

GABRIELLE DOLAN

Bestselling author of *Magnetic Stories*

STORY Intelligence



THE CRAFT OF
AUTHENTIC STORYTELLING
MADE SMARTER WITH AI

In an era where trust is increasingly fragile and AI-generated content is ever-present; this is a must-read for business leaders. Gabrielle is a masterful storyteller and in her new book she explains why authentic human stories are not just important, but essential for cutting through the noise and building genuine connection. This book smartly reframes AI not as a threat, but as an incredibly powerful creative partner, showing how we can use it to amplify and strengthen any story that needs to be heard.

—**Michelle Hutton**, Chief Client Officer, Burson

In a world increasingly dominated by ‘thinking machines’, Gabrielle Dolan brilliantly reminds us that humans are ‘feeling machines that think’. The very title, *Story Intelligence*, signals a vital evolution beyond traditional narrative craft for the age of AI. She guides us not to replace our humanity with technology, but to use it to amplify our uniquely human gift for storytelling. This book is a crucial lesson that logic and data alone will never be enough to truly move people. Dolan’s assertion that ‘experience is the best teacher, a compelling story is a close second’ is a profound truth for any leader looking to inspire action. I recommend this book as essential reading for anyone looking to retain authenticity and connection while mastering modern AI tools.

—**Dr Sue Keay**, Director, University NSW AI Institute

To story is human, but to story for influence requires guidance. *Story Intelligence* shows readers exactly how to craft narratives for maximum impact. If you need this superpower, you need this wonderful book!

—**Paul J. Zak, PhD**, author of *The Little Book of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Living Better*

Professional storytelling is widely acknowledged as a powerful tool. But is it under threat from AI? *Story Intelligence* convincingly argues that AI is not a threat but a highly effective partner in

enhancing storytelling skills. By understanding the core principles of storytelling (succinctly summarised in the book), AI can be harnessed to unlock our creativity. This book is an uplifting and exciting read, especially for those tentative about integrating AI into their creative processes.

—**Maia Gould**, Associate Professor, The Australian
National University

As deep tech continues to reshape our everyday and the communication landscape, through synthetic media, and AI-generated misinformation, the need for authentic human storytelling has never been greater. Gabrielle Dolan's *Story Intelligence* is a timely and essential guide for anyone seeking to build trust in a world of manipulated narratives and eroded truth. With Dolan's typical warmth, wit and practical wisdom, she reminds us that while AI can generate words, only humans can tell stories that truly resonate.

—**Prerana Mehta**, CEO, Australian Council of
Learned Academies

In a world where executives are told to 'tell their story' but given little guidance on how to do it powerfully, especially when trust in leadership is at an all-time low, this book is the missing piece. Gabrielle's blend of authenticity, storytelling smarts and practical AI strategy is a game changer. Essential reading for those of us helping leaders show up, speak up and shape culture with their voice.

—**Amanda Blesing**, Executive Coach and 3x
author for Leading Women

In a world where trust is eroding and attention is fleeting, this book is a timely and powerful reminder of why storytelling matters more than ever. It introduces a compelling new dimension of human capability: Story Intelligence (SQ)—the ability to authentically and purposefully use narrative to connect, engage, and inspire.

Going beyond cognitive intelligence (IQ), emotional intelligence (EQ), and cultural intelligence (CQ), the book makes a bold and original case for SQ as a core human skill—one that not only drives meaningful communication but also fosters deeper connection in an age shaped by technology and cultural fragmentation.

Gabriel skilfully explores how AI can serve as a creative partner in this journey, not by replacing our stories but by helping us uncover and share them more authentically.

This book is insightful, timely, and filled with soul. If you care about meaningful connection in the digital age, this is an absolute must-read. You'll walk away not just thinking differently, but feeling differently—about stories, technology, and about yourself.

—**Dr. Frederique Covington Corbett**, author of *Leadership on a Blockchain* and Chief Global Brand & Marketing, PFP

Story Intelligence is a timely, practical read. If you need to connect with others and build trust (and who doesn't?), this is the book for you. Gabrielle Dolan walks the talk, with real stories, useful tools and a solid case for why authenticity is almost always the answer.

—**Alicia McKay**, author of *You Don't Need An MBA*

Story Intelligence shows us that stories don't just inform, they connect. Gabrielle Dolan reveals how stories cut through logic, tapping into something deeper to build trust, shift thinking and move people. A smart book on the superpower we all carry.

—**Matt Church**, Founder, Thought Leaders Business School and author of *Future Proof Humans*

Gabrielle's best book yet! At last a sensible use of AI to mine human experience and help us connect better with others. The stories shared left me uplifted and motivated, eager to shift my communication in a meaningful way. Pithy and practical, this book will help you double down on authenticity and level up your impact.

—**Zoë Routh**, Leadership futurist and award-winning author

Gabrielle Dolan has done it again—taking something as timeless as storytelling and giving it a fresh, urgent relevance for the world we live in now. In an age where AI content floods our feeds and trust is harder to earn, *Story Intelligence* is the reminder we all need—that our authentic stories are the heartbeat of connection. What I love most is how Gabrielle doesn't frame AI as the villain but as a tool—a creative partner—when used with intention and heart. This book is smart, real and a must-read for anyone who wants to stand out with their true voice, not just more noise.

