

### **Stories: Grab Attention**

Stories are powerful tools for persuaders. Compelling storytelling automatically creates involvement and attention with your audience. We can all think of a time when we were in an audience and not paying attention to the speaker. We were off in our own world when all of a sudden we perked up and started to listen because the speaker had begun to tell a story. We sat up, attentively listened, took note of what was being said, and wanted to know what would happen next. Whenever you sense your audience is starting to wander, you should have a relevant story ready. Notice I said relevant. You can capture attention by telling a story but you will lose long-term persuasiveness if your story does not relate to you or your topic. If your stories work well to underscore your main points, your presentation will hold greater impact. Remember, facts presented alone will not persuade as powerfully as they will when coupled with stories that strike a chord within your listeners. By tapping into inspiration, faith, and a person's innermost feelings, you will cause your prospects to be moved by your story.

### **Stories can be effectively used to do any or all of the following:**

- Grab attention and create involvement
- Simplify complex ideas
- Create memorable hooks
- Trigger emotions
- Tap into existing beliefs
- Persuade without detection
- Bypass existing resistance to you or your ideas
- Demonstrate who you are
- Build interest
- Encourage participation

Stories answer questions in the audience's mind about who you are and what you represent. If you don't answer these questions for your listeners, they will make up the answers themselves. Your audience members can tell from a story if you are funny, honest, or even if you want to be with them. Remember, building rapport is a key ingredient for persuasion. Since you usually don't have time to build trust based on personal experience, the best you can do is tell your prospects a story that simulates an experience of your trustworthiness. Hearing your story is as close as they can get to the firsthand experience of watching you in action.

Your goal is for the listeners to arrive at your conclusions of their own free will. Your story needs to take them on a step-by-step tour of your message. A persuasive story simplifies your concepts so your audience can understand what you are talking about and what you want them to do. We love stories to give us answers to our problems. We accept the answers a story gives us more than if someone were to just provide us with those answers. Courtroom lawyers often create reenactments of events. They make the stories so rich in sensory detail that the jury literally sees, hears, and feels the event as it unfolded. The trial lawyer's goal is to make his or her description so vivid that the jurors feel the client's distress as their own and as such are moved by it. The more concrete and

specific your descriptive details, the more persuasive your story telling will be. Using specific details pulls the listener into the story, making it real, making it believable.

Pack your stories with authenticity, passion, and humor. Make sure they are straightforward and that the timeline or character development is not confusing. A story that confuses will not convince. Use your body, voice, props, music, or costumes if necessary. These methods intensify your message because they reach all the senses: Your audience will vicariously see, hear, and feel. Engaging the senses of your listeners will make your story more effective. If you can get your listeners to see, hear, smell, feel, and taste the elements of your story, their imaginations will drive them to the point of experiencing without actually being there. As you learn to incorporate the senses, you will find that their effects can persuade faster than your words. For example, smells and tastes can be very powerful. Both can evoke strong emotional memories and even physiological reactions in your listeners. Invite them to imagine the smell of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies and you will see noses flare and faces relax with the feeling associated with the smell of freshly baked cookies. Such sensation will fill their minds with feeling. Or describe in full detail the sensation of biting into a fresh lemon. You should see the faces in your audience pucker and their saliva start to flow in their mouths. You want the experience to come alive in their mind as if it is happening to them. Paint the picture in such a way that it becomes so real that your audience feels a part of it. People will participate in your stories if you let them.

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