

The Four Types Of Stories You Need In Business



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Stories in business has become, for want of another term, big business. Ultimately using authentic and appropriate stories helps your message be understood and remembered. What's more, stories have the power to increase engagement, buy-in and trust ...all critical components in business when you are attempting to implement change, influence and inspire or get people to buy your products or service. Over the last decade of working with people in business I have realised that there are 4 types of stories you need in the workplace. They are stories of:

1. triumph
2. tragedy
3. tension
4. transition.

All four types should include a mix of work and non-work-related stories. Business storytelling is not just about telling stories about business, the personal stories you share in business are normally the most engaging and memorable. Let's look at the four types in more detail.

TRIUMPH STORIES

These are stories of achievement — the moments in your career and personal life that you are especially proud of. And looking for a variety of triumphs that are both work- and non-work-related is important. Firstly, you will need to reflect upon your personal opinion of what a triumph is. Success looks and feels differently to various people. Your personal triumphs may not actually mean you won something; they may mean you had the courage to try.

Many of us can feel uncomfortable with sharing our triumphs at work for fear of sounding like we are arrogant or boasting. Try to get over this. Sharing these types of stories doesn't have to be about bragging that you got a promotion or ran your first marathon. Focus on how much the experience meant to you personally and why the achievement was so significant. If you demonstrate vulnerability and humility, your story will hit the right note.



It's also important to look for stories that show how you have helped others triumph. Maybe you were part of a team that received an award. Or perhaps your story of triumph is about coaching your daughter's basketball team when they won the grand final or they didn't win a game but every one of them improved. Focus on how this made you feel. Remember, this is about whatever success or triumph looks and feels like for you and is not just about winning.

You should also look for stories that demonstrate when you have helped the wider community. Have you volunteered through your company? Helped out with a children's fundraiser or stopped a high-rise development in your street?

It's important to have a combination of your own triumphs and those that came from helping others or being part of a team or community.

TRAGEDY STORIES

These stories vary according to your perspective of what you consider a disaster. Some examples may truly be about tragic circumstances, while others may be stories of regret.

Stories of regret may be when you didn't have the

courage to do something. This could be going for a promotion or taking that overseas assignment. The regret could be about not asking the love of your life out on a date or feeling like you didn't spend enough time with your parents when they were older. Other tragedy stories might be about things that happened to you through no fault of your own. The loss of a loved one or the bankruptcy of a company you were working for, perhaps. You need to avoid sounding like a victim, however. Sure, these events had an enormous impact on your life, but make sure you focus on what you learned from the experience as opposed to simply complaining about the circumstances.

You may also think of a tragedy story that was caused by you. Perhaps a decision you made that had dire consequences, like making an error while driving that led to a serious accident or providing advice to someone that in hindsight was incorrect.

When it comes to divulging stories, understand that you as the storyteller decide what stories to share and with whom you share them.

TENSION STORIES

These are stories of conflict that are driven by your values, loyalties or obligations. Tension stories that compromised your values might create conflict because you were forced to choose between two different beliefs. A popular example includes a story of a time when you did not stay true to your values. Ironically, sharing stories of when you did not uphold one of your values, and the regrets you have about that, demonstrates greater credibility than you may think.

If you share a story about how you treated someone at work with disrespect and how much you regret it, for example, that story shows that respect is something you value highly. Tension stories can also be about a situation when you were torn between two loyalties. Maybe you had to choose between two highly capable individuals in your team for a promotion. Tension stories are often closely related to your obligations. They may involve a situation when you felt tense about accepting an amazing work opportunity that would be great for your career, but that would mean unsettling your kids who had

just started in a new school. Look for the day-to-day too — tension can come from having to choose between working late to meet a deadline and getting home early so that you can cook dinner as promised. Regardless of what you are torn about, don't just focus on the decision you made. Make sure these stories focus on your inner struggles and the internal or external tension the event caused.

TRANSITION STORIES

These stories are about key transitions in your life. If work-related, they might include events such as changing jobs, companies, industries or careers. Non-work-related stories, on the other hand, may include moving countries, getting divorced, going back to study or having children.

The most powerful transition stories take the audience through what you were thinking and feeling at the time. Spending time highlighting the anxiety you felt when you made the decision is crucial, as is outlining your fears or level of excitement. A story that just goes through the logistics is not a story — well, not a very engaging one anyway.

Another thing to look for is transitions that may have been forced upon you. For example, being made redundant at work or moving countries as a child.

Your aim is to pick a variety of different transition stories so look for those when you have chosen the change as well. Did you have to decide between two different jobs or whether to take on an assignment overseas? Also think of stories that demonstrate when you instigated a transition. Maybe you decided to resign, took a sabbatical or dropped out of university to take a gap year.

Unlike the other three types of stories, where day-to-day events like changing cars or swapping from a PC to a Mac can be very powerful, it's important you choose transition stories that rely on very significant changes and events. (Whether you knew you were going through it at the time or not.)

The key to being a good storyteller in business is to have a variety of these four types of stories ready to use at pivotal moments.