—**Janine Garner**, author of *Be Brilliant* and *It's Who You Know*

Story Intelligence is a game changer for any leader who wants to deepen connection, influence with authenticity, and leave a lasting impact. Gabrielle Dolan beautifully unpacks the power of storytelling as a strategic tool—not just for communication, but for genuine leadership. If you're ready to elevate your message and engage on a whole new level, this book is your roadmap.”

—**Jane Anderson**, Business Growth and Communication Expert

Story Intelligence is a smart, practical guide to elevating your storytelling with AI. Packed with sharp insights and practical takeaways, it's a GPS for modern communicators navigating the new rules of storytelling. A must-read for anyone ready to turn AI into a powerful creative partner.

—**Tennille Burt**, Chief Marketing Officer

This is the story of how to tell stories in an age of algorithms. It's smart, brave, and brimming with integrity.

—**Prof. Catherine Ball**, Scientific Futurist

STORY Intelligence



WILEY 2025 ©

THE CRAFT OF
AUTHENTIC STORYTELLING
MADE SMARTER WITH AI

GABRIELLE DOLAN

WILEY

First published 2026 by John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd

© John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd 2026

All rights reserved, including rights for text and data mining and training of artificial intelligence technologies or similar technologies. Except as permitted under the *Australian Copyright Act 1968* (for example, a fair dealing for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review) no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise. Advice on how to obtain permission to reuse material from this title is available at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

The right of Gabrielle Dolan to be identified as the author of *Story Intelligence* has been asserted in accordance with law.

ISBN: 978-1-394-36087-1



A catalogue record for this
book is available from the
National Library of Australia

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd. Level 4, 600 Bourke Street, Melbourne, VIC 3000, Australia

For details of our global editorial offices, customer services, and more information about Wiley products visit us at www.wiley.com.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some content that appears in standard print versions of this book may not be available in other formats.

Trademarks: Wiley and the Wiley logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc. and/or its affiliates in the United States and other countries and may not be used without written permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty

While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this work, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this work and specifically disclaim all warranties, including without limitation any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. Certain AI systems have been used in the creation of this work. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives, written sales materials or promotional statements for this work. This work is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering professional services. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a specialist where appropriate. The fact that an organisation, website, or product is referred to in this work as a citation and/or potential source of further information does not mean that the publisher and author endorse the information or services the organisation, website, or product may provide or recommendations it may make. Further, readers should be aware that websites listed in this work may have changed or disappeared between when this work was written and when it is read. Neither the publisher nor author shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

Cover design by Wiley

Cover image: © phochi/Shutterstock

Set in 11.5/15.5pts and Plantin Std by Straive, Chennai, India.

Contents

<i>About the author</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>xiii</i>

PART I: UNDERSTANDING STORY INTELLIGENCE	1
---	----------

1. What is storytelling and why is it so powerful?	3
2. Why stories are so crucial today	15
3. Putting AI to the test ... the pros and cons	23
4. Embracing AI as your creative partner	39

PART II: INCREASING YOUR STORY INTELLIGENCE	51
--	-----------

5. The storytelling framework	53
6. The four types of stories	71
7. How to find your own stories	85
8. Putting AI to work, smarter <i>and</i> harder	93

PART III: SHARING YOUR STORIES	111
---------------------------------------	------------

9. Stories for presentations	113
10. Stories for sales	125
11. Stories for social media and podcasts	141
12. Stories around values	151
13. Stories for influence, change and inspiration	163
14. Stories for coaching or life advice	173
15. Stories for speeches and eulogies	183
16. Stories in the written format	199

About the author

Gabrielle Dolan, affectionately known as ‘Ral’ to those who’ve met her, is a globally recognised expert in strategic storytelling and real communication. It was while working in senior leadership roles at National Australia Bank that she discovered how stories could enhance communication and leadership effectiveness.

Since that realisation, Gabrielle has dedicated her career to helping people humanise their communications. She travels the world undertaking storytelling workshops and delivering keynote speeches at conferences, where she is known as an ‘edutainer’; that is, someone who educates and entertains.

An accomplished author, Gabrielle has penned seven influential books, including the bestseller *Magnetic Stories: Connect with customers and engage employees with brand storytelling*, which debuted at number two on Australia’s best-selling business books list.

She co-hosts a podcast with Jac Phillips called *Keeping it Real with Jac and Ral*, which ranked in the top 5 per cent of video-produced podcasts on Spotify. Gabrielle met Jac over 20 years ago and the relationship went from client, to friend to podcast co-host. Jac is an amazing, no-nonsense leadership coach.

Gabrielle holds a Master’s degree in Management and Leadership, an Associate Diploma in Education and Training and is a graduate

of the Harvard Kennedy School of Executive Education. Her academic achievements underscore her commitment to continuous learning and leadership development... or, to potentially making up for not passing English in her final year of high school!

Gabrielle's dedication to clear and genuine business dialogue led her to initiate the global movement Jargon Free Fridays, encouraging professionals to ditch corporate jargon and unnecessary acronyms in favour of straightforward communication. Her efforts were recognised in 2020 when she was named Communicator of the Year by the International Association of Business Communicators Asia-Pacific region.

