviews, or you use them incorrectly, in a way that gives away nothing about your personality to the person interviewing you.

You probably share relevant, work-related stories that demonstrate your skills, capabilities and experience — but are still left wondering why you're not getting picked. You tick all the boxes; you can do the job. But something is missing that would make you stand out compared to the other qualified candidates.

When you're being interviewed for a job, you are lining up alongside a lot of other people. If you're prepared to share a combination of work-related and non-work-related stories, you will showcase your unique qualities that no-one else has. Sounds pretty good, right?

Moving with the times

For many years, the preferred method of conducting interviews has been the Behavioural Event Interview (BEI) technique. This technique involves the interviewer asking questions about specific situations, such as, ‘Tell me about a time when you had to deal with an angry customer. How did you handle the situation?’ You could answer the question with something broad and theoretical like, ‘I showed empathy by understanding the customer’s complaints and then explained the process and why this occurred’.

If you’re interview savvy, you’ve probably prepared for the types of questions you’re going to be asked (a quick Google will result in thousands of these). But how many other people going for that same job will have done the same search and prepared for the same questions, and will answer them in exactly the same way?

What would differentiate you from all the other applicants is a story about a specific situation and how you solved it practically. For example, ‘There was this one time when a customer ... I solved the problem by ...’ This facilitates a process of two-way communication, and your interviewer will then ask follow-up questions like, ‘Why did you do that?’ Think of it like a maths test — getting the correct answer is only one part of it; you need to show how you worked it out and got the final result.

How stories help

Remember Greek philosopher Aristotle? He devised a model over 2500 years ago that is still relevant today. Aristotle said you need three elements to successfully persuade and influence:

1. *logos* (sound logic) — the data, facts and research
2. *ethos* (personal credibility) — the degree of trustworthiness and credibility you have
3. *pathos* (emotional connection) — the extent you connect with someone and they connect with you.

When you're in a situation like a job interview, your main aim is to persuade and influence the interviewer and decision-makers that you are the right person for the job. To do that, you need to not only provide logical reasons you are the right person, but also build personal credibility and an emotional connection so these decision-makers trust you and feel a connection with you.

The trickiest part is that you need to do this better than everyone else and relatively fast, considering interviews generally only go for about an hour, sometimes less.

Most people in job interviews spend way too much time on logic. They state all the facts — for example, 'I'm the right person for the job because I've worked in a similar role ... Have 20-plus years' experience ... Just love sales!' Know what the end result is? You come across as boring and bland and, when it comes to the crunch, you just don't seem to have the 'right fit' for the organisation you're interviewing for.

So how can you build trust and credibility and foster an emotional connection with your future employer to land your dream job? Tell a story, of course.

Let's look at some tried and tested examples that have helped real people to land a job.

Immigrating to Ireland

This example comes from Rose McCarthy, who is my oldest and dearest friend. Rose and I have been friends since we were 11 and, sadly for me, she now lives in Ireland. Rose had not worked for six years and was in a new

country, so she knew her CV was out of date and somewhat irrelevant for the position she was applying for. When she lived in Australia she worked as an HR manager for a large Australian corporation, but she was applying for a part-time reception role at a physiotherapist. Her CV didn't show any previous experience as a receptionist, but she knew she could do the job.

Story

Four years ago I moved to Ireland from Australia, where I had lived all my life, with my husband (who was originally from Cork) and our three children. My eldest daughter, Maeve, was about to start primary school so we wanted to be settled before she started school.

When making the decision to relocate, I remember thinking Life is an adventure, so I really didn't have a reason not to go. Maeve was a few months from turning five, Clare had just turned three and Michael was five months old when we packed up our house and moved to Cork. Ten days later Maeve started primary school.

A lot of my family and friends said we were mad because it was possibly the worst time to move. Ireland was in the middle of a recession with really high unemployment and here we were arriving at Cork airport. I am positive we were the only people in the world immigrating to Ireland at the time, when everyone else was coming to Australia; it's a wonder we didn't make the news.

I guess what this shows is that I am ready and willing to take on challenges and, although I have never had a role as medical receptionist before, I know I have what it takes to make a success of it.

Outcome

Two days before Christmas, Rose was at the shopping centre with her three children when she got the call offering her the job. She was thrilled.

She shared this story because she wanted the interviewer to see her as not someone who was going for a job interview but as someone who was a wife, a mother and person who was willing to take a chance. 'I had to show what a CV doesn't,' she says.

I remember when I was sitting in the interview, the physiotherapist was pregnant with her second baby so I knew we would have that connection and something in common straightaway. She had asked me how long I had been living in Cork and that for me was the opportunity to share my

story.

Speak up

Catherine, a client, was going for a job as head of diversity and inclusion. During the interview, the panel asked her how she had gone from leading large teams overseas to leading organisation-wide efforts related to diversity and inclusion, with no previous HR experience. Catherine wanted to demonstrate that, although she didn't have an HR background, she had the credibility, the operational experience and, most importantly, the passion to undertake the role successfully. She told the following story to illustrate what sparked her interest in seeking out the diversity role.

Story

I had always believed in gender equality but, interestingly, it had been an abstract concept for me. I hadn't grown up in a world where being a woman had ever limited me, and I didn't truly believe it really ever would. That was until I joined an organisation and industry that was very traditional and male-dominated.

Where I worked, women made up around 15 per cent of the overall workforce, and were barely represented at the senior leadership level. Over the 10 years I spent in that organisation, I was the only woman to have ever held certain positions, including an overseas role, despite so many able and qualified women being available and willing to take on the role. But one event triggered my commitment to work on cultural change and, in some small way, be part of the change I wanted to see in the world.

I was on a 12-month leadership course where people from across the organisation were selected to participate. However, fewer than 10 per cent were women. One of the course modules was held off-site and included spending the week away to learn about ethics.

An example given as an ethical 'dilemma' that the group was to discuss was whether to chase after a woman in a green bikini on a bicycle and toot your car horn at her (replete with moving images and matching sound effects on the PowerPoint slides).

Another 'activity' was rating 10 pictures, almost all of which were of women

in various stages of undress, on the spectrum of art to pornography. I found these activities totally inappropriate for ethical-related discussions when there were so many other valid ethical dilemmas that could have been presented for discussion to the group. I also found them to be offensive, belittling of women and representative of the wider organisational culture that diminished the valuable contributions of women — the minority of the workforce — and reinforced society-wide damaging gender stereotypes.

Although the other women in the group felt the same way, as did some of the men, most did not feel comfortable voicing their opinions to the organisation's leadership for fear of repercussions or impact on their career advancement. I did speak out, though, because I could not let this continue. Doing so led me to meet the Head of People and Culture within the organisation, and we discussed the work I could be part of in leading cultural change after the experience I had just had, but also as someone who brought fresh perspectives from an operational arm of the organisation.

Outcome

This story not only demonstrates Catherine's passion and commitment to diversity and inclusion, but also shows leadership and integrity, which she knew the company also valued.

Catherine says the interviewer asked a lot more questions about this situation and story and she received a lot of reassuring nods.

Up for the challenge

Bianca Driberg was going for a job as an internal communications manager. She knew that the interview process was an opportunity for them to see if she was a good cultural fit and also determine her personality type. As a result she decided before the interview to prepare some personal stories to share.

An unusual question she was asked was, 'What are you like?' Bianca felt her personality is determined by who she is outside of work, so she took a personal approach to the question and shared the following story.

Story

I guess what I am like is typified by a recent experience. I have just returned

from a month in Europe where I competed in a marathon in Paris and then another one in London. It was a lot of fun but really challenging.

I've now run 12 marathons and they never get easier. I chase faster times, different countries and special moments in time. The Paris marathon was one of those.

Challenged by slippery cobblestones and blessed by beautiful weather, I made a rookie mistake of drinking too much water early on and was feeling physically unwell from about the 10-kilometre mark. I thought this was going to be the first time I wouldn't finish the race. I stopped at medical staff along the way but knew I had to suck it up and push on. Time was the only thing standing in the way of my finisher's medal followed by dinner overlooking the Eiffel Tower.

Running a marathon is never smooth sailing and I never know whether my body will perform on the day. But I always give it a good go and I always push through the hard parts — and I ALWAYS finish what I start.

I didn't actually run in the time I wanted for either race but that didn't really matter. I couldn't have been happier with the experience or how I handled it. I had a friend with me who didn't run but always managed to make herself visible on the sidelines among the huge crowds in each event. Sometimes that was all I needed to keep going. The reason I am sharing with you my marathon adventures is that I think they really do show what I am like, because the drive I show for running and seeking new challenges is what I also apply to aspects of my personal and work life.

Outcome

'I had a bit of an out-of-body experience during that story where I got really passionate and energised remembering the marathon experience,' Bianca says. 'The interviewer (who I found out later also loved running) commented on my energy. I don't believe any amount of practising or experience being interviewed can show more passion and insight into what someone stands for than sharing a personal story ... and I got the job!'

