

# STORYVILLE®

Welcome to STORYVILLE®, an on-line tutorial and seminar dedicated to stories as the best way to use logic to communicate clearly with each other, make oral and written proposals to customers and clients, to get things done, improve speed and execution, increase sales, and create value.

## 1. Always tell a story. Why?

Stories engage. Told well, they persuade. Why?

Stories are how we listen. How so?

The inherent logic in stories has become part of our DNA in how we listen.

Stories find their origin on your parents' knees at a very young age:

***"Mommy and Daddy, will you tell me a story?"***

Stories enable sleep, contentment, satisfaction, smiles, safety, and consideration.

Stories eliminate confusion and fuzzy thinking.

Stories resolve conflicts, problems, complications, dilemmas, "burning platforms."

Stories provide solutions.

Stories ensure clarity.

We are wired to listen to stories.

Stories enable listening, and therefore understanding.

The opposite of listening is an uncomprehending blank stare.

Without stories, organizations are whistling in the wind.

Stories are the lingua franca of healthy organizations.

## 2. So, what's the big deal?

***Storytelling is a skill.***

Well executed stories drive sales and create value.

Customers unconsciously and implicitly listen for stories.

Why disappoint them?

Your competitors will ill-advisedly rush in with the solution:

*"Here's what you should do?"*

This approach provokes one question: "why should I?"

Your competitors are then instantly back on their heels where they started.

How did this happen?

They didn't make their case with a story.

### 3. Stories are efficient. How so?

Customers “get it.”

They may not do what you want, but it won't be because of confusion.

Confusion and “status quo bias” are your enemies.

Stories dissipate confusion and inertia.

Well told, stories convert “should” to “will,” as in “why should I?” to “why will I?”

Stories impel consideration of change.

**“Hmmm.... maybe I should listen to this?”**

Well told, stories impel change.

### 4. Stories are an organization's competitive sales execution edge. How so?

Stories cut to the chase.

Stories grease the conversation by mitigating the friction of inertia.

Stories are the most effective way to communicate.

Stories are non-confrontational.

They anticipate and answer the key customer question: “what do you want?”

Well told, stories are also the most efficient way to communicate.

**Stories are binary: they compel up or down, in or out, yes or no, won't or will.**

### 5. OK. Let's get started.

Stories have a logical sequence, which mirrors how we think.

They all start with the same implied enticing four words: “Once upon a time....”

**They are structured in three parts: beginning, middle, and end.**

They start with agreement: “as you know, as we discussed, in our last conversation...”

Why pick a fight out of the gate?

Why start with distraction?

They don't start with what you want the customer or listener to do.

As in, “You need to do this,” which invariably leads to “why should I?”

So, start on common ground.

## 6. Let's prove it.

Consider books, movies, plays that you have caught your fancy.

How did they start?

Examples:

Dickens' Tale of Two Cities, "It was the best of times, the worst of times...."

Sinclair Lewis' Elmer Gantry, "Elmer Gantry was drunk,"

***Seven Days in May, "I'm gonna tell you the damndest story you ever heard."***

In organizations, agreement sounds like,

"as you know,"

"as you said,"

"as you reported in your annual report,"

"as your board presentation underscored...",

None of these statements are controversial, because they are grounded in agreement.

*Always* start with agreement.

## 7. So, what's wrong?

All stories worth their salt have something wrong,  
out of whack,  
threatening,  
sinister,  
scary,  
riveting,  
deserving of our attention,  
cause for worry,  
screaming for resolution.

What's wrong is why we listen, watch, sit on the edge of our seats....engage.

It's common parlance these days to hear about the "customer engagement."

Customers engage because of the problem, which you intend to solve.

Stories are all about problem solving; the customer's problem, not yours.

This is the end game

Strategic Account Managers strive to achieve it, but often fail. Why?

Because they haven't figured out the listener's problem.

Which is the reason why he or she is listening to your story in the first place.

We have all walked out of movies, not finished a novel, lost interest in what your colleague is saying. Why?