Gabrielle spends her time between Melbourne and Bermagui on the southern New South Wales coast of Australia. She is married to Steve and they have two adult daughters, Alex and Jess. She is committed to improving her game... specifically on the golf course and pickleball court.

Introduction

On the eve of Halloween in 1938, ‘The War of the Worlds’ hit the airwaves on CBS Radio. An adaptation of HG Wells’ novel of the same name, which was published 40 years prior, it was directed and narrated by Orsen Welles (no relative of the original author).

Instead of being set in 19th-century England, the episode was changed to the current day in the United States. The hour-long program was a simulation of a normal evening radio broadcast with weather updates and music, but after a few minutes, the music was interrupted by supposedly real news, detailing the beginning of a devastating alien invasion and the United States military’s futile efforts to stop it.

One of the so-called ‘reports’ was from a rooftop in Manhattan, where a news reporter describes the invasion on New York City saying, ‘Five great machines wading through the Hudson River like men wading through a brook. There is black smoke drifting over the city and people are diving into the East River like rats, and others in Times Square are falling like flies’. The actor playing this journalist then coughs and collapses. After seconds of silence, a radio operator is heard calling, ‘New York. Isn’t there anyone on the air? Isn’t there anyone on the air? Isn’t there ... anyone?’

Thousands of listeners missed the start of this broadcast, which actually explained it was fictionalised, and mistakenly took it for

genuine news. They believed it to be true and shared the false reports with others, spreading it like wildfire. Chaos ensued as people took to the streets in confusion.

Imagine waking up to that news; what would you think? Fast forward to today, imagine waking up to a video of a world leader heavily criticising another world leader and threatening war, only to find out hours later that it was entirely fabricated. Or seeing a heartfelt testimonial about a product, only to discover that the person speaking doesn't exist.

Sadly, this is no longer just the plot of a dystopian novel acted out for entertainment. It is our reality ... right here, right now.

© WILEY 2025 It's impossible not to notice the influx of fake videos on your social media feed ... of lions swallowing whole snakes or tornadoes ripping through cities ... mostly generated by AI. At the moment, the quality is such that if you look closely enough, or perhaps are more sceptical, you will pick up details that prove them manufactured. Yet, read the comments on these videos and you'll see many people, alarmingly, believe them to be real. The real concern is that as technology improves and is so accessible, spotting the fakes is becoming harder ... even for the very discerning.

AI can generate fake but realistic videos of people saying things they never said, and of politicians or celebrities saying something damaging. Or worse, people in powerful positions can dismiss real videos as deep fakes, and fake news, as their public relations strategy. How can we trust what anyone says or does these days?

As a result, we are becoming more sceptical of what we hear and what we see. It is getting harder to discern what and who we can trust.

Trust is at an all-time low because it's challenging to distinguish what is real and what is fabricated.

For the past 20 years, I have been teaching business owners, leaders and sales professionals how to share stories to create genuine, authentic connection, and I truly believe that with the increase of AI-generated content and the overall decline in trust in society, the craft of authentic storytelling is needed now more than ever.

Storytelling has been an effective means of communication for tens of thousands of years. You need only look at how Indigenous Australians (the oldest living culture) use stories to pass their knowledge and wisdom through the generations.

Interestingly, though, I don't think that AI is the devil. I know people who are so put off by the rise of AI-generated content that they refuse to use it, engage with it or even acknowledge its existence! But to ignore AI so outright would be a terrible and costly mistake. Not just because it's here to stay, and here to advance, but because AI is an incredible tool that offers so many opportunities in all sorts of personal and professional contexts.

When we learn to use AI wisely (for good, not evil, so to speak) and understand its advantages and limitations, we can use it to craft genuine stories faster and smarter.

That's what I want to show you in this book.

'Story intelligence' refers to your ability to use the skills of storytelling in an authentic way that connects, engages and inspires others, especially when mistrust is at an all-time high. There is no dictionary definition for story intelligence, so I created one:

Story intelligence (noun)

The ability to purposefully and skilfully use authentic storytelling to communicate with clarity and to connect, engage, and inspire.

If we use AI-generated stories that are not authentic, we run a serious risk to our reputation and a potential damage to our brand. So the trick is to not rely wholly on AI, but to use it as a creative partner to help uncover stories we can share to engage and inspire others; and to refine those stories and supercharge our productivity, creativity, communication skills and impact.

Think of storytelling as your Batman, and AI as your Robin, your reliable and eager sidekick.

Together, in this book, we will:

- analyse the power of storytelling and why it is needed now more than ever in a world of declining trust
- bust the myth that AI is cheating or unethical (not true if used correctly)
- deconstruct what makes a great story and how to spot a fake
- explain the limitations and advantages when it comes to AI and storytelling
- follow a framework to find stories, both with and without AI's help
- share AI tips and techniques that will improve and refine your storytelling capability
- increase your confidence to share stories in different situations, from business presentations to personal speeches
- demonstrate how others have used stories in their personal and professional lives.

To do this, part I of the book ('Understanding story intelligence') unpacks what storytelling is and what makes it so powerful.

We'll look at the latest research, which shows the decline of trust across the globe, and why authentic storytelling is needed now more than ever. We'll also put AI to the test when it comes to generating and creating stories so that you can understand its limitations and its benefits and spot a fake a mile off.