This is a great example of how a personal story can create a connection with your interviewer. Given Bianca was applying for a communications role, it was also valuable to show that she has good storytelling skills.

Let's dance

Liz Earl was applying for a role as head of marketing. During the interview she was asked a question about the type of team culture she works best in. This is how she responded.

Story

A few years ago I took up adult ballet. This was the first time I had ever done anything like this. I saw it as an opportunity to learn a new skill, take myself completely out of my comfort zone and help build confidence in performing in front of an audience.

All the ladies who attend the class have been doing so for many years and also attend other dance classes throughout the week, so I knew going into the class I would have a lot of catching up to do.

During class, the instructor teaches us many new steps and goes through a repetitious process to embed the steps. After some time we are then required to complete the steps on our own or with a small number of students so the instructor can take a closer look at our technique individually and offer suggestions for improvement.

Each time we do this those who are not being critiqued are on the sidelines, cheering and clapping. Some of the more advanced students will help the newer students learn steps when it's not our turn to be critiqued. We also come together with costume making, with particularly those who can sew offering to make costumes for those that can't.

For the most part, ballet is an individual sport; we learn to master the steps individually. However, when it comes to performance time, we all have a part to play and everyone's part, no matter how great or small, is important to the overall dance performance.

Even though the worlds in my dance class and my professional life are very different, I value the team spirit that exists at ballet. We've all got something different to offer as dancers. We support each other through encouragement and helping those struggling to learn the steps. The sewers in the class help those who can't with making costumes.

When it matters, we all come together with our various skills and performance strengths and deliver a performance that makes all of us proud

— *this is real teamwork.*

Outcome

Liz got the job, which she was obviously thrilled about. ‘It helped demonstrate my personal side and my cultural fit and that’s what I think helped secure the role,’ she says.

Liz also adds, ‘Storytelling remains very much at the forefront of my thinking as I navigate my professional life. I really changed my approach and considered my “narrative” before going into this process’.

Make your stories work

I could write much more on the topic of using stories in job interviews (and I have done that in my book *Storytelling for Job Interviews*), but these examples are a great start to demonstrate how sharing a story in a job interview can help create an emotional connection with your interviewer. Showing a little vulnerability and your personality will help you stand out from all the other candidates.

Most of the stories so far have been shared in a face-to-face situation. In the next chapter, we look at stories you can use written down and shared on newsletters and blogs.

Chapter 12

Stories that work for newsletters and blogs

The vast majority of stories I have shared so far in this book have been those that were communicated face to face. However, I often get asked if stories are effective in the written format. As you can probably tell from what you've read so far, they definitely are!

While speaking is a big part of business these days — whether presenting to an audience of 1 or 1000 — the fact we're in an age of online global business means way more options exist than that.

Storytelling is applicable in newsletters, blogs, websites and even emails. A growing trend is for senior leaders to write their own newsletters to their team (instead of getting someone else to do it for them). The number of us writing our own blogs has also dramatically increased. This is the perfect opportunity to try out connecting and engaging with your team and audience through a personal story attached to a business message.

Although your style will need to be (very slightly) more formal for written stories versus oral stories, with a bit more focus on sentence structure and avoiding unnecessary repetition, you can still keep the tone very conversational and personal.

All the leaders who share stories in this chapter say that when you apply storytelling techniques to your written words, your communication improves tenfold. The time is right to move away from providing boring information, facts, stats and updates and towards sharing something personal, along with photos or pictures. Accompanying your writing with photos increases your impact and leads to better employee engagement, as well as improved responses to your newsletter and blog.

Read the following examples of real stories that have been used for newsletters and blogs. Where else might you be able to apply your newfound storytelling skills online or through your written communication?

Reframe

My mentor and friend Peter Cook sends out a regular blog and on most

occasions he uses a personal story to get his message across. He does this so well that I found it really hard to choose just one example to share with you ... so I have chosen two.

The first story describes travelling with his young family and his message is around the importance of reframing your situation, especially if it is unpleasant.

Story

When I travel my rule is 'no checked luggage'. I spent two weeks in America recently with just carry-on bags. However, this rule gets broken when I travel with my family. Last month we went to the Daintree and we packed two large suitcases, two baby car seats, one pram, two check-in cases, two back packs, one portable cot ... And we managed to miss our plane.

Our taxi got lost finding our house, there was an accident on the freeway, it was raining and the dog ate my homework. The plane was closed by the time we got to the airport.

I was at the service desk working out our options. What was a three-hour direct flight to Cairns was becoming an eight-hour ordeal with a layover in Sydney for a couple of hours, with a six-month-old baby who needed sleep, and a four-year-old — who doesn't have a lot of tolerance for travel delays — to entertain.

It was a disaster. But then something interesting happened.

Standing next to me at the service desk was another family. There were also six of them (my parents were with us too), and they too had missed their plane to Cairns. The main difference was that, thanks to my recent US trip, my status had been upgraded and I was now platinum. Which meant changing our tickets didn't cost anything.

But I overheard that it was going to cost the other family \$6000. Ouch.

The interesting thing was the difference that knowing their situation made to our day. Suddenly instead of the day being a disaster, we had saved \$6000. Our reference point shifted from us catching our flight, to what happened to the other family.

Which is interesting. Nothing actually changed in our experience.

The human brain is set up to make comparisons rather than calculate absolute value in a vacuum. Most of the planet would love to be in the

position of missing that flight, of having to spend a few extra hours in order to get to an amazing holiday ... which it was.

I find a couple of things work well to shift the context and change my experience when things go wrong.

The first is to consciously change my reference point — what I'm comparing my situation to. In this case the shift happened for me, but I can also shift my perspective without needing to see someone else's misfortune.

The second is to change my time frame. I consider my goals or outcomes in terms of the whole quarter, or the whole year, or the decade. No single thing matters that much when considered from 10 years in the future.

Outcome

Peter notes the difference in the responses he gets from his blogs when he uses personal stories: 'The blogs I write with personal stories are the ones that get the greatest responses. As a general rule, adding a personal story doubles the response, including my kids in the story doubles it again, and if there are pictures of my kids too it's exponential'.

Uneven sideburns

The second story I will share from Peter Cook is about his obsession with having perfectly even sideburns. He wanted to deliver a message to the students of his Thought Leaders Business School that illustrated how an obsession with minor details can distract you from achieving a goal.

Story

For the 25-odd years that I've been shaving, I've had this mild terror of uneven sideburns. I obsess about making sure that they match. If it looks like the left one is a bit higher, I'll take a bit more off the right. And if I take off a bit too much, then I'll go back to the left again. I reckon my tolerance is less than half a millimetre.

Over the years, I've spent a lot of time and energy getting them just right. Recently I was struck by something remarkable. I've never noticed anyone with uneven sideburns. Not once. Ever. In my whole life. Come to think of it,

I've never noticed anyone with particularly even sideburns. Turns out I just don't pay attention to any sideburns other than my own. And my guess is that no-one else is paying any attention to mine.

At our Thought Leaders Business School immersion a couple of weeks back, I had a thought leader who was concerned about launching an offer to various natural health businesses. He was worried about what people who knew him as one thing would think if they saw that on his website.

The answer is they wouldn't think anything. They wouldn't notice. No-one is paying that much attention. Everyone is too caught up in their own world to notice that type of detail.

Likewise no-one notices if your weekly newsletter doesn't come out for a month. Sorry — we're not searching our email each morning with bated breath hoping that it's going to be there. (So you don't need to start with an apology that you haven't written it for a while ... no-one noticed.)

This doesn't mean you should stop obsessing over your positioning. Or that it's not important. Or that you should be out in the world with uneven sideburns. It just means relax a little. And don't let the minutiae get in the way of going to market and selling stuff.

Outcome

When Peter sits down to write a blog, he has a particular process he follows: 'The story and the message help each other. Often I'll think of a point I want to make, and then find the story that supports that message. Then as I tell the story the message evolves.' Yet often, the story will come first. 'Sometimes something happens that I just have to share, and then the message just falls out of the story.'

I tend to use this strategy a lot with my blogs. When something of interest occurs my children often remark (with a bit of an eyeroll), 'You're going to blog about that, aren't you Mum?' Yes, I am.

Two hats

The third example comes from Dayle Stevens, general manager and divisional chief information officer at National Australia Bank. She is also a diversity champion so she regularly speaks and writes about this subject.

This is one of her blogs.

Story

My seven-year-old son always takes two hats to school. I take one out each night, and he grabs a second one each morning as he heads off for the day. 'No hat, no outside play' is the rule, so one hat makes sense, but two? I have always assumed it was a mistake, and that he didn't realise one was already in his school bag. It had been going on for quite some time, so I asked him about it this week. His answer floored me.

