



Sales Storytelling

A Mutualism Not Antagonism



“

I am aware that constant learning is important for my professional development. I have all intentions to learn, I buy books, I read articles and I sign up for online courses but rarely do I finish my courses, articles and books, despite best intent.

”

If this is you, then this little book is for you.

What we often don't realise is that we don't learn just from experiences but we learn from reflecting upon those experiences. As an avid reader, I read bite-size content everyday and then reflect upon it. This reflection gives me great insights into how I can apply what I am learning.

This book contains five of my most-read Sales Storytelling articles. All articles are under 5 mins to read, with a section for you to write your own reflections. The most important part of the book is writing those reflections and turning them into applications.

Go Make The Change Happen With Stories

LESSON 1

Presenting with Stories



You may know how to craft a story or presentation well but presenting it effectively is a different skill altogether. A well-crafted story that is delivered poorly is like a vintage wine drunk out of a plastic cup.

How you deliver your story can significantly change your desired outcome. You may have amazing verbal skills but you can very easily fail as a storyteller because in oral communication, a lot also depends on the non-verbal aspects of communication and often, what you don't say is of equal importance to what you do say.

I am going to share some principles of Storytelling in Presentations, but learning Storytelling and presenting effectively is like learning to dance which can't be mastered by reading or attending workshops. You have to actively do it. The good news though is that effective storytelling is not the domain of great storytellers. Anybody who is willing to make an effort can learn to use Storytelling for communicating and presenting effectively.

Even Warren Buffet had to work at it. Hear him talk about the only diploma he has ever obtained.

So what are some of the important factors in using Storytelling to communicate effectively and make your presentations memorable?

1) Which types of stories are best to tell?

Choose your personal experience as a story to tell since this is the only way you would relive it and emotions will be experienced. Without your emotions, your story will simply be an example, which is understood but not felt.

Story = Example + Emotion

2) How do I bring emotion into my stories?

The only way to bring emotion into your story is by using emotional words.

You can say, "The project failed" or you can say, "The project failed and we were all frustrated."



You can work with the principle of within two minutes but what is more important than that is to take out everything that is extraneous to the message and emotion that you are wanting to convey. It's not about what you add, what you take out is often more important.

[illegible]

LESSON 2

Story Techniques for Transforming Presentations



Here are some tips centered around delivering a story. Let's begin:

1) In practicing my delivery, do I have to give any focus to pausing at any stage?

Pausing and using silence either on commencing or within the story to give your audience a moment to feel the emotion is a skill that doesn't come without practice, and when practiced, is magical.

Pausing gives the story that you are telling some space to build the emotion and to induce anticipation in the audience. Silence draws emphasis to what was just said or what is about to come, and it allows others to contribute their own interpretation. Effectively used, it can greatly increase the impact of your story.

2) Places that I recommend you pause whilst delivering your story are:

- just after you have delivered the unanticipated in your story
- just after you have managed to trigger an emotion in your audience

3) How do I begin my presentation?

In the first few seconds or by the second slide, your audience's right brain has informed them whether they like you or not and this is based on how you talk, how you stand and how confident you appear. No matter how good the rest of your content is, you will never regain their attention if the first few seconds have not worked.

I recommend that you avoid generic statements like the ones below:

| |
|---------------------------------------------|
| Thank you for making time |
| I am glad to be here |
| We only have 30 mins |
| I request you to hold your questions |
| Put your phones on silent |

Start with something that they don't expect. What you want your audience to start thinking and feeling from the onset is:

| |
|-------------------------------------------|
| This person can help me |
| I am in for something good today |
| How does he/she know this about us |
| That is a great insight |

The best way to start your presentation is either with a relevant story or a question.

4) As a way of introducing myself to the audience, can I start with a personal story?

Yes and no. Quite often we say that starting a presentation with your story builds rapport. Yes, that is true but you never begin selecting a personal story thinking that it is about me. On the contrary, it is all about your audience. What is more important is why that story should matter to the audience. Think of the objective and then find a story.

| OBJECTIVE | TYPE OF STORY | ROLE |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| Build Credibility | Compelling Insight | Sales |
| Build Trust | Personal failure story | Leadership |
| Marketing a brand | Success story from customer | Marketing |
| Inspire Action | Positive Story | Various |
| Get Attention | Negative Story | Various |

Reflection

LESSON 3

What Will Hold You From Telling A Story?



I couldn't remember, so I did not say, is what leads to wasted sales opportunities.

John is pitching to a manufacturing client and at one stage he says:

Scenario 1

"Our clients regularly express concerns over production defects and we have been able to help our clients to bring down these defects phenomenally with the use of our technology"

Scenario 2

We have many manufacturing clients in a similar situation. In fact, Maria from XYZ, who we worked with last month, was in a similar situation and when I met her, she said, "Our manufacturing defects are affecting the business so much that if we don't do something, we are going to have to reduce head counts." The problem was serious, but in one month, with the use of our technology, they were able to reduce manufacturing defects by around 45%. Maria was very pleased with the outcome.

