

# Acclaim for STORYTELLING FOR JOB INTERVIEWS



'*Storytelling for Job Interviews* provides us with the skills and techniques for one of our most dreaded situations – the job interview. I wish I had this book 20 years ago!'

**- Paul Matthews**

*Communications Leader (Operations), Transport Sydney Trains*

'Within an hour of reading this book, I felt better equipped to attend an interview, conduct an interview and coach my teenage sons towards a Bradman interview performance. I lead a large team and am often interviewing candidates for senior roles. I would find it so much easier to select a candidate who follows the simple, yet powerful, guidance in this book.'

**- Natalie Nunn**

*Asia-Pacific Talent Development Leader, Ernst & Young*

‘The process outlined in this book not only helped me successfully get my most recent job, but I continue to share many of the stories in a variety of ways to connect and inspire my team. I cannot recommend it highly enough.’

**- Catherine MacLeod**  
*General Manager, Channel Development, NAB*

‘This is a must read for anyone who wants to succeed at their next job interview. The ability to connect with your interviewer, show them your personality and demonstrate your capability in the role is the winning combo that will help you land your dream job.’

**- Anna Abazovic**  
*Head of Operations, Seek Learning*

‘*Storytelling for Job Interviews* is an easy-to-read book for those seeking help with interview performance. I highly recommend it to those with experience, and also those who are starting out on their careers. The storytelling concepts allow you to put the approach into practice immediately. Learn to be yourself and stand out from everyone else in the interview crowd.’

**- Jennifer Goulopoulos**  
*Senior Product Manager, Financial Services*

‘The key to nailing a great interview is telling your story. Gabrielle Dolan provides expert, practical guidance on techniques that can be used in any interview situation.’

**- Ben Taylor**  
*General Manager Corporate Affairs,  
Rabobank Australia and New Zealand*

‘Stories are an ever-present part of our lives so it is easy to forget how powerful they can be. Gabrielle Dolan empowers job seekers to become conscious and skillful in storytelling to help them put their best selves forward in an interview.’

**- Chris Green**  
*Managing Editor, Kansas Leadership Centre*

‘This book has a delightfully simple but expressive narrative that clearly explains how to best tell your story at an interview and in the first 90 days of your new role. This is a must-read for anyone just starting out or at the top of your game.’

**- James Westwood-Beere**  
*Head of Group People Strategy, Woolworths*





*Story*  
**TELLING**  
*for* **JOB**  
**INTERVIEWS**

*HOW TO USE STORIES, NAIL AN INTERVIEW  
AND LAND YOUR DREAM JOB*

**GABRIELLE DOLAN**

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## About **THE AUTHOR**

Gabrielle Dolan is a global thought leader in storytelling and business communication.

She's worked with thousands of high-profile leaders from across Australia and the world, helping them to become better leaders and communicators using the art of business storytelling. Gabrielle is a highly sought-after international mentor and keynote speaker on these topics.

Gabrielle has worked as an independent business management consultant and has held various senior leadership roles in change management and learning and development for the National Australia Bank. She successfully co-founded One Thousand & One, one of Australia's leading storytelling companies, before launching her own practice in 2013.

She is a graduate of the Harvard Kennedy School of Executive Education in the Art and Practice of Leadership Development program. Her other academic qualifications include a master's degree in Management and Leadership from Swinburne University and an associate diploma in Education and Training from the University of Melbourne.



In 2015 Gabrielle became an Australian and New Zealand Partner of Thought Leaders Global, where she works with organisations to help them gain a competitive edge through thought leadership. In the same year, she was also nominated for Telstra's Business Woman of the Year award.

Gabrielle is a best-selling author of *Ignite: Real Leadership, Real Talk, Real Results* and *Hooked: How Leaders Connect, Engage and Inspire with Storytelling*. This is her third book.

When she is not writing or working, she can be found wandering in her vegetable garden at her 25-acre rural property on the southern coast of New South Wales. She believes the world would be a better place if there was less manure in business and more manure in gardens.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the many people who have sought my counsel on using storytelling in job interviews. It's those conversations that gave me the confidence to write this book.

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Finally to Mum and Dad, who always encouraged me to be the best I could.

# Introduction

When I left school, I applied for a job as a computer operator and was pretty rapt to get an interview in which I thought I performed well. The following weekend, I saw the job advertised again and can recall saying to my mum, 'Obviously I did not get the job'. She suggested I apply again. So after thinking, 'Yeah, right. How lame would that be?', I did. I was asked in for a second interview. The manager said to me, 'Your second letter was a lot stronger. Why did you apply for the job again?' I told him it was because I really wanted the job and I knew I could do it and do it well. I was offered the job on the spot.