Me: Why do you always take two hats to school?

Him: Don't you know? So if one of my friends forgets their hat, they can borrow one of mine for the day and then they can play outside and won't be left out.

After I pulled myself back together post bursting with pride at his giant golden heart, I reflected on his sense of community and innate understanding of inclusion. I was left wondering, Will it be his generation that won't stand for exclusion and will bring about change in the world, or is it something that will leave him as he storms and norms through all that is in front of him in growing up?

I made a pledge, there and then, that I would do all that I could to keep his giant golden heart full of this sense of community and inclusion forever. I'm also left with a new understanding that inclusion is as simple as always having a spare hat.

Outcome

'I use personal stories in my communications because I want to change the world and I do not believe that data and logic alone can do that,' says Dayle. 'Personal stories bring emotions and feelings, and these are the keys to inspiring people to change.'

She adds,

The reaction to the Two Hats story has always been positive. Admiring my son a little, yes, understanding more about my passion for inclusion, yes, but most importantly, inspiring a curiosity in others to explore inclusion, their own experiences and the role they themselves play in creating an inclusive world, which is the whole point of sharing that story in the first place.

Dayle also notes that the more she practises storytelling, the more she sees stories in everyday experiences. ‘I either experience something and realise that it is a great example of, say, passion for customers. Or I have an important message to communicate and tap into my experiences to find the relevant stories.’

Authentic leadership

The final example of a successful written story comes from Lynne Naphtali, commercial director at Accenture (where she is known by her maiden name ‘Storey’ — got to love that name!). This was Lynne’s first blog, and it’s a nice example of a transition story.

Story

Three weeks ago I heard about the very sad and shocking early death of an old colleague, Colin Fulton. The news came completely out of the blue. I cried there and then, standing at the pedestrian crossing on Dandenong Road, on my way into work as I read his obituary. I hadn’t spoken to him for a couple of years and hadn’t worked with him for at least a decade but when I stood there reading his obituary, I realised I’d been thinking about him just a few weeks before and had intended to check in with him as I did every so often.

Colin was our third or fourth client account lead on a troubled account in the UK, where I was working as contract management lead. It was a very tense working environment and we were told that a leader had been flown in from Texas. Having spent a great year at Austin University in Texas, I formed my own stereotype on the type of tough guy who was being airlifted in to save the day. The state slogan is ‘Don’t mess with Texas’, after all.

I still clearly remember Colin’s first day — in particular, the account leadership meeting to introduce him to the team. The room was packed and Colin was much more unassuming than I had ever imagined. He sat there with a laid-back smile and spoke in such a soft voice that everyone had to lean forward in their seats to even hear him. I remember being initially dismayed, thinking he didn’t seem to fit in and wondering how long he would last. How could someone so laid-back take control of the account?

Needless to say, Colin went on to impress and inspire us all. He was wise and measured, full of humour and, most of all, a true gentleman and incredibly authentic as a leader. He was a strong leader and was accountable for the tough calls, but he'd also make the tea and got a kick out of chatting to the analysts, especially if they mistook him for someone more junior.

This was long before I had ever heard of authentic leadership and I didn't truly appreciate the impact Colin's style had on me at that time. Looking back, I now realise he was the first senior leader I had seen who seemed comfortable in his skin and who could operate without bluster or aggression. His inner and outer self appeared to be the same and he could be successful without conforming to any stereotypes or the general tough leadership style of that time.

Reflecting back on this 10 years later, on my cold commute into work, I imagined all the other people who had been impacted by Colin and who had perhaps taken a little piece of that style and confidence with them into their own lives.

As I read the comments left on his obituary page, I realised that he had a profound impact on many of the people who worked with him. He was seen as not just a great leader, but also a mentor and someone who listened before offering advice. Often he'd ask an insightful question that would allow you to talk yourself to your own conclusion.

Although his style impacted me when we worked together in England, I was still very much attuned to the English consulting style of the time, where time was money and personal talk was not really integrated with delivery. In fact, I thought that too much 'person' got in the way of success.

Then I became a mum twice in two years and moved continents twice in the same time period. A year later, I found myself back to work in a very different culture and working environment in Australia. The general style here was much more laid-back and I honestly found that confronting at first. It took me a while to adjust and to realise that sharing yourself was just as, if not more, impactful in the workplace. With this, and perhaps with motherhood and a bit more maturity and confidence too, I came to realise that people were a major part of the enjoyment of work for me.

With this brave new realisation that being more 'visible', and vulnerable, helps us all grow personally and professionally, I'm putting myself out there

and pledging to share more.

So here I am with my first blog. I'm planning to talk more on topics like this that touch me and I hope you'll share your thoughts and keep me honest to leading in a way that is authentic to me. I hope that I can go some small way to honouring the immensely impressive life of a very special man and continue to be the best leader and person I can be.

Outcome

Lynne has received a lot of positive feedback from this blog and story, and believes it has brought her closer to her own team. She says, 'I now post monthly blogs to my team and have published some blogs externally too. Telling stories has a ripple effect and I've met a lot of ambitious and interesting people through sharing this and other personal stories.'

Lynne also adds,

Each time I write or tell a new story, I try to build on the experience from the last. I refine and reflect in a different way to what I would have done previously. I have a few trusted advisors I can bounce ideas off but in general I think that practice makes telling stories a lot easier and there is plenty of inspiration in our everyday lives to draw from.

Make your stories work

This completes part II and a range of different examples of stories that have worked in the spoken and written format. In the next part, we look at three organisations that have adopted storytelling into their whole workplace and culture.

What challenges did they face that warranted storytelling? What process did they go through to implement storytelling into their culture? What were the results and the lessons that they learned?

Part III

Storytelling case studies

The chapters in this part provide some longer case studies to show you how organisations have embraced the concept of storytelling and implemented it into their workplace. If you are a small business owner or CEO of a multinational, I am sure you will find these case studies valuable. I hope that documenting the process these organisations undertook, the lessons they learned along the way and the results they experienced will give you the courage and confidence to implement storytelling in your own company.

Chapter 13

Australia Post Case Study

Australia Post is a self-funded government business with approximately 36 000 employees nationwide. Their core business still involves the service of letters and parcels, but the organisation now also offers retail merchandise in a network of over 4000 post offices, along with financial services such as bill payment and banking.

Technology has fundamentally changed how we live our lives, and this has had a flow-on effect in the postal service, with more customers shopping online and the number of mail transactions declining. As customers' expectations evolve, so too must Australia Post.

The challenge

Australia Post has always had a strong sense of servicing its customers. In 2015 they wanted to refocus their existing emphasis on customers and introduce new shared values (shared across Australia Post and Startrack) and a new brand campaign.

Lauren Trethowan, Head of Enterprise Culture, established an engagement program to help everyone understand and connect with the new values. In her previous roles at PwC, Lauren had experienced many large-scale organisational changes with varying degrees of success. So she had an idea of what worked and didn't work; however, this was bigger than anything she had managed before.

The opportunity

The change program was called the 'Grapevine'. The grapevine (introduced in chapter 8) is the hidden, often unacknowledged network that exists at the crux of any organisation. Every employee is part of it, whether they realise that or not. You can't control the grapevine, but you can influence it. This is often overlooked, especially during large-scale change initiatives.

The idea behind Australia Post's Grapevine program was to tap into a group of influential people in the organisation who would be critical in driving the desired mindset and behavioural change. This was an opportunity to explore their company culture, embed their new values and capture powerful stories about their people.

The five Australia Post values to be communicated were:

1. Being safe everywhere
2. Respecting everyone
3. Helping each other
4. Improving every day
5. Delighting our customers

The process

Lauren explains that it was vital for the implementation side of the program to ‘create an environment where people felt safe and comfortable to express their views without fear of judgement or repercussion’. She adds

“ We needed not only the program to positively impact the people attending, but also for them to go back to their teams and positively impact the people around them. Allowing the natural process of what happens in a grapevine to occur.

The Grapevine program was delivered at a two-day event with 50 people from a broad cross-section of Australia Post, as well as external facilitators and specialists, including Colin Pidd, global partner and managing director at Conversant, and myself.

The chief customer officer at Australia Post, Christine Corbett, and Bob Black, Executive General Manager Parcel & eCommerce Services, became the sponsor of the Grapevine program and committed to playing an active role in subsequent Grapevine sessions.

Selecting the right team to attend the event was critical to the success of the Grapevine. HR worked with the senior leadership team from each business unit to select the most influential people across different levels and departments of the organisation. The whole concept of the Grapevine hinged on the impact these employees would have in their teams as they communicated their experiences.

Personal stories about the company values were to be developed and shared at the event. Time was provided to create an action plan around potential questions team members would be asked post event, how they would respond and the corresponding stories they could share to create a positive ripple effect throughout the organisation. These personal stories were not only shared on the day but were also either video recorded or audio recorded and shared on internal communication platforms throughout Australia Post.