In part II ('Increasing your story intelligence'), we will delve into a comprehensive storytelling framework and explore the four types of stories you can share in certain situations. We'll also look at how you can find stories ... both with and without AI. Then we will put AI to work harder and smarter, using it as your creative partner, to help enhance your stories while maintaining your authentic voice.

Finally, in part III ('Sharing your stories'), we'll look at a variety of stories that people have shared in specific contexts: from presentations, to sales, coaching moments and delivering speeches; the results and feedback from the stories; and an analysis of why they worked. I hope these stories provide you with the inspiration to share your own stories and create the right impact and trust with others.

Now, before we get into things, it's important to note that the term 'AI' (artificial intelligence) is very broad and refers to the concept of machines or software mimicking human-like behaviour. Generative AI (Gen AI) is a subset of AI that focuses specifically on creating new content such as generating text, images, music and more ... and that is what I mostly refer to and use in this book. (If you are interacting with a chat function on a website it is most likely Gen AI.)

The two AI platforms I use and refer to in this book are ChatGPT and Claude. In some instances, I have included direct copy from these platforms to show you how they work and what they produce. When the copy is unaltered, I have used a different font to highlight this.

Note, this book will not, however, explain how ChatGPT works (there are so many great books already written on this including *The ChatGPT Revolution: How to simplify your work and life admin with AI* by Donna McGeorge). But rather, it will show you how to use AI as your creative partner to help increase your story intelligence.

So let's get ready to craft some authentic stories, made smarter with the help of AI.

PART I

Understanding story intelligence

Story intelligence is very similar to emotional intelligence in that it refers to your ability...in this case, to tell a great story (as opposed to how emotionally intelligent you are).

Just as some people are naturally better at tennis, singing or physical coordination, some may have more emotional intelligence, and others more story intelligence. In either case, the skills are always learnable and you can become better at them.

So, in this part we will explore what storytelling actually is and why stories are so powerful. We will also discover why authentic stories are needed now more than ever in a world of rising distrust. Plus, we'll begin to look at using AI as a creative partner, which means understanding the advantages and limitations of AI-generated stories.

What is storytelling and why is it so powerful?



When our daughter Alex was two years old and I was pregnant with our second child, Jess, we decided to put a swimming pool in our backyard.

I had always had a pool growing up and it had brought so much enjoyment. We would spend hours in that pool with all our friends, family and neighbours and I thought it would be amazing to provide the same experience to our girls.

Of course, we taught Alex and Jess how to swim as early as possible, and as they got older they would have friends over to swim. But the pool wasn't very big so when there were lots of people over for a swim, we had a strict 'no jumping in the pool' policy.

As opposed to just stating this rule to Alex and Jess, I reinforced the importance of it by sharing a story from when I was a little girl.

The story was about when their Auntie Ali (my younger sister) jumped into the pool on top of me and her knee collided with my front tooth and broke it in half (my tooth, not her knee). Auntie Ali got into a load of trouble from Nana for jumping into the pool.

Alex and Jess loved that story so much. I cannot tell you how many times they asked me to retell it. I think they liked the idea of their big, grown-up aunty getting in trouble from her mum (their nana).

Years later, when Alex was about 10 and her friends came over for a swim, I overheard her telling everyone that they were not allowed to jump into the pool. She then went on to relay the story about her Aunty Ali to explain why.

By this stage, I had been running my business storytelling workshops for years and I knew how powerful stories could be to connect with people and to get your message across more effectively in a way that was understood and remembered. So when I heard Alex retelling that story, it totally reinforced in me the true power of stories.

Messages are clearly articulated and understood through stories. Stories are remembered and, crucially, stories can be retold without losing the message.

This is the power of telling a great story. This is story intelligence in action.

So let's look at the science behind why stories are so powerful, specifically what happens in our brains when we hear good stories.

The power of stories

Our brains are complex, with different parts serving unique functions. The left hemisphere organises thoughts and handles logic, while the right hemisphere processes emotions and personal memories. Then, there's the 'reptile brain' driving instinctive actions and the 'mammal brain', which fosters social connections. Layered atop these is the neocortex, which is linked to the intricate

limbic system. This network governs emotional bonds such as the connection between a mother and child.

Daniel Goleman, in his best-selling book *Emotional Intelligence*, explains the immense power of the emotions rooted in our evolved neocortex as:

... the root from which the newer brain grew, the emotional areas are intertwined via myriad connecting circuits to all parts of the neocortex. This gives the emotional centres immense power to influence the functioning of the rest of the brain.

When we tell stories, all areas of the brain (logical, emotional and sensory) are activated, working together to create vivid imagery and deep emotional resonance. A well-told story doesn't just convey information; it makes us feel something, be it excitement, empathy, pride or even sadness. These emotions form bonds between the storyteller and the audience, fostering a connection akin to the bonds formed by our limbic system.

In a 2014 *Harvard Business Review* article, neuro-economist Paul Zak highlights how storytelling stimulates oxytocin, often called the 'trust hormone'. Released during moments of trust or intimacy (such as hugging or even a handshake), oxytocin signals safety and builds trust. Remarkably, storytelling can trigger the same release, building a bond between the audience and the storyteller.

My workshops culminate in participants sharing a personal story related to a work message such as company values or purpose in small groups. Afterwards, I ask a simple question: 'What did you like about that?' Without fail, people comment that they feel a greater connection with each other.

