

Doug Stevenson's Story Theater International

Influence Anyone – Storytelling for Leaders and Executives

by **Doug Stevenson, CSP**

When you give a speech or presentation:

- Do people look forward to hearing you speak?
- Do you engage the complete and total attention of your audience?
- Do you inspire confidence in leadership?

You can lead, engage and inspire, all at the same time, when you learn the secrets to becoming a better storyteller.

Mistakes, Failures and Small Disasters

Finding stories to tell that are relevant and engaging is simple. Stories revolve around moments: big moments, small moments, and meaningful moments.

Garrison Keillor, the host of A Prairie Home Companion on NPR radio, says that “your best stories are about mistakes, failures and small disasters”. In the context of my Nine Steps of Story Structure, I call these “obstacles”. They can be big obstacles, like a life-threatening illness or a tragic event; or small obstacles, like a misunderstanding or getting stuck for two hours in traffic on the way to an important meeting.

Think about your life over the last six months. Did any challenges or obstacles cross your path? Were there things that didn't go according to plan: big things, little things, important things?

The mistake, failure or small disaster is the obstacle that gives your story tension and infuses it with emotion. Think of “the moment” that you encounter the obstacle as the pivot point of your story. This moment causes you to make choices about what to do next. I call this the “The Iceberg Moment.” In the story of the Titanic, everything was going along fine, until the ship encountered the iceberg. If there hadn't been an iceberg, we wouldn't have a story worth telling – it would be a boring story about a big cruise ship that got where it intended to go.

The Event Doesn't Have to Be Tragic

Iceberg aside, the moments that make for a great story don't have to be profound or dramatic. Most of the stories my coaching clients bring to me to help them with are about everyday events and situations. They're about things that go sideways at home, at work and everywhere in between.

The power of story lies not in the event, but in finding the meaning in the moment. Often, the story and the lesson-learned turn out to be metaphors. You don't have to have an interaction between a leader and an employee to have a story about good leadership. The story could be about hiking, traveling, or coaching a little league team, as long as the lesson learned from overcoming the obstacle or crisis is relevant to the business at hand.

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Here are a few examples of lessons from stories that are metaphors:

“Get back on the bike,” is a metaphor for picking yourself up after a product launch doesn't go as planned.

“Run your own race,” is a metaphor for being authentic to who you are rather than trying to be someone else.

“Take the stairs,” is a metaphor for not taking the easy path.

Find the Meaning in the Moment

Just last week I went into a store to purchase something. As I was standing in line at checkout, the person in front of me paid for his purchase and left the store. As I was checking out and paying for my purchase, the man came back into the store, walked up to the clerk and said, “You gave me too much change,” and handed him a dollar bill.

The clerk who had made the mistake was dumbfounded. The guy standing behind me said, “At least someone is still honest.”

It was a nice moment. What meaning can you find in this moment? How could you use that story in a business presentation? What lesson can be learned? What could the metaphor “Bring back the dollar bill” signify in your business environment?

Look for Turning Point Moments

I can vividly remember a moment in my life, from over 30 years ago. I was in rehearsal for a Shakespeare play, *All's Well That Ends Well*. I was 33 years old and had been acting for 14 years at that point and had yet to make much headway in Hollywood. I was a typical young struggling actor. No one in the cast was being paid in this production.

As I looked across the stage, my eyes settled on a couple of men in their late 50's who had small roles as dukes and magistrates. In that moment, I made a decision never to be a 50-year-old actor working for free.

That was a turning point moment in my life. From that moment forward, my life took on a new direction. A year later, I left Hollywood, relocated to Colorado Springs and became a realtor. During 11 years in real estate, I became successful, bought my first house, met my future wife and discovered the profession of speaking.

All's Well That Ends Well, indeed!

Turning point moments happen to you and me all the time. What really counts, though, is more than the moment itself – it's your ability to find the meaning in the moment. Stories are teaching tools. When told with elegance and craft, they bring meaning to life. They help people see new possibilities and alternative choices.

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Stories have the ability to make sense of the seemingly random obstacles, pernicious pitfalls and happy coincidences that insert themselves into our daily lives. They teach us how to live.

All Stories Are About Change

In the end, all stories are about change of some sort: change that is forced upon us by outer circumstances, like car accidents, health challenges and hurricanes; or change that takes place within us, such as the decisions we make about how we want to live our lives.

Our lives pivot one way or the other at moments of change and choice. As leaders who tell stories, you simply have to find the meaning in these moments, if you want to serve the needs of your audience, employees and stakeholders.

Consider the moments of change and choice you have faced in the last six months. Were they challenging, painful or just plain frustrating? Regardless of how big or small the moments are, your job is to find the meaning in the moment, and share that story.

Find a New Perspective

My job, as a storytelling coach, is to help leaders become the wise men and women their employees expect them to be. I help them become the Yoda in their organization who challenges people to consider a new perspective in a compelling way. Together we identify and craft relevant stories that can change hearts and minds.

When I watch a CEO clicking through dense PowerPoint slides filled with bullet points, charts and graphs, I often turn my attention to the audience. I'm watching to see if they're engaged or bored.

Far too often, the CEO has lost their audience. They've failed at the most important job of a leader – inspiration. If you know you can be more engaging and inspiring, let's talk.

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Doug Stevenson, CSP, has taught storytelling to leaders and executives at Microsoft, Genentech, Lockheed Martin, Oracle, Sanofi-Aventis, Coca-Cola Latin America, UCB Pharma, YPO-Manhattan, USAA Insurance, and many more companies in a variety of industries.

Whether Doug is presenting an entertaining and informative keynote or conducting a one-day storytelling seminar, his presentations are high-energy, highly-interactive, and fun-filled experiences.

Book Doug for *The Power to Persuade - The Magic of Story* or for *Sell It with a Story* keynotes or training. To discuss a keynote or training for your organization, please contact Deborah Merriman at 719-310-8586, or email her at deborah@DougStevenson.com

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CLIENTS: Partial list of Doug's Corporate and Association Bookings:

- Amgen Biotech (8) – storytelling training for marketing
- Microsoft (3) – keynote on storytelling & Sell It with a Story
- US Bank (6) – branch manager leadership training
- Allergan Facial Aesthetics – Sell it with a Story
- YPO–Manhattan – luncheon keynote for young executives
- Caterpillar (4) – opening keynote – global human resources conference
- Con Agra Foods (4) – storytelling for managers and directors
- USAA Insurance (3) – storytelling for leaders
- Deloitte (9) – Storytelling for Impactful Results workshops
- Coca-Cola Latin America (2) – storytelling for managers and leaders
- Genentech Pharmaceuticals (3) – future leader workshop
- HCA-NY, Home Health Care Association – annual conference keynote
- Wells Fargo Bank – storytelling training for media managers

Other clients include SAP, Bayer, Lockheed Martin, Google, Cisco, Cardinal Software, BEI Exit Planning, Verizon, Time Warner, Abbott Labs, Mortgage Bankers Association, TD Industries, National Education Association, Institute of Real Estate Management, American Medical Association and many more...

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