The Grapevine stories

Here are five stories that were shared around the five specific company values at the Grapevine events.

**Being safe everywhere: Scott Mansell, Regional HR Manager
SA/NT/WA, Parcel Services**

About eight years ago I thought it would be a great idea for Christmas to buy a bike for my lovely wife, who's very outgoing and tenacious at everything she does.

To my surprise she turned around and said, 'I can't ride a bike'. I understood that to mean, 'I don't ride a bike', not that she actually can't ride a bike.

She was determined to give it a go. So we took off down the street heading towards the park. When we came to a bend in the road she started screaming, 'What do I do? What do I do? What do I do?'

I just yelled back, 'Turn! Turn!' Thinking that would be the logical thing to do.

She hit the kerb and toppled over the handlebars, taking the skin off her knee and hurting her wrist, and was pretty shaken up about it.

For me, that was a bit of a light bulb moment because I was responsible for her safety and I let her down. I'd set her up to fail.

This reminded me that it is a similar situation at work.

New people come into our workplace every day. We too often assume that they know what they're doing because they're in that industry but that isn't always the case.

Being safe everywhere is everyone's responsibility and is very important to me.

Respecting everyone: Paul Kelly, Change Manager and Community of Practice, Business Optimisation and Efficiency

This year Australia Post marched in Melbourne's Pride March, which is part of the Midsumma Carnival and the Pride Network.

It was such a great day, marching down Fitzroy Street. My partner, Clayton, joined us and it was a great day to be part of Australia Post. We all wore our T-shirts that have 'Post Pride' written on them. Everybody on the street was excited to see us, and it just gave me a sense of pride being an employee of Australia Post and knowing how they were supporting this.

On the way home Clayton was a little bit quiet and I asked him if he was all

right. He told me that he was upset that his workplace would never support this and that they don't have anything like a Post Pride Network. He said he wished that the shared value of respecting each other was alive and well at his workplace and he made me realise how very lucky I am that Australia Post does respect diversity and includes everybody, every day.

Helping each other: Jonathan Snelling, Senior Product Manager, Domestic Parcel Features at Australia Post

My family — myself, Helen and my four children — went on a big family road trip around New Zealand. Being a reasonably large family, we hired a Tarago.

We'd been on a lovely walk up to somewhere called the Franz Josef Glacier and come back at the end of the day, tired and satisfied, to the car park. I then noticed that the back tyre of the Tarago was flat as a pancake.

As I was going about changing the tyre and trying to get things ready a few people came by and said, 'Can we help, mate? Can we sort you out?'

I constantly responded with, 'No, she'll be right. No, I got this covered. It's all good.'

Anyway, it wasn't all good and it took about an hour to change that tyre. The whole time it was raining and I was getting wet and muddy. The family were also getting a little bit impatient and understandably just wanted to get home.

When I got in the car and we started driving off my eight-year-old son, Jack, piped up and said, 'Dad, why didn't you accept anybody's help? Why? Why didn't you? You know we could have changed the tyre so much quicker and be home now'.

He was actually right and I know I didn't accept help because of my pride and ego. So what I've learnt from my eight-year-old is to have humility and be able to let go of pride and accept people's offers of help.

Improving every day: Aiden Turner, Senior Manager at Australia Post

In 2013, I weighed 170 kilograms and I started on a journey of self-improvement. I guess the thing that really resonates with me is that when I first started I didn't know what to do or how to do it, so I just joined the gym and thought that all I could do was get on the treadmill and run.

But when I got to the gym and I got to the treadmill, I couldn't run.

So all I did was I walked as fast as I could, for as long as I could and I kept on doing that every single day. And every day I improved either the speed or the amount of time to the point where, one day, I was walking and got up to about 10 kilometres an hour and I thought I could go faster ... so I started running 12 kilometres an hour.

I kept on improving to the point where, about three and a half months ago, I completed my first marathon by myself — 42 kilometres.

So I'm pretty impressed by that and really proud of myself, and I'm more and more confident in everything I do now.

That is how we improve a little every day.

Delighting our customers: Mark Foster, Parcel Product Specialist, Product Sales SMB, Commercial and Product

We all have someone special in our lives. Mine is my little two-and-a-half-year-old daughter. Since she was six weeks old, we have had dad-and-daughter time on Saturday morning and I take her to the café and we have a coffee.

These days, she walks in, places my coffee order and gets a babychino — and once a month, the owner gives her a smiley cookie for free.

When it's time to leave, she goes and pays and he takes her around the counter and does the cash register with her. She talks about it for hours afterwards.

I look at that and think of the simple things in life that can make people smile. When you think about work we have so much opportunity to delight our customers. It's the little things we do that can put a smile on their face.

The outcome

The Grapevine program was piloted with 100 employees from across the enterprise in August 2015, with resounding success. An additional 10 sessions were run across four states within Australia and, to date, the program has been delivered to over 1000 employees.

Participants were surveyed at the start of the two-day Grapevine session and then at the end. The following table shows the four statements the participants were asked to agree or disagree with, and the results before and after the Grapevine session.

Australia Post: Grapevine survey

Statement	Pre Grapevine	Post Grapevine
I can confidently explain our Australia Post Group shared values.	50% agreed	97% agreed
I feel confident to have a conversation about Australia Post Group's new brand and culture.	50% agreed	88% agreed
I understand what it means for the Australia Post Group to become a leading eCommerce company.	76% agreed	94% agreed
I would recommend Australia Post as a place to work to friends and colleagues.	78% agreed	85% agreed

Testimonials from the participants after the session included:

- 'It was amazing to meet Post people who, after 30-plus years, still have the energy, passion and curiosity to challenge the status quo, push forward and embrace change. They're inspiring.'
- 'I had some eyerolling moments when the thought of using stories was first introduced. I now feel enlightened to the power of using stories to deliver a business message.'
- 'I love the way you have allowed imagination and creativity to communicate.'
- 'An incredible two days! So many amazing people at Post and I feel much more connected to the company and where we are going. The ability to tell

a story will stick with me for life! So great to see our leadership learning together.'

- 'It is very reassuring to know that Australia Post is dedicated to change and the cultural value. The Grapevine is a testament to this.'

In addition, a recent enterprise-wide employee engagement survey compared how Australia Post employees who had and had not attended the Grapevine session felt about the organisation and its values. These were some of the results highlighted:

1. Overall, employee engagement was 13 per cent higher for those who had attended a Grapevine session.
2. Being proud of the organisation's purpose was 19 per cent higher for Grapevine participants.
3. Connection to the organisation's values was 13 per cent higher for Grapevine participants.
4. Overall engagement was higher in teams where at least one person had attended a Grapevine session. This showed that people were going back to their place of work and sharing what they'd learnt.

The Grapevine program continues to gain momentum and the format evolves with new content being injected into the session via panel member selection, articles, videos, stories and the selection of guest speakers and customers.

As a result of the success of Grapevine, Lauren Trethowan and the Culture Team made the finalists for the 2016 Australian HR awards and the APS Workplace Excellence Awards.

Make your stories work

The use of storytelling at Australia Post is an increasingly trusted and effective channel for disseminating messages within a highly dispersed network. This case study shows how positive stories can infiltrate an organisation's culture and promote pride in the company.

In the next chapter, we look at how global healthcare provider Bupa has used storytelling to face their challenges.

Chapter 14

Bupa Case Study

Bupa is one of the world's leading health and care organisations, with more than 32 million customers in 190 countries. In 2014, the company had grown considerably in size due to several acquisitions, doubling their workforce from 40 000 employees to 80 000.

Each newly acquired company brought with it a different culture, set of values and vision. So late in 2014, Lizzy Geremia, Head of Internal Communications at Bupa Australia and New Zealand, alongside her global internal communications colleagues, was tasked with launching a completely new set of Bupa shared values and embedding them throughout the organisation.

The challenge

This was not your everyday revamp of values. The task was to consolidate a diverse set of values from across all the acquired companies throughout the world.

The Bupa executive team had chosen seven core values that supported their well-known purpose: 'Helping people live longer, healthier, happier lives'.

Bupa's seven global values were:

1. Passionate
2. Caring
3. Open
4. Authentic
5. Accountable
6. Courageous
7. Extraordinary

As a professional communicator, Lizzy's first reaction was, 'What about three values, maybe four, but not seven?'

She questioned the number with Dean Holden, Australian and New Zealand Managing Director, who was part of the global group who determined the values, and very passionate about them. He said, 'Lizzy, success for me isn't that everyone can tell me what the seven values are; success for me is that I can see they have enriched our organisation and are part of our culture.'

The challenge was on!