Stories build a bond between the storyteller and their audience, which can fast track forming new relationships, or strengthen already existing relationships.

Paul Zak's research goes further, showing that storytelling doesn't just evoke oxytocin; it also releases cortisol during moments of tension, heightening focus. In one study, participants who watched an emotional story about a father and son produced both cortisol and oxytocin. Those with higher oxytocin levels were more likely to help a stranger afterwards. This demonstrates that stories with emotional highs and lows not only capture attention but also inspire empathy and action.

A good story allows listeners to feel secure, making them more likely to trust and believe the storyteller. Neuroscientist Uri Hasson explains this phenomenon as 'neural entrainment': when the brains of a storyteller and their listeners align.

In one study, listeners' brain activity mirrored the storyteller's, whether the story was in English or Russian. Essentially, hearing a story is like reliving it yourself, creating shared understanding and common ground. That's why when someone shares a story, it's very common, and surprising for some, when someone else gets emotional.

This supports the notion that experience is the best teacher, but a compelling story is a close second.

Our emotions drive decisions

We often strive to influence others through logic. Yet science shows that emotions, not logic, drive our decisions. Research by neuroscientist Antonio Damasio reveals that people with an impaired emotional centre in their brain struggle to make even simple decisions, despite having intact logical reasoning. This is because emotions provide the motivation to act; logic merely rationalises the choice afterwards. As Antonio says: 'We are not thinking machines that feel; rather, we are feeling machines that think'.

I often hear people push back on this concept, insisting that they are logical and never let emotions sway them. I call bullshit on that. Let me give you an example.

My husband, Steve, and I were discussing the potential downsizing of our family home and buying a new house over the next few years. I decided to have a quick look at what was on the market to show him the kind of house I would like, just to ensure we were on the same page when we started looking seriously.

I looked online and found a house that ticked all my boxes. I showed Steve, and he agreed that it ticked all his boxes, too. Then he suggested we go and look at it.

We walked into the house, and within minutes we had made the emotional decision to buy. The master bedroom was huge and it had a walk-in wardrobe and a spectacular ensuite. The study had floor-to-ceiling windows with ample light. The two other bedrooms were on a different floor with their own bathrooms, meaning for the very first time I no longer needed to share a bathroom with my daughters. (If you have ever had to share a bathroom with a teenager, you will no doubt appreciate the significance of this.) Steve was beside himself at the size of the garage in the basement and the close proximity to the golf course. Plus, the house had a rooftop entertainment area and was also brand new so it required significantly less maintenance than our current 120-year-old weatherboard.

We went home and spent a few days working through the pros and cons, as well as our financial situation. But let me tell you, we were coming up with some very logical reasons why we were about to spend significantly more money on a house than we had previously discussed.

Had we gone through the data and concluded that it wasn't a good decision, we would have changed our minds and decided

not to buy. But it would have been a very reluctant choice because, emotionally, we were already invested. We were imagining walking to the golf course and not having to pack clubs and buggies into the car. Steve's ongoing to-do house maintenance list was disappearing before his eyes. We were imagining and getting very excited about this next stage of our lives, and a bathroom all to ourselves.

The reason we were swayed by emotion is not because we are illogical...it is because we are human. If we had gone through our financials and reached the conclusion that it would be irresponsible to buy the house but bought it anyway, that would not have been logical.

WILEY 2025 ©

Anyone in sales or marketing will tell you that people buy on emotion and justify on logic. As Dale Carnegie, the bestselling author of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, aptly stated, 'When dealing with people, let us remember we are not dealing with creatures of logic. We are dealing with creatures of emotion'.

Why stories stick

You probably know a family member who had a story for everything. My dad was a bit like that. In most of his teaching moments, he would tell us a story to help us understand the why and the importance of learning; for example, how to change a car tyre.

So what makes us tell a story over and over again?

Dan and Chip Heath ran an experiment that they shared in their book *Made to Stick*. It's one of my favourite business books so I have read it several times.

What is storytelling and why is it so powerful?

The experiment was conducted with students at Stanford University. Half the students were asked to prepare a one-minute speech that supported the argument that non-violent crime is a serious problem. The other half were asked to present the case against.

On average, students used two-and-a-half statistics in their one-minute speeches, while only one in ten students told a story.

When it came to remembering the presentations 10 minutes later, only 5 per cent of the audience could recall any statistics, while 63 per cent could remember the stories. If my maths serves me correctly, the stories in this experiment were around 13 times more memorable than the statistics.

I experienced this myself when I was in New York for work and took Jess along with me. We did a one-hour tour of the 9/11 Memorial Museum during which we were told lots of interesting statistics and facts. We were also told some stories of individual heroics and tragedy.

Shortly after the tour, Jess asked me if I remembered how long the guide said a particular column was. I had no idea. In fact, I could not recall one statistic, and this was only about 15 minutes after the tour had finished. The stories, however, I will remember forever.

While the facts were interesting at the time, they were not sticky. Stories, on the other hand, are sticky.

Emotion, not logic, cements memories. Whether the emotion comes from a pleasant or unpleasant story, these emotions enhance memory retention a lot better than neutral experiences, such as logical messages (for example stats and figures).

