

Notes on

The Story Factor

*Inspiration, Influence, and Persuasion
through the Art of Storytelling*

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(Notes by Gary Tomlinson)

Preface:

What's your story? Who are you? Where do you come from? What do you want? When you seek to influence others you face these questions and more. Whether you're proposing a risky new venture, trying to close a deal or leading a charge against injustice, you have a story to tell – tell it well and you will create a shared experience with your listeners that can have profound and lasting results.

The Story Factor illustrates how story can be used to persuade, motivate and inspire in ways that cold facts, bullet points and directives can't. These stories, combined with practical storytelling techniques, show anyone how to become a more effective communicator.

Introduction:

Telling a good story is like giving a mini-documentary of what you have seen so others can see it too. It is a way to mine deep down and touch the tender heart of the most defensive adversary or power-hungry scoundrel currently obstructing your path or withholding the resources you need to achieve what you want to achieve.

“The magic of influence is less in what we say and more in how we say it and who we are.”

People don't want more information. They are up to their eyeballs in information. They want faith – faith in you, your goals, your success, in the story you tell. It is faith that moves mountains, not facts. Facts do not give birth to faith. Faith needs a story to sustain it – a meaningful story that inspires belief in you and renews hope that your ideas indeed offer what you promise. Genuine influence goes deeper than getting people to do what you want them to do. It means people pick up where you left off because they believe. Faith can overcome any obstacle and achieve any goal. Money, power,

authority, political advantage and brute force have all, at one time or another, been overcome by faith.

A story is your path to creating faith. Telling a meaningful story means inspiring your listeners (coworkers, leaders, subordinates, family, or even a bunch of strangers) to reach the same conclusion you have reached and decide for themselves to believe what you say and do what you want them to do. People value their own conclusions more highly than yours. They will only have faith in a story that has become real for them personally. Once people make your story, *their story*, you have tapped into the powerful force of faith. Future influence will require very little follow-up energy from you and may even expand as people recall your story to others.

When you want to influence others, there is no tool more powerful than story.

The Six Stories You Need to Know How to Tell:

There are six stories that will serve you well in your efforts to influence others:

1. **“Who I Am”** Stories
2. **“Why I Am Here”** Stories
3. **“The Vision”** Story
4. **“Teaching”** Stories
5. **“Values-in-Action”** Stories
6. **“I Know What You Are Thinking”** Stories

Those you wish to influence begin with two major questions: Who are you? and Why are you here? Until these questions are answered they don't trust what you say. Before you attempt to influence anyone, you need to establish enough trust to successfully deliver your message. Their trust in “who you are” becomes the connection that serves as a conduit for your message. Announcing that “I'm a good person (smart, moral, ethical, well-connected, well informed, savvy, successful...) and therefore trustworthy” is more likely to activate suspicion than trust.

People want to decide these things for themselves. Since you usually don't have time to build trust based on personal experience, the best you can do is tell them a story that simulates an experience of your trustworthiness. Hearing your story is as close as they can get to firsthand experience of watching you “walk the walk” as opposed to “talk the talk.” A story lets them decide for themselves – one of the great secrets of true influence. Other methods of influence – persuasion, bribery or charismatic appeals – are push strategies. Story is a pull strategy. If your story is good enough, people – of their own free will – come to the conclusion they can trust you and the message you bring.

So...What's Your Story?

Before anyone allows you to influence them, they want to know, “Who are you and why are you here?” If you don't take the time to give a positive answer to these questions, they will make up their own answers – usually negative. It is human nature to expect that anyone out to influence others has something to gain. Most people subconsciously assume your gain will mean their loss. This is human nature. We instinctually erect barriers and suspicions to protect ourselves. You need to tell a story that demonstrates you are the kind of person people can trust. This will be different in different situations.

How can we expect people to trust us, to be influenced by us, when we don't let them know who we are? When we separate our attempts to influence from *who we are* personally, we neglect the most important criteria most people use to decide whether to listen to us or not. We spend too much time talking to a person's rational brain and we neglect their emotional brain. Emotional brains are very touchy about being neglected. Without proof, the emotional brain would rather be safe than sorry, and will conclude that you bear watching.

“Who I Am” Stories:

The first question people ask themselves the minute they realize you want to influence them is “who is this person?” A story helps them see what you want them to see about you.

Personal stories let others see “who” we are better than any other form of communication. A “who I am” story can break through negative opinions by disproving one of them right up front. It begins to merge into the next kind of story you need to tell, the “why I am here” story. Even if your listener decides you are a trustworthy human being, they still wonder what's in it for you to get their cooperation. And until they have a good answer, they will tend to assume that you have more to gain than they do – otherwise, why are you trying to influence them?