The opportunity

The values were to be communicated globally, but launched in Australia and New Zealand first at a two-day leadership conference in early February 2015. Lizzy recognised the importance in first communicating the values correctly in Australia and New Zealand, with the potential for this process to then become the model for other regions across the globe. Says Lizzy:

“ When I looked at the values and what they were, I thought, *We have to use storytelling to bring them to life*. We had values about authenticity, being open, passionate and courageous, which is what storytelling is all about. A goal of the global IC team was to embed the values through the lens of storytelling — we wanted to ensure the launch of the values was an enriching experience for our people.

Lizzy also wanted to live the values in the way she communicated them, so she felt it was important to be open, passionate, courageous and authentic in the way she presented those stories.

At the time, some leaders in Bupa had successfully used storytelling as a communication tool; however, not everyone had this skill. Consequently, Lizzy knew they needed to train leaders on how to tell stories effectively.

The process

Initially, seven leaders were chosen from across Australia and New Zealand, all tasked with sharing a personal story to communicate one of the Bupa values at the two-day conference. Each leader was given a choice of which value they wanted to talk about. Lizzy says:

“ I engaged Gabrielle to train these leaders on storytelling, and to provide mentoring around how to find the right personal story and deliver it with impact. The new values would be unveiled at the second day of the conference, with the seven leaders on stage sharing each personal story one by one. However, this plan was almost derailed when external facilitators decided the morning should first be spent debriefing everyone on the specifics of the first day!

Lizzy lived Bupa’s courageous value when she flagged the issue this would have on the impact on launching the values. She urged the managing director to let the leaders go first so that the stories could speak for themselves and connect and engage the audience from the get-go.

Many leaders at the conference still refer to the second day’s story-filled opening as memorable and enjoyable.

Bupa’s super seven stories

Here are the seven stories that launched each of the Bupa global values.

Passionate: John Rizzo, Head of Strategy, Bupa Australia and New Zealand

For as long as I can remember my mum has worked with the most severely mentally and physically disabled young people of our society. Her passion for this formed the backdrop of my teenage years.

When I was about 14, Mum started doing research into a ground-breaking approach for these students who saw the world as a scary, overwhelming place designed for someone other than them. Sitting in a room like this with movement, sound, lights and us ... can be a frightening experience.

Mum’s research involved creating an environment called a ‘sensory room’, which allowed only one sense to be activated at a time. The barriers Mum

faced at the outset were enormous. No budget, a battle for prioritisation, and the need to create buy-in from her fellow teachers and parents.

Throughout my teenage years, our dinner conversations were often consumed with talk of Mum's ongoing research, her fundraising and the barrier after barrier she fought through. Despite being given reason after reason to give up, Mum's passion continued to drive her.

After five long years the funds were raised, the room was open and our dinner conversations changed to Mum sharing the success and breakthroughs the students experienced in that room. Mum started scrapbooks of all her students who would come through the sensory room. She loved them all.

When I think about passion I think about Mum. Full of energy and inspiration that she broke down every barrier she faced. She had a belief and she was prepared to fight for it.

That room is still at her school in Melbourne, making a difference to thousands of people's lives. My mum is still working with them, still loves them, still loves what she does and she still has all those scrapbooks.

Caring: Brent Bennett, Head of Wellness Strategy and Operations, Bupa

Back in my late twenties, I went to a Tony Robbins speaking event at the Entertainment Centre in Sydney. Tony took the packed centre on a roller-coaster journey of over the top 'rah rah' to deep insight and reflection.

I wasn't so much into the hype, but I was intrigued throughout the day by Tony's reminder that at the end of the day he would be giving us all a special gift. What would this gift be? Maybe a show bag? He charged a motza for the ticket, so it could actually be quite good.

It came to the end of the day and he had the audience in the palm of his hand as he once more promised his special gift. The gift went something along the lines of,

After you leave here today, take the time to visit an aged care home. Take the time to talk to an elderly resident; chances are they won't have had a visitor for some time, someone to take the time to talk to them, listen to them and show you care. For what will be a small sacrifice of your time will provide tremendous joy for someone else, and you will find their gratitude for the care you have provided will be returned to you tenfold.

All those years ago, I chose not to take Tony up on his gift. But 25 years on, I was reminded of this story and finally appreciated the essence of his message. My mother-in-law was admitted to a care facility 18 months ago. While she benefits from regular visits from my wife, Gill, and other family members, many residents have no-one.

On first visiting the home, Gill was quite confronted and saddened by all of these old people, covered in white sheets, sitting quietly, staring vacantly. Today is an amazingly different story. She greets and farewells each of the residents by name and knows their individual stories, and many now respond enthusiastically to her warm welcomes and return the kisses she blows to them.

I too have finally cashed in on Tony Robbins's gift. I concentrate on the few men in the home and particularly Gary, who is not too many years older than myself, but has spent the last decade in the home with fellow residents 30 to 40 years his senior. Taking the time to listen, showing some compassion, generating a bit of laughter, showing that you care. I now invariably leave feeling like I have made a difference ... and I'm better for it.

Open: Tina Paterson, Functional Transformation Director, Bupa

Last Christmas, I was pulling the perfectly cooked turkey out of the oven when my son, Angus, who was five at the time, saw me and said, 'Mum that turkey isn't like a real turkey is it?'

I'm not sure if you have ever lifted a turkey out of a very hot oven, but they are heavy and, as I was manoeuvring it to the bench, I quickly replied, 'Yes, Angus, it is'.

He was disgusted that we could be eating an animal and refused to eat the turkey. (He still ate the ham because he had not quite made the connection that ham was also from an animal because it didn't have an animal name, but I wasn't about to tell him.)

On one of our Friday morning rituals to our local café, Angus started asking questions about eating other animals and made the link that steak was actually from a cow and ham and bacon were from a pig. He told me he was going to be a vegetarian.

In my head I was thinking, But that would mean cooking two meals for our family every night, and how would he get enough iron and protein in his diet? I could not comprehend that someone so young could make that

decision. I did my best to persuade him against it, even suggesting that fish would be okay. With that he looked at me and said, 'But an animal is an animal, Mum'.

When I was asked to talk about the value of 'open' today I thought about Angus and how he sees everything through an unfiltered lens. Through a humanitarian lens of what is the right and wrong thing for people ... and animals. He always manages to see things from another point of view, something I failed at when he told me he wanted to be a vegetarian.

At what age do we start subconsciously filtering ideas? As we become older and apparently wiser, our experiences mean we can often see things through a practical lens and are therefore not as open as we could be.

Imagine if we could be open like a five-year-old child and see things through an unfiltered lens ... to be open to different points of view, to truly listen and understand. Just imagine what we could achieve.

Authentic: Greg McPherson, General Manager, Bupa Optical

For most of us, our lives are lived through this device, the business card. It tells people who we are and what our title is, and really a lot of our worth is tied up in this single little bit of paper.

If I turn mine side on and look very carefully, I see a different view. The different view I see looks out on a cricket ground full of teenage boys. It's on this ground that you get asked different questions than you would on this. You get asked, 'Does your son bat or bowl? Can they field? Will they keep up? And what about you? Will you help out? Will you turn up? Will you score?' I hate scoring.

For me, this ground is really for my son, Mitchell, and his love of cricket. In fact, it's on this ground that he and his friends learn how to be in a team, how to work together, play, get on, realise sometimes you win, sometimes you don't, develop a sense of sportsmanship and, in essence, start to figure out who they are as young men.

They have to figure out if they are genuine to each other, if they want to be there, what they say, what they do, and what they mean — do they all connect? Because when you play cricket, week after week, year after year, as teenage boys, you can't fake it. They have to be genuine, and in fact they're learning to be authentic.

For us parents, mostly dads but some mums too, whiling away the hours, it

reminds us of why we're there for them. We're there for them because it's their genuine love of the sport, and they really want us to feel how that feels for them.

It reminds us to be authentic too, because again, as parents, we have a hard time faking it. 'Dad, did you see that catch?' Sure. 'Did you see that wicket I just got? What about that catch that I nearly caught?' They know when we're faking it and they know when we're authentic. So for me, when I sit down next to a fellow dad and he asks, 'Who are you?' I simply turn and say, 'I'm Mitchell's dad'.

Accountable: Anthony Oates, Head of Legal — Health Services and M&A, Bupa

Late last year, my partner, Christie, spent some time in Africa. She'd been planning it for about two years, and it involved some volunteer teaching in Ghana. Unfortunately for her, the timing could not have been worse. The Ebola outbreak had started to gain pace in West Africa, and everyone was telling her not to go, it was just too dangerous.

Meanwhile, I was planning a trip to Europe for a wedding and a leadership conference in London. Being the unselfish and supportive partner I am, I suggested she ditch her do-gooding activities and join me for a week on a beach in Europe.

I know you're all thinking, What could be better than a week on a beach with a lawyer? Despite the obvious appeal, she moved heaven and earth to change her African trip, and she ended up going to Tanzania to do a similar volunteering arrangement.