Which one sounds more compelling to you?

If your answer is scenario 2, then you are like most people.

But the key thing to notice here is, even if you tell John that scenario 2 is a better way to communicate, he will still want to speak like in scenario 1, knowing full well that his sales storytelling is falling on deaf ears.

Why?

Because in John's words, "I don't remember the exact percentage. I know it was around 45%. I can't remember what Maria's exact words were. I don't want to make stuff up. I couldn't remember, so I did not say.

Scenario 1 is a wasted opportunity. If the percentage was 44.78% and you said 45%, it's absolutely fine. The client won't call that a lie. If you do not remember what Maria had said exactly, it's ok, as long as the implication of what she had actually said and what you are saying is the same. We waste several opportunities because we think we are embellishing our stories. Be accurate but don't fuss over precision. In an effort to be precise, you are wasting opportunities.

Reflection

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

A man in a black shirt and shorts is running across a white, geometric, crystalline structure. He is carrying a black briefcase in his right hand. The background is a bright, white, geometric pattern.

LESSON 4

What is the Most Important Skill You Need to Have?

Some beliefs that we don't question when it comes to sales a person's skills.

Belief 1

You have the gift of the gab and you can sell ice to Eskimos. You are a great sales person.

Belief 2

Talk is cheap. It's your ability to listen that makes you a great sales person.

My Belief

It is important to be able to talk and listen well, but what you are talking about and what you are listening to will not matter if you are not asking relevant questions and responding accordingly.

Asking relevant questions is what your sales people should do best, but sadly, there is hardly any emphasis given to good Questioning Skills in sales. I have worked in sales for over a decade and I have never heard of an organisation that trains its sales people to ask good questions and provides sales training on questioning skills.

So, what kind of questions can sales people ask?

I call this technique **Diagnostic Questioning**, and yes, the word diagnostic is borrowed from the medical terminology. I feel that being a good solution sales person is almost like being a good doctor. Both are trying to discover what is wrong, however, only listening to what the client or patient says is not enough. Asking the right questions is key to making a correct diagnosis, whether it is a patient or a client.

Your job as a sales person is to solve a client's problem, not just sell them a solution that may or may not matter. In Diagnostic Questioning, you seek further information that leads you to either eliminate irrelevant information or takes you closer to the challenge that you are trying to solve for the client. This is an approach which should narrow your search and help you to discover an insight that the client has not even considered.



Client

“ Our sales is behind target this year and I believe that it's due to a lack of sales skills in our sales teams. Hence, I need your services to deliver some sales training programmes for us. ”

Rather than jumping in and offering a million solutions that you may have for sales training, you should ask another question.



“

Well, if sales are not happening, what else could be wrong other than our sales teams? ”

“

Would you please mind sharing what led you to the conclusion that the lack of performance is because of a lack of skills in the sales team? ”

”



Sales person

“

Yes you are right, it's most likely something that needs to be addressed with the sales teams, but let's try and find out what it could be specifically. ”

”

Use of words like... specifically, in particular, what exactly, who in particular....often draws you closer to the problem.



“

Would you mind sharing with me how your sales teams approach a new opportunity and what systems they use? ”

”

“

Yes we have a sales process that we follow. Here it is, you can look at it. We also have a sophisticated CRM system that our sales teams use. ”

”



“

I am looking at your sales process and I am not able to find if you qualify the opportunities that you receive. Is there a process to do that in your organisation? ”

”

“

What do you mean? We are running a business and we do not decline opportunities. A potential opportunity comes to us and we respond. ”

”

“

That is where we need to zoom in a bit more. Your conversion rate is 25% which is way behind the industry standards and I suspect the reason for that may have something to do with lead qualification. May I ask a few more questions please? ”

”

LESSON 5

Selling your Product

How can I best answer consumer's question,
What exactly can your product do for me?

”

Recently, I worked with a leading global telecommunications company that makes several different types of products. My job was to work with the Product Heads and build a narrative around each product.

After a few days of work, we all agreed with the Product narrative built around each product and then we went through this exercise of asking all the product heads, "Why do you think consumers would buy your products?"

The Product Head would say something like this:

After a consumer has purchased something online and if there are any discrepancies on the transaction, they don't have to call the bank or the credit card company.

- ✓ It's easy to install on the phone
- ✓ It's very reasonably priced
- ✓ they don't lose money

Each product had a long list of reasons. After looking at all the reasons provided to me over 4 days, I came to the conclusion that there were 2 key reasons emerging, irrespective of which product we were talking about.

- ✓ Save me time
- ✓ Save me money

I then did a research on the key reasons why a consumer buys a product and the answer was in one of my favourite author's book which I had read a couple of years ago, All Marketers Tell Stories by Seth Godin.