Too often, we focus solely on the importance of the message, assuming it will naturally resonate. However, without an emotional connection, even the most critical information risks

being ignored or forgotten. A compelling story bridges this gap, making messages not only meaningful but memorable. Remember the pool story.

Regardless, if you are leading a change in your organisation, trying to land your dream role in a job interview, pitching to a client, giving a speech, connecting with followers on social media, teaching your students or providing a life lesson to your kids, stories will help you do this. Stories engage our brains on multiple levels, stimulate emotion and enhance memory.

If you want your audience to remember your message, then tell a story. It's how we connect, engage and inspire.

Lessons from Aristotle

In the professional world in particular, we rely heavily on using logic, and logic alone, to persuade. While facts are undeniably important, they *inform rather than influence*. We rely too heavily on spreadsheets, charts, case studies, data analysis, return on investment calculations, and so on. What we need to realise is 'Facts tell. Stories sell'.

So, to get the recipe for success right, we need to look at Aristotle's Model of Persuasion (from 350 BCE), a foundational concept in rhetoric and communication that has stood the test of time. This model, comprising ethos, pathos and logos, offers a comprehensive understanding of how individuals effectively persuade and connect with others. Each element serves a unique purpose in fostering trust and enhancing communication, making this framework particularly relevant in our personal and professional lives today.

Aristotle identified three core elements of influence:

1. *Ethos* (personal credibility)
2. *Pathos* (emotional connection)
3. *Logos* (sound logic).

Ethos (personal credibility)

Ethos refers to the credibility and ethical appeal of the speaker. It embodies the character, reliability and authority of the individual communicating a message. In both personal and professional contexts, establishing ethos is paramount for gaining trust.

For instance, in personal relationships, a friend who has consistently demonstrated honesty and support is likely to be trusted more than someone who has a history of deceit. In professional environments, ethos can manifest through expertise, experience and integrity. For example, a manager who has a proven track record of successful projects and fair treatment of employees is more likely to inspire loyalty and respect from their team. On the contrary, a leader who lacks transparency or has a history of unethical behaviour may struggle to earn the trust of their employees, leading to a toxic workplace culture.

Personal credibility is earned through authenticity, expertise and consistent alignment between words and actions. Without these, even the most logically sound arguments can fall flat.

To cultivate ethos, individuals must consistently align their actions with their words. This requires self-awareness, accountability and a commitment to ethical behaviour. Additionally, sharing personal stories or testimonials can enhance one's credibility, allowing others to see the genuine character behind the words spoken.

Pathos (emotional connection)

Pathos measures how deeply your audience engages with you and your message. It is about understanding and appealing to your audience's values, fears and aspirations.

In personal communication, pathos plays a crucial role in building empathy and understanding. For example, sharing personal struggles or successes can create a bond between friends or family members, fostering a sense of support and solidarity.

In professional contexts, pathos can be a powerful tool for leaders and marketers alike. A compelling story that resonates with employees or customers can inspire action and loyalty. For instance, a company that shares stories of how its products have positively impacted customers' lives can evoke emotional responses that enhance brand loyalty. In contrast, a purely factual presentation that lacks emotional engagement may fail to resonate with the audience, diminishing its impact.

As we have explored, stories are one of the most effective ways to build an emotional connection with your audience, especially stories that involve some level of vulnerability. However, it is essential to strike a balance because overusing emotional appeals can lead to a feeling of manipulation, which may ultimately erode trust.

Whether you're inspiring employees or a friend to embrace change, or convincing clients to choose your services, emotional connection is crucial.

Logos (sound logic)

Logos represents the logical aspect of persuasion, relying on reasoning and evidence to support claims. Using sound logic to persuade people is critical in both personal and professional communication as it provides the rational foundation for arguments and decisions.

However, while logos provides the rational foundation for decision making, it's important to understand its limitations because it is quite ineffective when it comes to persuasion or influence. Raw data and logical arguments, while necessary, rarely drive a significant change or inspire action on their own. They provide the 'what' and 'how' but often fail to address the 'why' that motivates human behaviour.

Logos alone is insufficient to inspire change.

Finding the right balance

Aristotle's model illustrates that trust is built through a combination of credibility (ethos), emotional connection (pathos) and logical reasoning (logos).

In personal relationships, these elements create a holistic approach to communication that fosters understanding and strengthens bonds. When individuals feel they can trust someone's character, relate to their emotions and understand their reasoning, they are more likely to engage openly and honestly.

Think of it like a three-legged stool. Currently, most of the way we communicate resembles a stool with one long leg (logic) and two stunted ones (credibility and emotion).

We are very, *very* good at the logic part. However, true influence emerges when logic, personal credibility and emotional connection work in harmony. So, we need to even up those leg stools. Sharing authentic stories is an extremely effective way to build personal credibility and emotional connection.

All the research shows us that stories help us to not only connect and engage but also to build trust. This has always been critical, and even more so in a world of AI, fake news and declining trust, so let's explore that next.