About a week in, I received a really excited email from her. She'd met this amazing boy called Lewis. To my relief, Lewis was a five-year-old from her school. He was bright and he had enormous potential. Unfortunately, like a lot of kids in Africa, his parents were really poor and there was no way they would have been able to send him to school next year.

We both decided that we would sponsor Lewis, and send him to a local boarding school where he'd not only be educated but also fed and clothed. I know that's a really cliché thing to do, and a lot of people here have probably done something similar, but it made me realise how something so small could have such a significant impact on someone else's life, and really change their direction.

It wouldn't have happened had it not been for Christie taking accountability over her commitment, taking ownership and making it happen. When I think about the value of accountability, I think of Christie. Like her, all of us, every day, have the opportunity to take ownership, make it happen, and have a significant impact on someone else's life.

Courageous: Maureen Berry, Clinical Service Improvement Director, Bupa Aged Care Services

I have 10 brothers and sisters and I am the second eldest. To say my childhood was difficult would be a massive understatement. We were desperately poor, my father was an abusive alcoholic and we had some shocking times.

I remember after one terrible night my elder brother and I (we were 12 and 13 at the time) made a pact. We agreed to never marry young, to never marry anyone who had a drinking problem and to not have children in poverty. We also made a promise that no matter what happened we would look after each other and our younger siblings.

It was not long after that my mother decided she could not afford to look after her 11 children. She had divorced, we were all in a shelter and she had decided the best way was to offer all of us up as wards of the state. I can distinctly remember standing up and speaking up to her and saying, 'No, you can't do it. There has to be a better way. We have to stay together, we will find a way'.

We did end up staying together and the positives that my childhood gave me were to be brave, to speak up and to dare to try.

Eighteen months ago I faced this again. Getting close to retirement I had an option of either easing into the sunset, drinking pina coladas, or taking on the project to integrate our health services ... Talk about courageous. The aged care health system was completely outdated, but I knew from my experience I could give this all my energy and a red-hot go. I knew there was a better way, that it had to be integrated and that by staying together, we could find a way.

So I am not having an easy drive into retirement as planned — more like attacking it 'Thelma and Louise' style — but I am so excited that at Bupa we have the courage to fundamentally change the aged care model. We are brave and dare to try to truly live our passion of helping people live longer, healthier and happier lives.

Extraordinary: Jenni Coles, Director, Bupa Care Services in Auckland, New Zealand

My dad had six young children when he was diagnosed with a severe heart infection. He could have become a cardiac cripple and given up work, but he didn't. He continued to work and support our family for the next 20 years.

Dad was a county engineer responsible for roads and bridges for a large rural area. Within that area, there were about 100 small old one-lane wooden bridges. These needed to be replaced because they were dangerous for the stock trucks and families, but the county didn't have sufficient funding to replace them all.

So Dad researched the options and decided the best approach was to replace the bridges with concrete two-lane bridges.

What he did next went above and beyond his role. In our own backyard he built a pre-stressed concrete plant, powered by an engine from a steam train, and got to work creating all the bridge piles and bridge spans for the 100 bridges.

When I think about my dad, a lasting image I have is of him standing beside a truck loaded with the makings of a bridge with a huge smile on this face.

I see my dad as extraordinary. He battled through severe illness to provide for our family and he followed his desire to ensure our community had safe roads and bridges. Those bridges are still there today and will be for the next 100 years.

We might not be building physical bridges at Bupa but every day we have the opportunity to be extraordinary. To go above and beyond, to be the best we can dream to be — like my dad did.

The outcome

Directly after the conference leaders were given a toolkit to help them embed the values in their teams. This included a guide on how to find a personal story that aligned to the values and an overview on how to run these sessions in their teams. This was a key step in sharing the values across the business, and happened over the two months after the leadership conference. So successful was this approach that the framework was adopted globally across Bupa.

‘I’ve been blown away by how quickly the values became part of life at Bupa, and I believe the storytelling approach was the reason for this,’ says Lizzy.

In May 2015, an initiative called #bupathanks was created by the global internal communications team. The purpose was to engage all employees in the Bupa values and recognise one another for living different values, either by sending them a physical card or an e-card. Over 1600 thankyou e-cards and 10 000 physical cards were sent out throughout the Australian and New Zealand region during the #bupathanks week.

Values flip cards were produced and shared in office meetings, where employees used them to call out a value or declare they were going to say something authentic. Morning teas were held and, in Australia and New Zealand, some employees were visited by Thank You Man, who visited various sites publicly thanking some people who had received a #bupathanks card.

Bupa implemented a ‘value of the month’ for the rest of the year, where they encouraged others to share stories about where they had seen someone living a company value. These values are now integrated with the performance cycle, providing rewards and recognition to those employees who demonstrate the Bupa values.

Bupa no longer conducts employee engagement surveys but has adopted a simple Net Promoter Score, asking their employees every quarter whether they would they recommend Bupa as a place to work and why.

When employees give a rating of 10 out of 10 and say they would recommend Bupa, one of the key reasons they give is based on the company values and purpose.

Interestingly, when employees provide a low rating, saying they wouldn’t recommend Bupa, a reason they give is that they don’t see the values being lived

by those around them.

Make your stories work

The success of this case study opened the door for storytelling to be used for other communication issues at Bupa. I have since trained the executive leadership team and major transformation team in storytelling, as well as the internal communications team for internal support. More recently, Bupa have added my online storytelling program to their internal educational offerings so all employees can access and learn the skill of storytelling.

In the next case study, we look at a different approach Spark New Zealand has used to bring their values and vision to life through storytelling.

Chapter 15

Spark case study

New Zealand's biggest telecommunications company, Spark, provides digital services to millions of New Zealanders and thousands of Kiwi businesses. It is one of the country's largest listed companies, and is home to over 5000 employees spread across the country.

In 2013, Spark (formerly Telecom) took a big leap into the unknown, committing to a three-year business turnaround plan to transform itself and seeking to play an even bigger role in New Zealand's digital future. The scale of the transformation has been enormous — some say one of the largest in New Zealand's business history.

The challenge

In transforming the company from Telecom to Spark, the challenge was to re-invigorate the business from the foundations up. Spark was operating in an industry that was (and still is) going through massive disruption, and it wanted to communicate the burning platform for adaptation, and the pace and momentum needed to drive essential change.

At the time of the rebrand, Spark decided to take a closer look at its internal values. It made sense for the internal Spark team to align themselves closely with the sense of vigour and clarity the rebranding of Spark was projecting to its customers. Lasting and authentic change needed to come from the inside out, rather than just swapping out the more publicly visible elements of a company brand.

To go about this, Spark wanted to involve its people in writing the new Spark story and the values that would be the DNA of its new brand. Getting this right was critical and, because of this, Spark put in place a collaborative approach with its employees.

The process that Spark went through in determining their values was, in my experience, unique. They ran three separate working groups (with approximately 30 people in each group), around the country, all completely independent of each other.

Each team started with a blank sheet of paper and was asked to write real values for real people, using real language. None of the output from any one team was shared with the other teams; the teams operated independently of each other. Amazingly, all three teams wrote extremely similar values.

Spark then got 20 senior people in a room and presented them with the ideas from the three teams. They could find nothing that needed to be added or eliminated — they worked on some minor ‘wordsmithing’, but that was it. Spark people knew and could convey, authentically and in their own words, how they would ‘be’ and show up for New Zealanders (internally and externally).

This process helped to create a strong sense of ownership and personal connection to the values and purpose from employees — because they were written ‘by the people, for the people’.

So their purpose was clearly defined: Our ambition is to be a winning business,

inspired by customers to unleash the potential in all New Zealanders.

Their four new guiding values (written by their people) then featured language to reflect this purpose. Their overarching values are:

- We listen.
- We're straight up.
- We get stuck in.
- We win together.

The behaviours that underpin each value are also written in a way that is very different to normal values and behaviours. I particularly like the behaviours that are listed under 'We're straight up':

- We call a spade a spade — with respect.
- We're jargon-free — we use the language of our customers.
- We create value for our customers and us.
- We are up-front and we front up.

The opportunity

Heather Polglase, Head of HR at Spark Digital, was the key driver to introducing storytelling into Spark. Heather states,

“ We are on a journey to transform how we show up for and deliver for New Zealand customers and businesses — that takes a fair bit of heavy lifting and requires world-class leadership and teams ... as such, inspiring and taking people with us is mission critical. Given that, storytelling is a skill our leaders and many of our people will all need and want!

Spark were looking not only to bring their values to life but also for ways to further develop their leaders and inspire and keep their people.

Based on feedback and experience in leading organisation change, Heather understood that leaders were key to communicating the values in ways that brought them to life for their people. For Heather, ‘essentially it could be the difference between values staying printed on the walls and values being walked and talked’.

