

Story Telling For Business

✍ by Gabrielle Dolan

In sales conversations companies can spend a lot of time on 'small talk' and swapping random personal stories to try to build rapport with customers or potential clients. Building rapport 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 with someone.

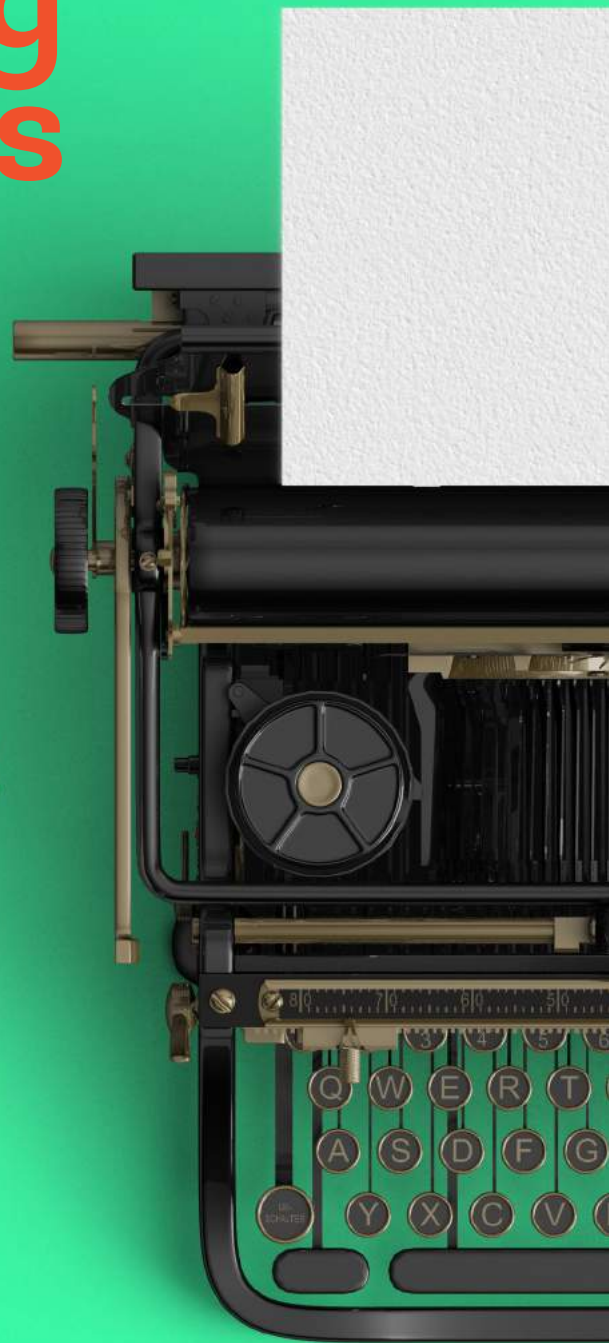
However, the stories companies share in a sales context must have purpose and be authentic because random small talk is often not properly thought through. Stories or conversations with no purpose are hit and miss.

