

Power Pointers for Story Selling

We have already discussed some of the essential elements to great stories: engaging emotions, powerful word usage, proper voice inflection, effective body language and clear structure. I'd now like to highlight just a few more key points besides those that have already been discussed to help make your story selling the best it can be. One of those points is the powerful use of humor. Nothing disarms and invites an audience in more than humor. We are instantly drawn to people we think are funny. We enjoy listening to humorous individuals and hearing what they have to say. Humor grabs attention, creates rapport and makes a message more memorable. It can also relieve tension, enhance relationships and motivate people. If you've got an important message to share, humor can give you a huge advantage. The actor John Cleese once said, "If I can get you to laugh with me, you like me better, which makes you more open to my ideas. And if I can persuade you to laugh at the particular point I make, by laughing at it you acknowledge its truth." Don't use humor just to get a laugh out of your prospects. In humor, there is so much potential for influence. Armed with humor, you can provide special insights or teach important principles.

Humor must be used cautiously, however. If used properly, it will help your audience to like you. If used ineffectively or inappropriately, however, it can be a big turn off. The instant you irritate or offend your audience members, it's over. Nothing you say or do from that point forward will rectify the damage done. Worse, they'll always remember you as a bad comic. Be sure that you have good material before attempting to incorporate humor into your presentations. Also, cater your comedy to your audience. What would they find funny? What are some inside experiences they share that you could draw humor from? Use humor that will evoke chuckles and lightheartedness but that is still built on truth. It is a very wise idea to test the comedic waters on friends or family to make sure your humor *works!*

Another technique that is sometime used in story selling is the instillation of fear. As manipulative as it may sound, fear definitely motivates others when it is used properly. I would strongly caution against creating a false sense of fear, however. Doing so truly *is*

manipulative, and by instilling false fear you will lose your audience's long-term trust. Use fear only if the threat is real and if it is in the best interest of the audience to be forewarned. For example, doctors sometimes have to be straightforward with their patients about the impending worst-case scenario if they don't get in shape. It's scary to hear, but the patient truly needs this information to be brought to her/his attention.

As much as we may wish it to not be the case, often it is only fear that will motivate and move someone off a path to destruction. There are less dramatic, but nevertheless fear-inspired, examples: Fear incites us to buy life insurance, to floss our teeth, to buy cars with airbags, to install home security systems and to purchase guns. Hopefully, fear will not be a persuasive tool you use with great frequency, but if you feel you can effectively use it to underscore a very important message, adhere to the following guidelines:

1. You must make your audience feel the anxiety and uneasiness that come from anticipating the possible, even greater, negative emotions (pain, grief, loss, etc.) that will become imminent if the problem is not dealt with.
2. Your prospects must feel not only that the fearful event is likely to happen, but also that they could be victimized by its occurrence. In other words, they must feel vulnerable.
3. You must provide a solution to the fear you instill. Give your prospects a recommended action to resolve the fear-inducing problem.
4. Your prospects must believe that they are capable of doing what is asked of them and that doing so will work for them.