Heather realised that storytelling was a critical skill for all their leaders to learn, stating,

“ We could see that in many cases our leaders didn’t necessarily feel or believe they could be inspirational in the way they communicated with their team and with our customers. Some of them perceived that this ‘inspirational’ messaging and presentation was reserved only for a chosen few, who were extroverts and ‘good’ at public speaking. That’s where the storytelling training needed to come in.

The process

The storytelling approach was initially piloted in July 2015 at the customer conference for Spark's business arm. This was an optional workshop, offered as a way for the sales team and leaders who looked after delivering services to New Zealand businesses to build a new capability.

This ended up being the most widely talked about workshop in the optional afternoon of this conference. But it was reserved for just a few and didn't necessarily have a clear 'call to action' back into the business. Fast forward to November 2015 and another chance to develop an incredible skill was found — storytelling masterclasses for the masses at Spark. An invite was sent to about 400 people throughout Spark to see what the interest was.

The masterclass was marketed as providing skills to not only help them communicate Spark's values but also improve their communication in their everyday roles as leaders or sales and service people.

The invite was sent out on a first-in, first-served basis, with a strict capacity limit to room sizes, and all sessions reached capacity within a few days. I conducted four masterclasses in Wellington and Auckland to over 300 Spark leaders. Those who missed out on getting a seat were still trying to get in on the day!

Spark stories

The following is a selection of stories that Spark leaders developed and shared to demonstrate the company's values.

We listen: Amanda Jarvie, Manager Market Development, Spark

A couple of years ago I was driving home from work and heard John Kirwan, the Auckland Blues coach and mental health ambassador, talking on the radio about his new book, which he had written to help parents prevent teenage depression and suicide.

As research for the book he organised to meet with groups of teenagers. Walking into his first group and wanting them to feel at ease, he drew on his experience from the young men in the Blues and welcomed them with the traditional Kiwi 'Sup Bro'. Their reaction surprised him: they were obviously uncomfortable. When he asked them why, they said it was

embarrassing and not the right way for an adult to speak to teenagers. He explained that this is exactly the issue — parents are struggling with how to talk to their teenagers; often all they get are grunts, shrugs or ‘whatevers’, so what should they do instead? What they said was that often parents were busy or at work and when they come home they walk through the door and start asking how their day was or other stuff. It suddenly suits the parents to talk, but it doesn’t necessarily suit kids to talk then.

Their strong feedback for parents was that rather than doing it all on their terms and deciding when they were ready to talk, be ready to listen when their kids want to be heard.

I thought about my own situation, a working mother of three, and recognised that I behave in exactly the way they described — wanting my kids to tell me everything about their day as soon as I get home from work and getting the same mixed reaction.

I also thought about the frustration I feel at night when they string out bedtime with endless stories and stalling tactics. Taking the insight from these teenagers I realised that my kids were telling me that the time they wanted to talk was when they went to bed at night. I needed to change my approach so that I could be there and really listen then.

All it took was a simple change — making bedtime 15 minutes earlier so we now have that time to talk.

This is equally relevant for us all at Spark. Imagine if we were to embrace our value of ‘We listen’ and make ourselves available to truly listen to our customers whenever they want to be heard.

We’re straight up: Wendy Ireland, Brand Communications Manager, Spark

Being straight up. It’s a phrase that’s used a lot and I think it means many things to different people. I’ve often been described as straight up in my communication style but probably more for my tendency to ‘call a spade a bloody shovel’. In my younger years I would pride myself on being the first to pipe up if something needed pointing out. People would often sidle up to me after and say, ‘Really glad you raised that — it’s what we were all thinking but wouldn’t say’.

But I think over time my straight-up-ness lost its way, became a little too vigilante. It kind of forgot what it was fighting for ... but it didn’t need to

fight at all. Assertiveness was something I'd completely misread for needing to be right, needing to not fail or needing to be louder to make my point heard.

Six years ago I visited my sister in Las Vegas, where she had just started her law degree at the University of Nevada. I went to a lecture with her and saw, embossed on a plaque on the wall outside the lecture theatre, a quote that really inspired me. It said, 'Don't raise your voice; improve your argument'. I took a photo of it and filed it away somewhere. I thought about it once or twice in that time but didn't really put it into practice.

It was really only this year that straight up's true strength became clear to me. And it is more about vulnerability than it is about strength. Accepting my vulnerability — really owning it — has taken more courage than my typical 'go into battle' approach to communication with someone, and the results go so much further. And the shoulders are so much lighter.

It's also this year that I had the good fortune of a new manager for our even newer brand communications team. My manager lives all of Spark's values but it's her perfect balance of empathy and energy that makes her straight up value an excellent act to follow. I've learned more about how to be truly straight up in this year than I have in my whole life.

In a team meeting just last week, my manager segued into inspiring quotes and mentioned she'd been watching Suits — a legal drama — on Lightbox. Harvey Specter, one of the lead characters, had said something that really inspired her: 'Don't raise your voice; improve your argument'. I mentioned my University of Nevada connection to that quote and walked away with one of those lovely warm fuzzy feelings of a happy coincidence. Or perhaps it was fate.

To me, straight up at Spark is about taking small steps every day to quietly observe and accept my vulnerable self, go into a situation with true empathy and, most important of all ... breathe.

We get stuck in: Heather Polglase, Head of HR, Spark Digital

Growing up as part of a family business was a very dynamic and flexible experience for me — one I'm so grateful for. From very early in my childhood (about the age of four) life was a very busy and organic thing, full of wonderful people. My mum and dad owned restaurants and were very hands-on in their businesses, often working long hours — so I grew up spending a fair amount of time fitting in with their hectic schedules and

being part of a wonderful restaurant environment filled with the fantastic people they employed. I think I've had many, many restaurant aunties over the years, who taught me many valuable life and career lessons!

While for many of us, incredible dining experiences look and feel seamless — like well-oiled machines — I knew, and was part of, what went on behind the scenes and that, let me tell you, was often quite a different picture! Lots to be done, time constraints and big feasts to deliver to keep people happy and coming back for more! But in all of this I always knew that my parents loved being in business to create a real difference for people and families — helping them to create memories around eating and drinking together.

As I grew older and became part of the crew (after school, weekends and holidays), I was given more and more opportunities to contribute to the experience we were creating — peeling potatoes, washing dishes, rolling ice-creams and plating meals up, waiting on tables — and I came to understand that while it certainly was a different picture to that of those enjoying and paying for the experience front of house, actually as a team we looked like a pretty cool version of the picture too. We were a team all mucking in and pulling together to deliver incredible enjoyment and experiences for others. We could plate up and send meals out for up to 150 people in less than 15 minutes — purely because we all focused on the outcome, talking with each other, helping each other and doing what it took to get to the outcome, no matter who we were or what our job was.

Some years later as I reflected on these incredible childhood experiences, and all the hard work behind the scenes, I talked with my parents about how they made such experiences happen time and time again, and also why their employees had always felt more like an extended family to me! They talked about how they were always very clear about what they were aiming to be and do, that they employed people to work with them whose values aligned with theirs, who understood that there was only so much money available and who took the approach to do what it took to get there — often above and beyond the role of being a waitress, kitchen hand or chef.

When we talk about our value 'We get stuck in' and how this can truly help us deliver amazing experiences for customers, I often reflect on how my parents were able to shape this value as part of their approach to leading in their own business. They taught me and many others that while clever individuals are a good starting point, a team of people with the desire to create difference and 'amazingness' can all rally together to do so. Getting

stuck in is a part of me and who I am as a leader — I want to continue role-modelling this in the way my parents did for me.

We win together: Neal Richardson, Portfolio Director, Spark

Last weekend I realised one of my favourite shirts was past its best before date. It was frayed around the collar, had a rip along the bottom and, on closer inspection, the material was very thin. I was a little disappointed because I was sure I had only bought the shirt a few years ago but when I looked at the label I realised it was more than 10 years old. In hindsight, I probably should have thrown the shirt away several years ago.

I actually found it hard to believe the shirt was 10 years old and it reminded me how time can sneak up on you and you can hold on to things longer than you should.

I think it's easy to fall into this same trap at work as well as in our personal lives. Before we know it, years have passed and we have continued to do the same things in the same way that we have always done.

When I think of our value of 'We win together', I think we all need to see opportunities every day to do something different. Either getting rid of something that no longer serves us or approaching a problem in a new way or seeking out a new challenge we had not considered before.

By doing small things differently, we start to change both ourselves and the people around us so we can truly win together.

The outcome

The storytelling training received some incredible feedback, with 90 per cent advocacy for usefulness from the post-training survey. Asked whether the storytelling masterclass built participants' confidence and capability in communicating with their teams and customers, 98 per cent responded 'agree', with 2 per cent unsure.

One verbatim comment from the feedback sums up why storytelling skills are so important:

“ The training was really interactive and forced you to think of real-life examples that you could apply to work-life scenarios. I enjoyed the group sessions and the opportunity to all share stories that were centred around our values. I now actively try to think of stories to help highlight a point or bring more weight to a topic of conversation.

