



Keyword: Story Tip

Getting Your Message Across by Creating Powerful Stories

by Kevin Eikenberry

Stories are an incredibly powerful way to communicate. But you don't have to take it from me. Consider Plato's view: "Those who tell stories rule society." Perhaps you don't want to rule society, but you would like to be a bit more influential.

Creative writing instructor Robert McKee: "Story telling is the most powerful way to put ideas into the world today." Now we're talking - all of us have ideas we want to share and have spread.

The bottom line is that if we want to communicate more effectively, stories can help us do that. Yet, there is an art to crafting and telling stories in a powerfully effective way.

While there is far more about powerful story telling than can be explored in a short article, I can give you some very specific ideas to help you in choosing and constructing your own powerful story.

Choosing Your Story

If you don't select the right story to present or support your message, it won't matter how effective the telling of that story is. To pick the right story you must start with your goal - what are you trying to present? What ideas are you trying to support?

When trying to communicate a specific message don't tell a story just to tell a story; tell a story to forward your message. Having this clear mental picture before you begin is critical to your overall success as a storyteller.

Once you know the goal, the challenge is to find the story! Start first by examining your own experiences. You might be able to identify a time when you were in a similar situation, or you might be able to use a story that seems at first unrelated, but once you close the loop in telling the story the message can be made clear.

Either way, when you can mine your own experiences for the ideas of your stories, you are off to a good start because you have intimate knowledge of the story.

If you can't think about a personal story, look for stories somewhere else. Consider things you have read or heard in the past. The newspaper and biographies are also prime places to find your story.



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Wherever you find your story, if you want it to be powerful, choosing it is just the start – you must take the basic story and construct it carefully to create the power you want it to have.

Constructing Your Story

When taking your basic story outline and developing it to create a powerful message, consider the following factors.

Simple. Basic is best. One of the easiest ways to ruin your story is to make it too complex or to include too many details. Look for ways to hone your story to the basic elements. It will demonstrate your message better and be more memorable.

Unexpected. Present a twist. Think about it. When you hear a story that is too transparent, you aren't very interested. Make your stories more interesting by building curiosity – and curiosity is built when the story has at least one unexpected component.

Concrete. Be specific. While you want the story to be based on concepts, you want it specific enough to be interesting. Walking this balance comes mostly from being descriptive about the components you leave in the story as opposed to detailing everything that could be included.

Credible. Be believable. This comes partly from the selection of the story, but also comes from telling the story in a believable way. Have you ever heard a “fish story” that has been embellished to the point that no one believes it? To really make your point (unless your point is the danger of embellishment) keep your story credible.

Emotional. Tell them why they care. The best, most powerful stories have an emotional component; that's part of the reason we love stories! Construct your stories to highlight the emotions you or others felt during the situation you are retelling. These emotional ties are a large part of what will make your story compelling – and therefore successful!

Choosing your story and constructing it using the suggestions above will significantly improve the value, usefulness and power of the stories you tell. These approaches will help you communicate more effectively as a leader and in any area of your life.



Kevin Eikenberry is a bestselling author, consultant, trainer, speaker, coach, leader, learner, husband and father. He is the Chief Potential Officer of the Kevin Eikenberry Group (www.KevinEikenberry.com) and the Creator of the Remarkable Leadership Learning System (www.Remarkable-Leadership.com), both of which are dedicated to life-long learning and helping Clients unleash their remarkable potential. Interested in becoming the remarkable leader you were born to be? Go to www.Remarkable-Leadership.com today!