Consumers covet things that they believe will:

- 1. Save me time**
- 2. Save me money or make me richer**
- 3. Make me attractive**
- 4. Matters to someone I care for**

The fourth category, matters to someone I care for, is something I have added based on my own experiences.

How can you use this information?

After you have finished preparing your product story, ask yourself which category you fall in, and once you have identified it, make sure you spell that out in your product storytelling.

Let's look at the reasons given by the product head earlier...

LESSON 6

My Product is Not Selling

One of the tools that Product Sales People use to sell a product is called Product Matrix. Let's say my product is Office 2010 suites. It looks something like the table below:

| Office 2010 suites | New PC only | Pre-installed on PC or Retail Packaged Product** | | | Volume License only | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| | Starter | Home and Student | Home and Business | Professional*** | Standard | Professional Plus |
| Word | Limited Functionality | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Excel | Limited Functionality | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| PowerPoint | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| OneNote | | ✓ | ✓ | NEW | NEW | NEW |
| Outlook | | | ✓ | NEW | ✓ (w/BCM) | ✓ (w/BCM) |
| Publisher | | | | ✓ | NEW | ✓ |
| Access® | | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Communicator | | | | | | ✓ |
| InfoPath® | | | | | | ✓ |
| SharePoint Workspace | | | | | | NEW |
| Office Web Apps | Microsoft-hosted on Windows Live™ | | | | Licensed with Office Volume Licensing and deployed on SharePoint for Manageability and Control | |
| Purchase Recommendations for Customer | <div><div>Home</div><div>Small Business</div><div>Mid Size Business</div></div> | | | | | |

Why is this a bad example of product storytelling?

By showing this matrix to the customer, I am showing a bunch of features to the customer, but the customer has to know what features are important to them.

Your customers will have an idea of what they want but that doesn't necessarily mean that they know everything about that product that can make their lives better.

"Just like you, Maria does a lot of presentations, and when she works on the content of the presentation, she often needs a Me Area (this is a feature of Communicator in Office) which would tell her team where she is and that she needs 2 hours to do this work. After the presentation is ready she wanted to share it with the team, so she used the in-built Skype feature and had a discussion about the presentation."

A Product Matrix makes it hard for a customer to understand what to do with your product, how to use it, why it's so great and the features that would benefit them that they don't know about. It's like describing a story by separately introducing each character and you are left wondering how to connect them. Stories however, present and draw lines between all the dots and lead your customers to a stage where they say, "I get how this product makes my life better."

Reflection

[illegible]



About the Author

Anjali is the Managing Director of Narrative: The Business of Stories. Anjali works with private and government organisations to determine what their individual and unique business challenges are and by incorporating Story Skills, she crafts individualised solutions to help solve those challenges. Narrative was formed with the belief that:

"Rarely can a response make something better, what makes something better is a connection"*

Anjali has helped companies to increase Staff Engagement and Performance, increase Client Satisfaction and Sales, define Company Values and effectively Position Brands by embedding Story Skills into their organisations.

Her work with Business Organisations has involved Narrative's own programmes in Corporate Consulting to identify and solve corporate difficulties and promote strengths. Teaching and incorporating Story Skills to present brands and products successfully and to engage clients. Using Story Skills in the Narrative Medicine programme. Speaking on Business Storytelling at keynotes in conferences and teaching business leaders to more effectively engage and inspire clients and employees. Anjali has worked with a wide variety of private and government organisations such as SAP, BASF, Roche, Shell, Danone, Cisco, Economic Development Board and Central Provident Fund.

Anjali has worked in corporate roles for over 15 years and has an extensive background in Sales, Marketing, Business Development, Branding, Events and Client Relations having worked in management roles with the Hyatt Hotels and Resorts and Brand Experience Agencies such as Jack Morton Worldwide and George P. Johnson, in India, Singapore and Australia. Anjali has also had an opportunity to work with the world's best airline – Singapore Airlines.

In her various roles, she has been responsible for managing sales, new business revenues and staff. Hence her background constantly informs her work and programmes, so that they are not just theoretical, but are based on extensive experience, knowledge and understanding of strategic issues facing companies and of the issues facing employees in delivering their best for their companies. Anjali's focus and skill have always been with relating with people, clients and companies, and moulding solutions to problems based on her experience and an ability to tell pertinent stories that engage, change, persuade, explain inspire and influence.

No matter the industry, there is in every situation a need to engage, change, persuade, and to explain, inspire and influence. Having taught Business Storytelling to clients from a wide variety of industries including airlines, education, health, IT, tourism and pharmaceuticals, she knows that this is a skill that can be learnt and applied to all workplaces and companies for enduring change.

How to get in touch

Let's talk and find out how we can help your business engage, influence and inspire through storytelling.

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