That's a wrap

- *Stories make meaning stick.* A simple family anecdote about a broken tooth became a memorable way to enforce pool safety, showing how stories embed lessons in a way that facts alone never could.
- *Our brains are wired for stories.* Storytelling activates multiple parts of the brain making it easier for listeners to understand, relate to and retain messages.
- *Emotion drives decision making.* Despite our belief in logic, science shows we make choices emotionally and justify them with logic afterwards. A compelling story taps into this natural process.
- *Stories create connection and trust.* When communicated authentically, stories build emotional bonds through shared experiences, triggering chemicals like oxytocin (trust) and cortisol (focus).
- *Data may inform, but stories influence.* People rarely remember stats but they remember stories. Experiments and personal experience prove stories are more memorable and impactful than pure information.
- *Aristotle's timeless model of ethos (credibility), pathos (emotion) and logos (logic) reminds us that persuasion is a balance of all three.* Stories offer a way to build trust and connection alongside rational arguments.

Why stories are so crucial today

2

Remember the Information Age in the 1990s after the internet burst into our lives? That feeling of information overload pales into insignificance with AI. We not only have more information at our fingertips, we also have to determine whether it's fake or real. Whether it's intended with good intent or manipulation. We have moved from the Information Age to the Trust Age, or perhaps more accurately, the Distrust Age.

Misinformation often feels like it is weaponised, not just to deceive but to divide. And through it all, the very idea of 'what is truth' comes under pressure.

This is why authentic storytelling is so crucial today...because we are in a trust crisis.

The Edelman Trust Barometer has been providing a comprehensive analysis of global trust across key institutions (business, government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and media) for over 25 years. I have been following the annual publication for years and it's interesting to note where we are currently at.

The 2025 report surveyed over 33 000 people from 28 countries and their key findings on the global decline of trust is disturbing.

Some of the key findings showed that the majority of respondents hold grievances against government, business and the rich. Sixty-one per cent globally have a moderate or high sense of grievance, which is defined by a belief that government and business make their lives harder and serve narrow interests, and wealthy people benefit unfairly from the system while regular people struggle.

The report also found that this widespread grievance erodes trust and that those with a high sense of grievance do not trust any of the four institutions (business, government, media and NGOs). Additionally, they do not trust CEOs or AI.

© Here's what's alarming:

- *Global trust has stagnated at 56 per cent globally.* Trust levels vary significantly by country, with China, Indonesia and India reporting the highest levels of trust; and Japan, the UK and Germany reporting the lowest. Trust inequality between high-income and low-income groups has widened, with low-income individuals showing significant distrust toward institutions.
- *Governments are least trusted and this is particularly high in Western democracies.* Countries that underwent elections in 2024, such as the United States, the UK and France, showed little to no improvement in trust levels. Business was the most trusted institution, though there are still concerns about ethical responsibilities.
- *For the first time ever, trust in employers has dropped globally.* The report signalled concerns about job security, automation and corporate ethics, something all leaders should be mindful of when it comes to communication.

- *The role of misinformation and AI is high.* Fear of purposely misleading the people by saying things they know are false or grossly exaggerated has reached an all-time high. In summary, 69 per cent are concerned about government leaders misleading people, 68 per cent are concerned with business leaders and 70 per cent are concerned about journalists and reporters misleading people. I find this extraordinarily high. When you flip the numbers, that means only 30 per cent of people are not concerned about being misled.

The report indicates that institutional failures over the past 25 years have led to a widespread crisis of grievance. This makes it critical for leaders, especially in business, to take active steps to rebuild trust through ethical leadership, transparency and meaningful societal engagement.

The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2025 also backs up these findings. The report highlights a significant decline in trust, particularly concerning AI and the proliferation of disinformation.

Key findings of the report include:

- *Misinformation and disinformation are the top risks for the second consecutive year.* These factors erode societal cohesion and undermine trust in governance, complicating efforts to address shared crises.
- *AI's amplification of false information.* The report emphasises what we already know: the advancements in AI have significantly lowered the barriers to producing and distributing false or misleading content. This technology enables the rapid creation and spread of deepfakes, synthetic voice recordings and fabricated news

stories, making it increasingly challenging to distinguish between genuine and deceptive information.

- *There's an erosion of trust in institutions.* The pervasive spread of AI-generated disinformation undermines public trust in critical institutions, including governments and the media. It highlights that this erosion of trust poses a substantial threat to democratic processes and societal stability.

In short, AI will continue to evolve, deepfakes will become even more convincing and misinformation will persist. The battle for trust will define the coming decades.

© So what does all this mean for us?

WILEY 2025 We cannot rely on polished messaging; perfectly curated, or even AI-generated, images; or corporate-speak. People are looking for real voices, raw honesty and a sense that there are actual humans behind the brand. Even with the popularity of content creators and influencers, people are looking to connect to a real person ... someone they can trust.

In a world flooded with artificially generated content, our very humanness becomes a differentiator. Individuals, professionals, and leaders must learn to show up with greater authenticity. We must share real stories with each other!

Sharing authentic stories is critical to address our key challenges:

- How do we earn trust in a time of widespread distrust?
- How do we stand out when AI can mimic our voice and our face?
- How do we rise above the noise of fake news and constant spin?

You cannot control others sharing misinformation and fake stories, but you can control the stories you choose to share with genuine intent.

In a world of distrust, your audience is highly sceptical, so the stories you share cannot afford to have any elements that ‘just don’t seem believable’. That means, your stories need to be true and cannot be made up by AI alone. AI cannot run the show (more on that soon).