Fast forward several years later. It was the middle of the night and my young daughter Alex was screaming for her milk. As my husband, Steve, was heating up her bottle he said to her, 'Hang on, the bottle's coming soon. Good things come to those who wait'. I remember snapping at him with, 'Don't you ever say that to our daughter again. It's a stupid saying. Good things don't come to those who wait; good things come to those that get out there and do something about it and when they fail they don't give up, they try something different'.

Though I was a first-time mother in a sleep-deprived state, clearly overreacting, the sentiment is still

something I truly believe. If you try something and it doesn't work, don't give up – but also don't keep doing the same thing.

I've been putting this philosophy into practice since 2005, working with business leaders and professionals to help them overcome obstacles at work, communicate in a more engaging and inspiring way and empower their team through the use of business storytelling. Over the last few years, more and more people have asked me to mentor them and help them use these personal and professional stories as a way of communicating their capabilities in upcoming job interviews.

This book is an accumulation of that knowledge and experience. It will equip you with the tools and techniques you need to stand out against the many other job applicants who are similarly qualified to you. You'll learn to try something different, to tell stories about your personal and professional life that demonstrate your values and how valuable an asset you will be to a team, organisation and your future employer. Ultimately, this book will help you nail that job interview and land your dream job.

For many years, the preferred method of conducting interviews has been the Behavioural Event Interview (BEI) technique. It involves the interviewer asking questions about specific situations, such as: 'Tell me about a time when you had to deal with an angry customer. How did you handle the situation?' You could answer the question with something broad and theoretical like: 'I showed empathy by understanding the customer's complaints and then explained the process and why this occurred'.

If you're interview savvy, you've probably prepared for the types of questions you're going to be asked (a quick Google will result in thousands of these). But how many other people going for that same

job will have Googled and prepared for the same questions, and will answer them in exactly the same way?

What would differentiate you from all the other applicants is a story about a specific situation and how you solved it practically. For example, 'There was this one time when a customer ... I solved the problem by ...' This facilitates a process of two-way communication, and your interviewer will then ask follow-up questions like, 'Why did you do that?' Think of it like a maths test – getting the correct answer is only one part of it; you need to show how you worked it out and got the final result.

So, as you work through this book, you'll look at examples of the four types of stories you need to nail an interview. You'll then identify your own stories to show how you have practically dealt with certain situations and problems from your personal and professional life. You'll then put this knowledge into practice, following five steps to construct your own stories. During this process, you will define what the job position entails, how your capabilities and values match what the employer is looking for and how to select the right story to effectively demonstrate this.

In this book, you'll learn:

- why stories are so powerful in business today
- how stories distinguish you from the rest of the interview pack
- how to land a job in less than three interviews (instead of over 50)
- what four story types you need to nail a job interview
- how to put storytelling techniques and skills into practice
- how to define, find, match, construct and prepare stories
- how to prepare for tricky questions like:  
‘What’s your biggest weakness?’
- how to use your stories in the first 90 days of your new role and beyond.

So what are you waiting for? Let's get to storytelling work.

## CHAPTER 1

# *From boring* **TO BRADMAN**

**S**ir Donald Bradman was an Australian cricketer in the 1940s and is widely acknowledged as the greatest cricketer in history. He had an unprecedented and extraordinary batting average of 99.94 – to put that into perspective, the closest anyone else got at the end of their career was 60.97.

When I was young, I played cricket endlessly in the backyard with my brothers and in the street with my cousins and friends. Every game would start the same way. Two kids would be chosen as the captains and they would then take it in turns to pick their teams. Normally the captains would choose the best cricketers first or would choose their closest friends.

If Don Bradman, the greatest cricketer of all time, was in that line-up he would undoubtedly

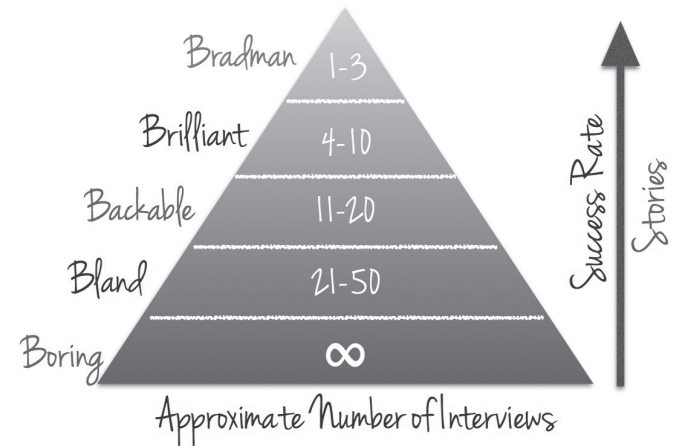
have been picked first every single time – unless the captain had a very strong allegiance to his best friend, but it would have to be very strong to risk losing Bradman to the other team, which you would if you didn't pick him first.