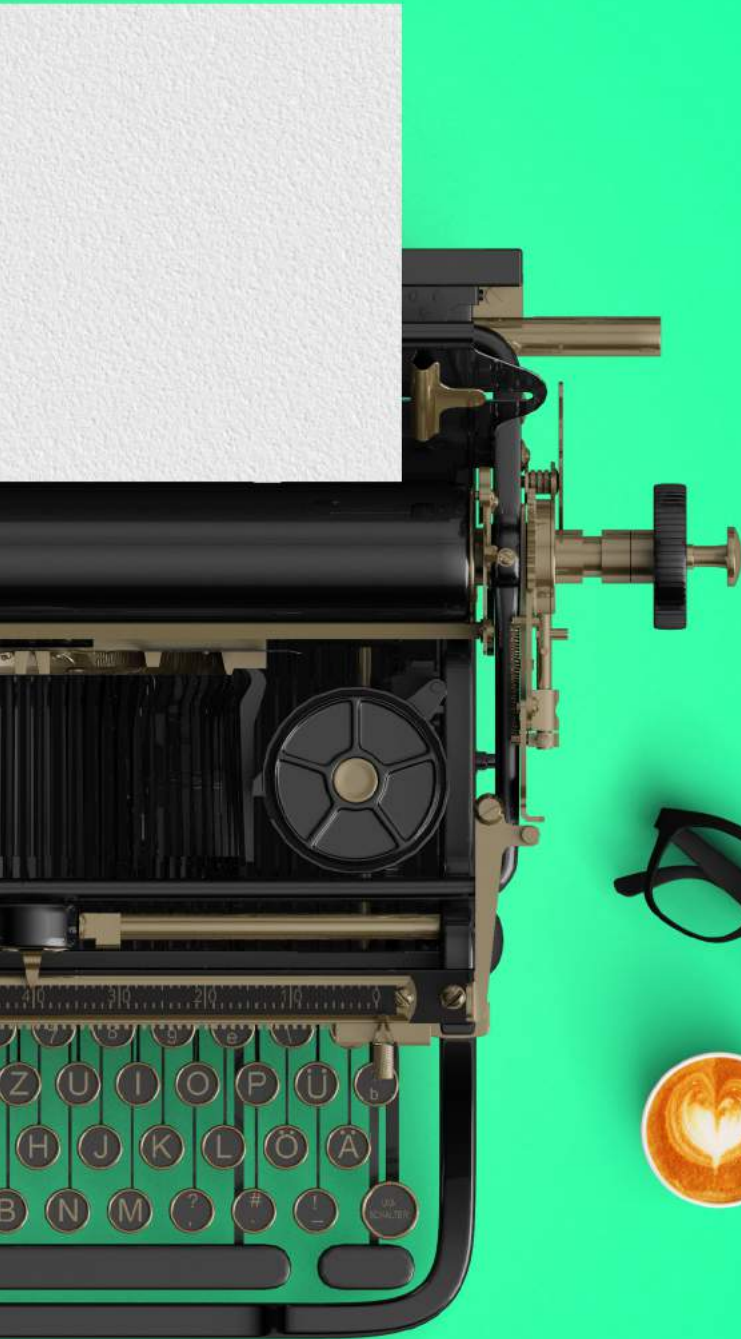
Types of stories

There are three types of stories for sales meetings that:

- Show how others have benefited from the product or service
- Demonstrate business values
- Address any potential concerns the client may have.
- Show product benefits

Showing how others have benefited from a product or service is probably the easiest to do. Don't fall





into the trap of just listing the benefits, but rather explain the benefits of what is offered by sharing stories about what other clients have experienced. New clients, they often want to hear about the work a business has done with other clients similar to them. Choose companies the business has worked with that are similar in size or industry, as well as those facing similar challenges that your organisation has helped them successfully deal with.

Demonstrate your values

Demonstrating company values is not often done enough in sales meetings, but it's important to do so. However, often this can be in a dry statement, for example. "We value customer service" or "I value trust and am trustworthy".

These statements mean nothing. A client the business has worked with previously has had the benefit of time to get to know the organisation, but is a complete stranger to new clients. The business must demonstrate its values quickly – and one of the most effective ways to do that is through an authentic and appropriate story.



Address any potential concerns

Addressing clients' potential concerns is often overlooked or avoided in sales conversations. The key to this is to try and preempt what concerns they may have and listen for cues during the meeting. Then have stories to try and alleviate these concerns.

The following 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, hearing aid provider, and clinical development consultant for the world's only extended-wear hearing device, the Lyric™.

A particular stigma is attached to wearing hearing aids — unlike glasses, with frames made by companies such as Prada and Armani, hearing aids are not seen as a fashion accessory. New patients often come to Keith with excuses already prepared for why hearing aids are not going to work for them. So, Keith has to not only explain complex technologies, but also get his patient enthusiastic about something they are resisting. This is one of his favourite stories to help with this.

Story

A big, burly 40-year-old bloke comes to see me; 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, 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 new born baby cry at night.

He's been wearing Lyric ever since, and his daughter is now nearly three years old.

Outcome

In just a few sentences, Keith's story sums up a particular product feature and how it changed one of his patient's lives.

"Not only is the technology explained, but the emotional connection also demonstrates the value of the technology," says Keith. He also believes that this story shows patients that hearing aids are not just for the elderly, which helps to break down some of the stigma attached to using them. 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. He often finds himself in tricky situations where he has to collect lease payments from retail tenants. Obviously, he wants to keep the tenants as clients, but he also has to find a way to recover the money owing. The tenants may be under financial pressure and often go into meetings with Jason feeling like it's "David versus Goliath". This is the story Jason shares in these situations.

Story

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 he 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 dad 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 — and 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 wouldn't be happy.

Outcome

Jason says this story always seems to alter 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."

Edited extract from Stories for Work:
The Essential Guide to Business Storytelling (Wiley \$29.95),
now available at all good bookstores.
Learn more at www.gabrielledolan.com



Gabrielle Nolan

Four types of stories you need in business

 by Gabrielle Dolan



Stories in business have 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 four types of stories you need in the workplace. They are stories of triumph, tragedy, tension and 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.

First, you will need to reflect upon your personal opinion of what a triumph is. Success looks and feels different 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.

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

If you demonstrate vulnerability and humility, your story will hit the right note

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.

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.

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.

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.

About the author

Edited extract from **Stories for Work: The Essential Guide to Business Storytelling** (Wiley \$29.95), now available at all good bookstores. Learn more at www.gabrielledolan.com