

Stories that *work*



Extract from *Stories for Work: The Essential Guide to Business Storytelling* by Gabrielle Dolan





Usually in sales conversations, a lot of time is spent on “small talk” and swapping random personal stories to try to build rapport with the customer or a potential client. Building rapport with someone before launching into what you really want them to buy is not only good in a 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 to establish trust and credibility with someone. However, the stories you share in a sales context must have purpose and be authentic, because random small talk 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 that:

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

Show product benefits

Showing how others have benefited from your product or service is probably the easiest thing to do. Don't fall into the trap of just listing the benefits, but rather explain the benefits of what you are offering by sharing stories about what other clients have experienced.

When I meet with new clients, they often want to hear about the work I have done with other clients similar to them. 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 successfully deal with.

Demonstrate your values

Demonstrating your values or your company's values is not done enough in sales meetings, and it's 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 on their own.

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 to do that is through an authentic and appropriate story.

Address any potential concerns

Addressing your client's 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.

STORY ONE: 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 newborn 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.

STORY TWO:

Can I test drive you?

Jane Anderson is a personal brand expert, speaker and author. She helps and mentors clients

to become better known in their industry so that they can increase their sales and results. She shares the following story to highlight this.

Story

Last month, I found myself looking for a new car. It was late on a Friday and I was rushing around, trying to find the best deal. I'd done all my online research and ended up at a particular dealer. He sensed I needed to decide on the car quickly, because it was the end of the financial year, and to my surprise, he let me take it home for the weekend to try it out.

This certainly eased some pressure for me. I didn't have to rush my decision; I could drive the car for the weekend and return it on Monday. The dealer wasn't pushy. He was helpful, listened to my needs and made the whole process easy. As a result, I decided to keep the car.

According to Forbes, 60 per cent of a buying decision is made before the customer buys from you. Similarly, the CareerBuilder Survey found that 58 per cent of recruiters extended a job offer because they got a good sense of the job seeker's character and personality.

One of the best ways to encourage people to test drive you is to write a blog. It's a bit like being allowed to take the car overnight. Your posts take the reader from their world into yours. They give the reader your insights and perspective. Too often, we want the customer or recruiter to make a decision there and then,

and we risk looking pushy, "salesy," or just like we're feeling weird about the whole situation.

Seth Godin, author of many books including Tribes, says, "We're in the connection economy. People want to connect and buy you, but they will buy when they're ready."

We've all come across the stereotypical car dealer who just wants to get their commission. But we need to get to know the car first. "Will it give me what I need? Will be it economical enough? Do I like it? Is it safe?" Your client or recruiter is asking these same questions. Organisations don't have extra cash floating around if things go wrong anymore, so every dollar matters.

So allow people to get to know you. Give samples of your work through your blog so there is less pressure on you to sell. As F. W. Woolworth, the founder of Woolworth Corporation, said, 'I am the world's worst salesperson so I must make it easy for people to buy'.

Outcome

The preceding story comes from Jane's blog, but she also shares something very similar face to face when she meets potential new clients (focusing more on the story about the weekend test drive, rather than the figures and quotes). Jane says, "The story seems familiar to them, so I believe it makes the point easily."

Jane adds that she often uses stories in a sales meeting because



'stories can demonstrate that you have understanding and compassion for your clients' problems, which I think builds respect and credibility'.

STORY THREE:

Lessons from Dad

Christina Guidotti is a mentor, speaker and author. While she now predominantly works helping women to achieve their potential, before this she ran a very successful real estate agency in Brisbane. This is where she developed some extensive skills in sales and leadership. One of her key messages to potential clients is the importance of delivering on the promises you make and avoiding making excuses, which is something her dad taught her.

Story

My dad was born in 1943 in Chios, Greece, and was the third son of seven children. He was raised on a farm in a house with no running water. When Dad was eight, the family left Greece to migrate to Australia. They sold everything they owned in Greece and came over with just one suitcase each, in order to start a new life. The only money they had was used to buy the boat fares, and the trip took 46 days. It was a long, tough journey to an unknown life, and Dad remembers when the children got lice, and were washed down with kerosene and water, which burned their skin.

Life in Australia was not easy, because Dad did not speak

English. As migrants, the family had to get work quickly, which they found on a farm and an asbestos factory. They were amazed that homes had running water in Australia and the living conditions were much better than in Greece. After a couple of years, they had saved enough money to buy their own house.

When Dad was 10 he bred and sold pigeons, guinea pigs and puppies for extra income. He would push a wheelbarrow full of vegetables door-to-door, selling whatever he had to offer on the day. He arranged horse rides for the kids at school for additional money. He also remembers dancing the Zorba as a young child, attracting crowds who gave him coins for the entertainment. He loved to dance; it was his joy.

The family managed to buy their own grocery store and Dad finished school at age 14 to work in the family store. A strong work ethic was instilled in



Dad from a very young age. He demonstrated strength of character, a no-excuses mindset as well as an amazing amount of resourcefulness, which would go on to serve him well throughout his life.

At the age of 29, Dad opened a real estate office and 14 years later he had expanded his business to 14 offices. So his childhood was not the average for a child in Australia. He went from not knowing how to speak the language, to creating a very successful life. Dad's strength of character, enthusiasm, optimism, ability to see opportunity, and sheer hard work were key drivers of his success, both in business and in life.

My father taught me about work ethic and the mindsets of optimism, enthusiasm and persistence — essential tools for success. Over the last few decades in my own business I've worked on the principle of under-promise and over-deliver in my relationships. Be dependable and you will get asked more often. As Dad taught me, 'You can let them down once and you may be forgiven. Let them down twice and you may get one more chance. Let them down often and you lose.'

Being dependable is the promise I make to you.

Outcome

Christina obviously values the same work ethic as her father. When she shares this story she often gets comments along the lines of, 'You can absolutely tell you are your father's daughter', and, 'This explains why you have equal amounts of compassion and a no-excuses attitude'.

Christina believes this story is important for her in attracting the right mentoring clients, because she does not want to mentor anyone who does not know she will take no excuses from them.

STORY FOUR:

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 firsthand 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 will kill me.

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."

Conclusion

If your job includes any form of selling or influence then developing a suite of stories for to use will be beneficial. Stories are a fast, easy and effective way to build rapport, trust and credibility with potential clients and customers.

Gabrielle Dolan is considered a global thought leader in storytelling and business communications. Her latest book *Stories for Work: The Essential Guide to Business Storytelling* is available now. You can find out how to implement storytelling into your company at

www.gabrielledolan.com