

The Secret of Stories

Stories are powerful tools for persuaders. Stories draw your audience in and they help an audience understand and appreciate your message. We can all think of a time when we were in an audience where we were 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 shifted to telling a story. If you stop and think about it, the best persuaders are the best storytellers. When we hear a story, we automatically tune in and want to know what happens next. Why do stories have this effect on us? Why are stories more engaging than facts, figures and statistics? Let's find out why.

One of my first sales jobs was in telemarketing. My office was in a typical tele-sales room with small stalls and a room full of high-energy closers. My mindset going into the job was: *How hard can this be? I can talk to people on the phone.* I thought, *I'm a people person and I'll have fantastic results.* In the past, I had been told time and time again that I was a people person who could talk to anyone. I was quickly served a large piece of humble pie as I tried to sell products to customers over the phone. The way this room worked was simple. The phone would ring and as you picked up your receiver, the operator would tell you a number. Each number represented a different product. We would sell real estate, weight loss products, stock market advice and other products.

One day, my phone rang and I was tired of not getting the sale. This time I was going to make it happen, I thought as I picked up the receiver. The operator told me the number and I looked it up. Weight loss was my assigned product. I was connecting well with the prospect, when I asked him about his target weight. Then there was a long pause. He finally opened up and told me about all the diets that had not worked and his frustration with his weight. I thought I was finally getting somewhere. After about ten minutes of conversation, the prospect finally asked, "What does my weight loss have to do with real estate investing?"

Sure, I could have told you that you need to know your audience before you try to persuade. I could have also told you that being in sales isn't the easiest profession.

Instead, I told a story to capture your attention. By spicing it up with a little humor, I was better able to get my point across.

In this chapter, I want to talk about those key elements that make story selling so effective. When you understand what those essential story selling components are, and how to use them, you will be able to influence and touch people's hearts with the messages you powerfully convey. The first, and probably the most powerful, element of a good story is that it should engage the emotions. Facts and figures alone are much less likely to strike a chord with your audience than they are when coupled with relevant, powerful stories. When an individual's emotions are engaged, s/he will be more inclined to connect to you and your message. The more common ground you can establish, the more sense of connectivity you can create and the more attentive and receptive your prospects will be. Effective story selling is the difference between communicating and convincing, presenting and persuading, lecturing and touching their hearts.

A big part of whether or not your message is persuasive is whether or not the audience can believe in you. When you don't always have an opportunity to build rapport and trust with every individual in your audience on a one-on-one basis, stories can answer their questions about who you are, what you represent and what you want from them. If you don't answer these questions for them, they will draw their own conclusions. Why take the chance that they might conclude incorrectly? Use story selling to build rapport with your prospects. Do you want them to view you as funny, honest or down-to-earth? Identify the main points you want to get across and select your stories accordingly. Hearing your story might be as close as your prospect will ever get to a firsthand experience with you.

Meaningful stories inspire listeners to reach the same conclusion you have reached. People value their own conclusions more highly than yours, so if you can make your story *their* story, you will be that much more persuasive. Human beings are drawn to anything that gives us "answers." Use stories to help your audience answer some of their own questions. If you are successful in doing this, your message will grow and develop in

your prospects' minds and hearts. If they remember nothing else about your presentation, your story and its underlying message will always get played over and over again in your listeners' minds.

Positively engaging your prospects' emotions is one way in which story selling is especially effective when trying to make a point to an audience that might otherwise put up resistance. Stories are less prone to make others feel defensive or like you are critiquing or making demands of them. Instead of bluntly presenting your objections or differing opinions, bypass resistance and large egos by presenting your point of view in a non-threatening, even entertaining, way. Often people staunchly defend their positions not because they are so committed to those positions themselves but more often because they simply must protect both their need to be *right* and their embarrassment of being wrong. If you can avoid triggering this emotional defense mechanism, you will be amazed at how much more open your prospects are to considering your ideas.

Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I'm going to guide you through the crucial steps of effective story selling. To be a successful persuader, you must know which types of stories to use and how to implement them. In our next section, we'll explore different types of stories and their uses.

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