**In an age of distrust, authentic stories are your greatest asset,
maybe even your superpower.**

Technology is not the enemy

With that said, ignoring AI completely would be at your peril... especially when it comes to storytelling.

Sure, if you look at the previous stats, AI is contributing to the decline of trust because it is an unknown force, but it is definitely *not* the enemy. AI is arguably the greatest technical advancement of this century and it is being embraced at breakneck speed!

For example, did you know that within five days of launching in 2022, ChatGPT had one million users? To put that into context, it took Instagram five months to get a million users, Facebook 10 months and Netflix three-and-a-half years.

However, with any new technology and all the benefits it brings, there are always negative consequences. (I mean, before electricity, no-one died from being electrocuted.)

We are at the very early stages of truly understanding the benefits and consequences of AI. So, given what AI is capable of, many

people understandably feel concerned about using it, whether it's 'right', 'wrong' or contributing to trust problems.

While the speed at which AI is infiltrating our lives can feel overwhelming or exciting... or both... we need to do our best to stay current. Many people are concerned they will lose their job to AI. The most likely scenario is that you will lose your job to someone who has embraced AI. Our employers will expect us to embrace this technology soon enough, if they haven't already.

And when used correctly and with integrity, AI is absolutely amazing! On a global scale, it is touted to transform healthcare from finding cures for cancer to providing more accurate and faster diagnoses. On a personal level, AI cannot only save you time and energy but it can also significantly help with your creativity, especially when it comes to generating and refining your stories. (I will prove that to you soon.)

When ChatGPT came along I started to experiment and use it to edit my LinkedIn posts, and to reword emails to make them sound more professional and succinct, or less defensive. I also started to use it for other things, such as idea generation for articles.

Given the nature of my work, I also started to experiment with using AI to generate stories.

I would use AI to suggest stories to me about a specific topic. For example, teamwork or innovation. To my surprise, what AI generated wasn't that bad. In most instances, they were plausible stories and definitely something I could work with. But never something I would just straight out share! So my whole premise for this book is to help you adopt this amazing technology to help increase your storytelling intelligence.

Now, I am by no means an expert on AI... far from it. But I do enjoy keeping up with emerging technology and am a bit obsessed with efficiency (probably because I am inherently impatient).

You don't need to understand how things like AI work to make them work *for* you. (For example, I have no freaking idea how a microwave works, but it has not stopped me from using it for most of my life.)

So, in the next chapter we're going to put this technology to the test. Let's look at the limitations and advantages of using AI to help you with your stories. We'll learn to spot a fake, and make sure you're not creating your own fakes and adding to the mistrust out there.

When you know how to tell a great story, and how to use AI to help, your storytelling intelligence knows no bounds.

That's a wrap

- *We've entered the Distrust Age.* From the optimism of the Information Age, we've now arrived at a time where trust is under siege. Misinformation is weaponised, and the line between truth and manipulation is increasingly blurred.
- *Global trust is in freefall.* The 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer and the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report show alarming trends: trust in institutions, leaders, media and AI is eroding, especially in Western democracies. Trust in employers has dropped for the first time ever.
- *People crave realness, not perfection.* Polished messaging and corporate-speak no longer cut through. In a world of deepfakes and content overload, we are hungry for raw honesty, emotional truth and genuine connection.

- *Authentic storytelling is your trust-building superpower.* In an age of AI-generated content and digital noise, sharing personal, human stories is one of the most powerful ways to stand out, earn trust, connect and inspire others.
- *You can't control misinformation, but you can control your own stories.* People are sceptical, so your stories must be real. They can't feel 'off' or manufactured. True, lived experiences build credibility and that's something AI alone can't fake.
- *AI isn't the enemy ... but it's not the answer either.* Like electricity, AI is powerful but must be used wisely. It can assist with efficiency, creativity and editing but it can't replace your lived experiences or emotional truth.

TURN YOUR LIVED EXPERIENCES INTO YOUR MOST POWERFUL COMMUNICATION TOOL

In a world flooded with AI-generated content, how do you cut through the deluge to truly connect with your audience? While artificial intelligence can create polished presentations and perfect posts, it can't replicate your lived experiences or forge genuine relationships. *Story Intelligence* is your guide to mastering authentic communication in the age of AI.

Inside, bestselling author and communication expert Gabrielle Dolan introduces **story intelligence**: the game-changing ability to use your storytelling to communicate with clarity, connect emotionally and inspire action. Drawing on 20 years of experience in coaching leaders, she reveals how to harness AI as your creative partner while maintaining authenticity, building trust and driving results. Learn how to:

- craft compelling stories for every situation
- reduce the time you spend finding and refining your stories
- master the four essential story types: personal, professional, public and parable
- make your messages more persuasive and interesting
- combine the best of AI with the best of human creativity.

In an era where everyone sounds the same, your authentic stories are your competitive advantage. With *Story Intelligence* your stories will hit harder when and where it matters most.



GABRIELLE DOLAN is an expert in strategic storytelling and communication. She's a keynote speaker, educator and author with a master's degree in management and leadership.

COMMUNICATION

AU \$34.95/NZ \$38.99/US \$21.95/CAN \$30.95

Cover Design: Wiley
Cover Image: © phochi/Shutterstock
Author Photo: Oli Sansom

WILEY



Also available
as an e-book

ISBN 978-1-394-36087-1



9 781394 360871