Following on from the success of the initial training in November 2015, the next opportunity to upskill more leaders in the art of storytelling came about six months later at Spark's Truly Useful Leadership conference.

Building on the launch of the values and to continue to bring these values to life, the company launched a cross-business initiative called Little Victories, which focused on what being 'customer inspired' means in practice. For Spark people, this meant being 'truly useful', and committing to helping customers, and customers' customers, win little victories every day.

The purpose of this recognition program was to find stories of employees living the values and, in doing so, being truly useful for customers — and then to acknowledge them for this.

In a short period of time, the Little Victories philosophy became commonplace across Spark's day-to-day work, and quickly became the lens through which everyone at Spark shares, celebrates and recognises the way they can work together to enable true usefulness for their customer community.

Heather says,

“ Our values underpinned our ambition and this program, and so it was a no-brainer that we then added another series of storytelling workshops for our leaders across the country, given the success and incredible feedback from the first round. It also meant we captured more of our audience and we got a

chance to solidify learning and application for those who had been before, and loved it.

This time I trained 600 of Spark's most senior leaders along with other key influencers and support staff in different locations over six masterclasses, as part of their Truly Useful Leadership conference. Spark, living their value of 'We win together', invited some of their key external partners to attend the conference and training sessions.

After the conference, they provided further one-hour workshops and then followed up with some skill-building videos for all of the participants. The videos were strategically sent out to all participants over the four-week period following the conference. This ensured the skill remained front of mind by reinforcing what they had learnt at the conference and encouraging them to share their stories.

Understanding the importance of role modelling from the CEO and senior executive leaders, more intensive training was conducted with the top 40 senior leaders, including the CEO and executive team. An invite was sent out to these 40 senior executives and, after 14 signed up within the first hour, additional sessions were organised to cater for high demand. This demand highlighted their commitment to learn the skill for themselves and to role-model the behaviour for others.

On reflection Heather states,

“ I haven't experienced this degree of uptake for a skill-building opportunity before — it seriously sold out faster than our Christmas event! I also witnessed firsthand how energised, engaged and challenged our people were during the masterclasses — and now I've watched them practise, experiment and talk about what they learned with many others. All of us as leaders paying it forward, which is what it's all about.

Many of the comments I received highlighted far more flow-on benefits too — it was awesome to see how something this powerful also brought together team members from across different business groupings and teams, and therefore helped to break down silos as well.

It's an amazing feeling and outcome when you can offer an opportunity for development such as this — where the return on investment from building storytelling capability is for them personally (and their career), for our people and teams and ultimately for our customers.

Make your stories work

Too often companies expect leaders to ‘communicate the values, live the values, and drive the values through the organisation’, but don’t provide the space and skills for them to do that. This case study at Spark is a wonderful example of how to use storytelling organisation-wide to engage everyone in the purpose and values.

This also completes part III. But before you think you know everything about telling a good story, read the conclusion for some final secrets to good storytelling.

Conclusion

I'm often asked, 'How many stories is enough?' To answer this, I'd have to think about the numerous inspiring speakers I have seen in person and online, all in a variety of business contexts and settings — from one-on-one coaching and mentoring sessions to 1000-plus conferences and speaking gigs. This book has limited space for the variety of contexts in which you can use stories — and the number of examples keeps growing by the day.

So, no magic number exists when it comes to the number of stories you can share. We are still a long way from having 'too many stories'.

Secrets to make your stories work

The fact-and-figure heavy business world is desperate for authentic and story-filled engaging leaders. I hope the tools, techniques and examples in this book inspire you to be one of those leaders. And hopefully by now you know how to find and share your own stories in a variety of different situations — but before you unleash your newfound storytelling skills on the world, here are five secret tips to stories you must know.

Embrace vulnerability

The world's best storytellers embrace their vulnerability. Brené Brown, for example, is a professor at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work. Her book, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent and Lead*, is a *New York Times* number one bestseller and was voted by *Fast Company* magazine as one of the top 10 business books of 2012. Her 2010 TEDx Houston talk, 'The Power of Vulnerability', is in the top 10 of the most-viewed TED talks in the world.

Brown believes that vulnerability is 'our most accurate measure of courage' and describes it as 'the last thing I'm willing to show you. In you, it's courage and daring. In me, it's weakness'.

Good storytellers understand the power of letting others in to our most secret selves. They see it as a strength rather than as a weakness. Showing vulnerability in your stories makes them more memorable, engaging and enjoyable.

Vulnerability is not about oversharing and wearing your heart on your sleeve. Showing vulnerability requires boundaries and trust. Vulnerability without boundaries can lead to distrust and disengagement, with people potentially feeling like you are deliberately trying to manipulate them.

Vulnerability is about sharing our feelings and experiences with people who have earned the right to hear them. Brown believes, 'We need to feel trust to be vulnerable and we need to be vulnerable in order to trust'.

Keep it succinct

As a general rule, stories in business should be about one to two minutes long when spoken. Any time over this and your audience will start to think, *Get to the point*. In some cases, they may even verbalise this!

I was running a workshop once where one of the participants was sitting for a while with her arms crossed, not looking overly impressed. When I asked for questions and comments she shot up her hand and said, ‘I don’t think this storytelling stuff works. I shared a story once to the board and after 10 minutes someone told me to get to the point’. I’d say her story was about eight to nine minutes too long.

If you are a speaker on stage your stories can at certain times go longer than this, but generally in business they need to be succinct. People love listening to stories, but make sure you stop talking well before they have stopped listening.

Use humour wisely

In an effort to be more engaging, many people try to make their stories funny. Nothing is wrong with sharing a funny story. Most people love a bit of humour, but everyone’s version of what is funny differs. So humour definitely has its place, but you must use it appropriately.

Anything that can be interpreted as sexist or racist is a big no-no. And that is no excuses. Political humour is also risky because it has the potential to divide your audience. The key with humour is to know your audience and who you are talking to. Play it safe with ‘in jokes’ too — unless, of course, all of your audience are in on the joke.

Done well, humour can be used to bring in humility. This could be very important when sharing stories of your own triumph, because humility can help decrease the chance of people thinking you are bragging. Humour can also be used strategically to lighten the mood of a tragic story.

Be prepared

I have witnessed firsthand how much time and effort people who are brilliant at sharing stories put into preparing their stories. This includes making sure they are very clear on their message, finding the most appropriate story, writing their story out, practising their story and being prepared to start all over again if they feel the story is not working.

Ironically, when these first-class storytellers share their stories, people in the audience or in their team often comment that they are ‘a natural’. They are not naturals; they have just put a lot of preparation into the stories.

You need to prepare your stories by planning them, writing them out and then

practising them over and over again. This will help you determine what detail you put in and what detail you leave out. It will also help you make sure you have the right story for the right message.

Have a variety

When it comes to storytelling you really need a variety of stories. The worst thing you can do is have one or two stock-standard stories that you pull out for every occasion and for every message. You do not want your audience to think, *If he tells one more story about his kids, I will ...* or, *Here we go, again another story about her triathlons.*

If you are a keynote speaker and your audience is different every time, of course you will have some leverage to use the stories that you know work. Likewise if you are a leader and you have to deliver the same presentation to different audiences.

The main thing with stories is to have a variety. Some of your stories may be quite personal and more emotional than others. Some may be stories about when you were a child, and some about something that happened on the weekend or in the week at work.

Here's the real secret: the best way to have variety in your stories is to always be on the lookout for new ones.

Next steps

If you're committed to being an authentic and engaging leader who uses storytelling — and, seriously, why wouldn't you be? — get out there and give it a go. Don't let this book gather dust on your bookshelf. Read the examples, find your own stories and start sharing them in your own world.

If you need a bit more help applying the techniques, check out my online storytelling program, which you can access from anywhere in the world. Or if you want a bit of inspiration for you or your whole team, contact me about a speaking event or training program, like those you've seen and read about in this book.

Most of all, don't forget to share this book with your team and other colleagues. As you have seen, storytelling is at its most powerful when it is a shared experience.

Gabrielle

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Connect and share

Stories are such a powerful and genuine way to connect, and I would love to hear your story.

Which of the stories in this book really resonated with you? Do you have a story that you have shared and received good feedback on?

Your story may just make it into my next book!

Ways to connect:

- LinkedIn: GabrielleDolan
- Twitter: GabrielleDolan1
- website: www.gabrielledolan.com
- email: enquiry@gabrielledolan.com

I'm equally passionate about reducing the amount of corporate jargon we use in business. If you are too, I'd love to see you join the Jargon Free Fridays revolution:

- #jargonfreefridays
- www.jargonfreefridays.com

Finally, remember that stories are like drinking a nice bottle of wine. Always best shared and always know when to stop.

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