

STORIES THAT SELL



GABRIELLE DOLAN

www.gabrielledolan.com

Author of *Stories for Work:*

The Essential Guide to Business Storytelling

Stories are the fastest, easiest and most natural way to build rapport, and establish trust and credibility.



Usually in sales conversations, you spend a lot of time on “small talk” and swapping random personal stories to try to build rapport with your customer or potential client. Building rapport with someone before you launch into what you want them to buy not only is good business sense, but also makes scientific sense, especially when it comes to storytelling.

Stories are the fastest, easiest and most natural way to build rapport, and establish trust and credibility. However, the stories you share in a sales context must have purpose and be authentic as opposed to random small talk that has not been properly thought through. Stories or conversations with no purpose are hit and miss.

You should try to have three types of stories in sales meetings. These:

- 1. show how others have benefited from your product or service**
- 2. demonstrate your values**
- 3. address any potential concerns the client may have**

SHOW BENEFITS.

Telling how others have benefitted from your product or service is probably the easiest approach. Do not fall into the trap of just listing the benefits, but rather explaining the benefits through client experience stories.

When I meet with new clients, they often want to hear about the work I have done with similar

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clients. I choose companies I have worked with that are similar in size or industry, as well as those facing similar challenges that I have helped them surmount.

DEMONSTRATE YOUR VALUES

Demonstrating your values or those of your company is not done enough in sales meetings, and it is so important. However, we often tell others what we value in a dry statement: “We value customer service” or “I value trust and am trustworthy”. These statements mean nothing.

A client you have worked with previously has had the benefit of time to get to know you and what you value, but you are a complete stranger to any new client you meet. You must demonstrate your values quickly, and one of the most effective ways is through an authentic and appropriate story.

ADDRESS POTENTIAL CONCERNS

Addressing your client’s potential concerns is often overlooked or avoided in sales conversations. The key to this is to try to pre-empt any concerns they may have, and listen for cues during the meeting. Then have stories that address their concerns.

Here are two stories that have been used in real sales situations...

BABY CRIES

Keith Chittleborough has one of the toughest sales jobs in the world: selling a product people need, but don’t want. He is an audiologist, providing hearing aids, and a clinical development consultant for the Lyric extended-wear hearing device.

Unlike glasses, with frames designed by companies such as Armani and Prada, hearing aids are not seen as a fashion accessory. New patients often go to Chittleborough with excuses already prepared for why hearing aids are not going to work for them. So he not only has to explain complex technologies, but must also enthruse his patient about something they are resisting.

One of his favourite stories to help with this involves a burly 40-year-old bloke: “His biceps are the size of my thighs. He’s nervous, but already excited about the product, having done a bit of his own research. He’s found out, because Lyric is so deep in the ear canal and the battery lasts for several months, that it can be worn even in bed.

“Shyly, he tells me he’s going to be a dad in a few weeks and he wants to be able to hear his newborn baby cry at night.

“He’s been wearing the hearing aid ever since, and his daughter is now nearly three years old.”

In just a few sentences, Chittleborough's story sums up a particular product feature and how it changed the life of one of his patients.

"Not only is the technology explained, but the emotional connection also demonstrates the value of the technology," he says.

He also believes the story shows patients that hearing aids are not just for the elderly, which helps to break down some of the stigma attached to their use. All of this is achieved in just a few sentences, highlighting that stories can be just as effective when they are short and sharp.

DAVID AND GOLIATH

Jason Garner is a retailing and property executive who often finds himself in tricky situations when collecting lease payments from retail tenants. Obviously he wants to keep the tenants as clients, but he also

has to find a way to recover money owing. The tenants may be under financial pressure and often go into meetings with him feeling like it's "David versus Goliath".

Garner shares a story about this father.

"My dad was a printer, and I remember as a kid I didn't see him a lot because he worked seven days a week, holding down multiple jobs. He worked really hard to build his business and would often miss key family moments because of this. I recall many birthday dinners when Dad wasn't there, but I am really proud of him and the upbringing he gave us because I know he did all of this for us and to keep the family going.

"He was actually really instrumental in teaching me the importance of not only hard work but also respect for others. I followed in Dad's shoes and worked in retail for

many years, so know first-hand the demands of business—the pressure of sales, the small margins and making sure bills are paid on time. I know how heavily that can weigh on you and how it affects every part of your life.

"I guess the reason I am sharing this with you is because I want you to understand that while I may not fully understand what you are going through, I am here to help you. If I do anything less, my Dad will kill me.

This story, says Garner, always seems to change the conversation for the better. "I remember one time when that story changed the mood of the meeting completely," he says. "The retailer could see that I was not 'Goliath', but someone he could work with to overcome this issue. After that, the relationship between us became a partnership rather than a transactional one, which ensured mutual success for all." ■