Because the story has insufficient or no tension

**Non-listening manifests itself by customers, colleagues thinking about something else.**

**They are either confused or bored.**

**They are staring blankly, looking at their watch or iPhone, staring out the window.**

**They feel no "burning platform."**

Your story, often something you've asserted, didn't make sense or wasn't logical.

The absence of a problem, complication, threat results in customer dis-engagement.

Tension reinforces, encourages, and ensures engagement.

This is the storytelling edge.

Why? It's by the far the most important.

Get this right, and you have chance.

Without the problem, complication, or obstacle, you have zero chance.

## 8. How about some examples?

Who isn't engaged in *Casablanca*? Why?

Because the problem is clear:

will Bogart and Ingrid foil the German menace?

will they get away?

will they rekindle their Paris romance?

***No one walks out of Casablanca.***

Ditto: more recently, who walks out of *Argo*? No one. Why not?

Because the story has a life or death complication:

Will the Americans escape?

Will they foil the sinister Iranians bent on torturing them?

Will the US State Department relax its intransigence?

Will there be an electronic airline ticket at the airport counter at the last minute?

Will the plane actually get airborne before the Iranian posse shoots them down?

The tension in the story is why we watch and listen.

Remember: we're not looking for high art here.

We're seeking to engage.

## 9. Stories told to customers, clients, colleagues, spouses, our children are the same

The tension in *Argo*, even if non- life-threatening, needs to be part of every conversation and proposal? Why?

So that the story is clear, compelling, and cries out for a solution...which you will provide.

No tension or problem begets a failed proposal, because it's not a story.

It's something else prompting "Why should I?"

It's desultory words without structure, direction, clarity, intention.

***It's a list of 27 power point items at 2PM in a windowless conference room.***

We've all been there.

## 10. What happens with non-story proposals?

***Customers, clients, colleagues respond courteously with two death-knell words: “that’s very interesting” or “that’s like what we’re already doing.”***

Both “interesting” and “like” spell doom. Translation: your proposal is toast because it didn’t conform to how and why we listen.

It wasn’t a story, because it didn’t have a burning platform.

It didn’t impel or compel.

It actually wasn’t “interesting.”

Clients and customers won’t and don’t budge.

Who cares?

The status quo prevails.

Thanks for coming.

No sale.

## 11. But what if your proposal is a story with a beginning (once upon a time) and middle packed with tension? What now?

The story’s tension or problem should trigger a question: So what?

What are you proposing to resolve the problem you have identified?

What is the resolution to my dilemma?

What should happen?

Better said, what do you propose to do about it?

What exactly do you recommend?

What do you want?

This is the sweet spot of any client or customer proposal.

The story has engaged and enabled a recommendation. Why?

Because of the story, your customer is engaged.

You are empowered to recommend.

***Because the story started with agreement, introduced a problem (Little Red Riding Hood’s Big Bad Wolf, Snow White’s Bad Queen, the Magnificent Seven banditos, Sheriff of Nottingham v. Robin Hood), you’re set to propose a solution.***

## 12. Let's talk about the end of the story: the recommendation.

### ***Recommendations douse the fire on the burning platform.***

Logic is king.

Do the recommendations logically derive from the tension in the story?

Do they solve the problem?

Do they stand alone?

Do they comprise all the elements of the solution?

Is there absence of redundancy?

Do the recommendations clearly and unambiguously solve the problem?

If so, now what?

## 13. Support your recommendations with reasons

Reasons help answer the question: how so?

And convert it to: why will I?

Don't leave any out, but don't pad.

Collectively your reasons must make the case and be all you got: assert them all.

Reasons defend the solution.

But beware: customers can detect when a reason has already been used.

These are reasons masquerading as another reason: #1=#4 just said another way.

Maybe they are not reasons at all.

They are merely padding the argument.

Customers are smart. They will detect the fraud, throw the bums out.

If they don't detect it, they'll be confused because it won't ring true.

So, ensure your reasons stand alone. No overlap. No "it sounds like."

***This is the M.E.C.E test: reasons must be Mutually Exclusive and Collectively Exhaustive.***

## 14. What else?

Other key storytelling considerations:

Has the decision-maker been the listener?

Is the decision-maker even in the room?

Remember the inertia of the status quo?

Game theory favors certainty, safety, doing nothing.