“Why I Am Here” Stories:

People won't cooperate with you if they smell a rat and most of us sniff for rats and are suspicious of hidden agendas. When you focus all your communication on showing your listener what he might gain, you come across as hiding your gain. Your message begins to seem incongruent, insincere, or worse, deceitful. If people think you are hiding or lying about what you stand to gain from their cooperation, their trust in your message plummets.

There is no need to fake selfish goals. People really don't mind selfish goals as long as they aren't exploitative. Story is best suited to people with genuinely good intentions and sound personal goals. A "Why I Am Here" story usually reveals enough for people to make a distinction between healthy ambition and dishonest exploitation.

"The Vision" Story:

If your listener(s) are comfortable with who you are and why you are here, then they are ready to listen to what you think is in it for them. I don't think anyone sets out to influence others without the understanding that we need to demonstrate some benefit of compliance – some "what's in it for them."

If you want to influence others in a big way, you need to give them a vision story that will become their cathedral. A vision story weaves all the pieces together – particularly the struggles and the frustrations – so that they make sense. A vision story is the antidote to meaningless frustration. To live in this world with purpose and meaning we must tell ourselves some story of vision that gives our struggle meaning.

"Teaching" Stories:

Whatever your role in life, you have certain skills that you want others to have, too. Whether you need to teach someone how to write a letter, design software, answer a telephone, make a sale or manage a group of volunteers, story halves the necessary teaching time. Too many people get mad at those they wish to teach because "they just don't get it." Rather than banging your head against a wall, why don't you find a story that successfully delivers whatever it is you want them to "get." Often the message you want to send is less about what you want them to do and more about how you want it done. Story is perfectly suited to combine both what and how.

Teaching stories help us make sense of new skills in meaningful ways. You never teach a skill that doesn't have a reason "why." When someone understands what you want them to do but doesn't buy into why you want them to do it, you never will be satisfied with their performance. Clarity is overrated in teaching. Story allows you to reintroduce complexity over tidy "skill-set modules" so that the skills you teach also teach people to think about why and how they might use a new skill.

"Values-in-Action" Stories:

Without a doubt, the best way to teach a value is "by example." The second best way is to tell a story that provides an example. Story lets you instill values in a way that keeps

people thinking for themselves. “We value integrity,” means nothing. But tell a story about a former employee who his mistake and cost the company thousands, or a story about a salesperson who owned up to a mistake and earned so much trust her customer doubles his order, and you begin to teach an employee what integrity means.

If you wish to influence an individual or a group to embrace a particular value in their daily lives, tell them a compelling story. Values are meaningless without stories to bring them to life and engage us on a personal level. And personal stories are the best way to engage people at a personal level.

“I Know What You Are Thinking” Stories:

When you tell a story that makes people wonder if you are reading their minds, they love it. It isn’t hard to do. If you have done your homework on the group or person you wish to influence it is relatively easy to identify their potential objections to your message. If you name their objections first, you are that much closer to disarming them.

One of the best ways to use this kind of story is to dispel fears. Before you facilitate a committee meeting, tell the group about the time you were on the “committee from hell” that was more like a dodgeball game than a work group. Tell about the specific behaviors and characters, like the guy resembling Napoleon who cut everyone off, and the sweet southern lady who charm did not quite hide her insincerity. Whatever your story is, and we all have one, your story will let the audience know that you want to avoid the same things they want to avoid. Once they know that, they can relax and listen.

What Story Can Do that Facts Can’t:

A good story helps you influence the interpretation people give to facts. **Facts aren’t influential until they mean something to someone.** A story delivers a context so that your facts slide into new slots in your listeners’ brains. Facts are neutral until human beings add their own meaning to those facts. People make their decisions based on what the facts mean to them, not on the facts themselves.

Giving people facts as a method of influence can be a waste of time. When you give the story first and then add facts, you stand a better chance of influencing others to share your interpretation, to see that the “evidence” means what you propose it means rather than whatever their original story will distort it to mean. If you give facts first you risk an interpretation that bends your facts to support their existing view or that discounts and discredits your facts in a way that may permanently cripple these facts as tools of influence. Sequence is very important here. Save your facts until after you are reasonable sure the interpretation is going to support your cause.

Message from Gary Tomlinson:

Storytelling is the most valuable skill you can develop to help you influence others. It is your birthright to be a good storyteller. In a sense your life is a story and you are already telling that one perfectly. Storytelling is not rocket science. It is very easy and incredibly rewarding to practice.

The Story Factor contains lots of story examples, storytelling techniques and detailed explanations that are not contained in this book report. You would be doing yourself a real disservice by not getting and reading this book.