

Fine Tuning your Story Selling

The use of repetition can also be very effective when telling a story. Repetition creates familiarity with your ideas, which in turn builds positive association. Repetition also makes a message more memorable. You need to repeat your message several times so your audience understands precisely what you are talking about and what you want them to do. This doesn't mean that you should sound like a broken record. You can repeat the message several times without saying the same thing over and over again. My motto is, when you repeat something, repackage how you say it. Each time you stress your point, use new evidence and new words.

Obviously, this technique must be used skillfully. When repetition is overused, it is likely to result in diminishing returns. You know how you feel when someone tells you that same old story for the tenth time, or when you've seen that commercial one too many times. If you've heard a story a million times before, you tune out and quit listening. Keep your point reinforcements to approximately three references—and definitely no more than five.

A common mistake among storytellers is they become too long-winded. It's as though they're telling the story just because they love to hear themselves talk. Don't let your stories get too long, or you're going to lull your audience to sleep. Even if you think you're really entertaining, too much of a good story is still draining. I have heard it said that a two-minute story gives greater impact than a ten-minute one. If you think about it, if you were actually in an audience where the speaker talked for ten whole minutes about the same thing, then those ten minutes would probably feel like an eternity. Don't belabor the point if it can be said more concisely. This doesn't mean you should abandon the idea of giving your audience important details, as we discussed earlier. Of course, you must engage your audience, but be sure you're aware of this fine line. To be an effective storyteller, it's so important to always be tuned in to audience feedback, even if it's not overt. As you gain experience, you will get better and better at gauging your audience. You will then be more readily able to discern how you're coming across to your audience. You'll also develop a good sense of pace and timing.

Hand in hand with not being too long-winded is this piece of story-selling advice: Don't bore your listeners! You may think these two concepts are the same thing, and they can be, but even a short story can be boring if it's not presented well. Respect your audience's time and commitment to being there to hear you and be sure you've done your homework ahead of time. Deliver a presentation you know your prospects are really going to love. Your audience is paying with either their time or their money. Give them your best effort in exchange for that payment.

How else can you bore an audience? By not giving them enough detail, by indulging in self-glorification, by going off on too many tangents or by delivering an indignant soapbox lecture. It is very important that you take the time to go through some of the brainstorming questions so your stories and presentations, on the whole, have structure. If you have a clear story-selling outline, your presentations will remain uncluttered and you will avoid these dangerous detours.

When you follow my suggestions, it will not take you long before you are a very skilled story seller. With these story-selling tools under your belt, you'll have that much more of an advantage when presenting your ideas, whether to a large audience or to a single person. And there is no better feeling than to get your point across in a manner in which it is understood, appreciated and persuasive.

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