Does the story convincingly overcome this human and psychological tendency?

Does it confront this bias so that it's out the open as a false choice?

***Is your story the fulcrum that moves the rock?***

Does your story make it easy for the customer to say yes?

Does your story make it less risky to act than to do nothing?

## 15. OK, let's talk about language.

Verbs and Metaphors are the coins of the realm.

Nouns are inert, just sitting there waiting for verbs to animate them.

Think PowerPoint lists of nouns rendered lifeless by the absence of verbs

Metaphors are efficient.

They are mini-stories in that they conjure up images in place of words.

They communicate without words.

Use them liberally.

***Metaphors are the elephant in the room.***

See? You're thinking of an elephant and drawing an inference.

Metaphors communicate clearly and fast.

With proposals, speed is everything.

You don't have much time.

You're fighting the status quo bias, NIH, and the security of doing nothing.

You must create insecurity, which compels action.

Think "burning platform."

Whoops. There's another metaphor.

You're in the fear business.

Scaring clients into doing something that is good for them.

That something must be less risky than doing nothing.

You're trumping the attempt to equate what you're proposing as "like" the status quo.

You're greasing the skid. Sorry, another metaphor.

## 16. Bundle, Bundle, Bundle

Customers and clients have things on their minds.

If your proposal should be one of them, make it easy for them.

Folks can't remember lists of disjointed, unrelated stuff

Aggregate and bundle similar ideas into buckets. Why?

Research shows that we can remember somewhere between 5-7 unlike things

Remember: you're telling a story that you want your customer to recall.

***We can remember the 7 buckets and some of the 6 items in each bucket. But, We can't remember all 42 items unless they are bundled with like items.***

Of course, proposals that are stories don't have items.

They have ideas.

Ideas need to be organized in the same way so that customers retain them.

## 17. Improvise, Improvise, Improvise

The best laid plans are just that, plans.

Think WWI in *The Guns of August* when all plans were worthless with the first shot fired.

It never turns out as we thought.

Something changes.

The decision-maker isn't there, the lights don't work, your mother in law shows up.

Don't stop.

The train has left the station.

Learn to think on your feet.

Learn to dance.

Don't fret; it shows.

Have fun.

***Play jazz at STORYVILLE®.***

## 18. Practice, Practice, Practice

Remember that storytelling is a skill.

Here's a helpful acronym:

***STOP: Stop, Think, Organize, Propose***

Think first; write later

Think first; speak later

There's a tendency to speak first. Bad idea.

Proposals are both oral and written.

Oral proposals are better crafted because you are thinking on your feet

Written proposals tend to be wordy.

The holy grail is clarity.

Effective proposals are structured as stories.

They are clear because of the logic of storytelling.

And, they are easy to follow.

Practice on your colleagues in the hallway: "as you know..."

Pick mundane issues: moving the Coke machine, installing a white board in the conference room, convincing your wife to mow the lawn, stack the wood, make lunch.

Be disciplined:

Situation: start with what you and the listener agree on,

Complication: state the urgent problem,

Recommendation: solve it with a recommendation, supported by reasons that pass the M.E.C.E. test.

Never start with the solution: we don't think like that, and it doesn't persuade.

Customers, colleagues, clients, spouses all respond the same: "why should I?" or "why do I need you?"

So, start at the beginning of the story, or be prepared to back up anyway.

## 19. So here's the story about why stories?

Situation: As you know, everyone loves a story. We grew up listening to stories. They are part of our DNA. They engage. We listen for the structure we have grown to expect.

Complication: But we forget about stories when making proposals. We don't appreciate the importance of client, customer, colleague engagement. We rush to judgment confusing the listener, who becomes distracted and checks out.

Recommendation: Structure all oral and written proposals as stories, with a beginning, middle, and end. Why?

1. We are hard-wired to think this way.
2. Stories are logical.
3. We can remember them, such that they sell in our absence.
4. We anticipate the end game, such that we pay attention.
5. Everybody listens.
6. Stories have an edge, compelling action and execution.

*Welcome to STORYVILLE®.*

**Want to know more about STORYVILLE®? [Click here to get started](#)**

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