So let's imagine you're being interviewed for a job, lining up alongside all the other contenders. What Bradmanesque qualities do you have that would ensure you get picked first every time?

You don't have to know who Don Bradman is to play out this scenario. The analogy works for any other person or athlete that you consider a leader in their field – Serena Williams, Pele, Nadia Comaneci or Babe Ruth, for example.

Figure 1 is a model that shows the number of interviews you probably go for before you are successful at getting a job. The closer to being a Bradman you become, the more you're using stories in your interviews and the fewer interviews you have to go to before you're successful.

Figure 1: The Bradman interview success model



### Where are you now?

Do you feel like you go for hundreds of interviews and never seem to get anywhere? Have you ever considered that you may be presenting yourself in a *boring* or *bland* way? That's not to say you are a boring or bland person; it's just likely that you don't use any stories at all in job interviews, or you use them incorrectly, in a way that gives away nothing about your personality to the person interviewing you. In other words, you're playing it safe.

What about if you're *backable*? You probably share relevant work-related stories that demonstrate your skills, capabilities and experience, but are left wondering why you're not getting picked. You tick all the boxes; you can do the job. But there's something missing that would make you stand out as *brilliant* compared to the other candidates.

If you're prepared to share a combination of personal and professional or work-related stories you'll be seen as a *brilliant* candidate. You've probably been very successful in the past getting jobs and have not had to go to many interviews because of that high success rate. But what if you're up against a Bradman, Serena Williams, Pele, Nadia Comaneci or Babe Ruth? (Which you will encounter at some stage of your career.)

To be a Bradman, and continue to be a Bradman, you've got to put in some hard work. You must dedicate time and energy to prep for any interview. As a young child, Don Bradman would hone his cricketing skills over and over: not only hitting a cricket ball with a cricket bat, but also hitting a golf ball with a cricket stump against corrugated iron to make the ball rebound in unpredictable directions. Wherever you sit on this model right now, there is always room for improvement. That's where learning to tell stories will help.

## What is storytelling?

Storytelling is not a new concept. Ever since humans have been able to communicate they have done so through stories. Just look at the Aboriginal culture in Australia. It's the oldest cultural history in the world that's still alive today, thanks to generations of master storytellers and their Dreamtime storytelling.

It is only recently, however, that the business world has realised and embraced the power of stories. Storytelling in business is now not only accepted as a key leadership competency and communication skill, but is encouraged and highly sought after.

Just because something is labelled a story, however, doesn't mean that it is a story. There's a big difference between storytelling in business and storytelling you use at home with your family and friends to explain what you had for dinner or what your cousin Jill did last week.

*Storytelling is sharing a story about an experience, but linking it to a message that will influence and inspire your audience to action.*

## So what is a story?

A story has a sequence and structure around a specific event. It contains sensory and emotional detail.

When you share a story in a business context, such as a job interview, your story must have the following three ingredients for it to have impact:

1. *purpose* – what is the point of your story? This is not about sharing random stories that leave your interviewer thinking, 'What has this got to do with anything we're talking about?'
2. *authenticity* – is this story true? Never, ever make up stories – no matter how tempting it might be to land your dream job. Lying is not worth the damage it can cause to your credibility

and you never know when it might come back and haunt you.

3. *congruence* – does this story really portray who you are and what you believe? Don't say you live and breathe teamwork when you actually prefer to work in complete isolation.

You will learn to put these points into practice as you work through this book, finding and constructing your own stories.

## *How stories help in job interviews*

The Greek philosopher Aristotle devised a model over 2500 years ago that is still relevant today. Aristotle said you need three elements to successfully persuade and influence:

1. *logos* (sound logic) – the data, facts and research
2. *ethos* (personal credibility) – the degree of trustworthiness and credibility you have
3. *pathos* (emotional connection) – the extent you connect with someone and they connect with you.

When you're in a situation like a job interview, your main aim is to persuade and influence the interviewer and decision makers that you are the right person for the job. To do that, you not only need to have logical reasons why you are the right person, but you also need to build personal credibility and an emotional connection so that they trust you and feel a connection with you. The trickiest part is that you need to do that better than everyone else and relatively fast, considering interviews generally only go for about an hour, sometimes less.

Most people in job interviews spend way too much time on logic. They state all the facts: 'I'm the right person for the job because I've worked in a similar role ... Have 20-plus years' experience ... Just love sales!' Know what the end result is? You come across as boring and bland and when it comes to the crunch, you just don't seem to have the 'right fit' for the organisation you're interviewing for.

So how can you build trust and credibility and foster an emotional connection with your future employer to land your dream job?

Tell a story, of course.