



Gabrielle Dolan

Business Storytelling

The what, the why, the why now, the who and the how.



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What & Why

What

Business storytelling is sharing personal stories attached to a business message to change mindset or behaviour or to assist in your message being understood and remembered.

Why

The reason it has emerged as a critical leadership competency and communication skill is because accurate execution can significantly increase the impact a leader can have.

There are a variety of communication styles employed by leaders. At the lower end of the scale are the leaders who have incompetent or invisible communication skills and consequently the impact they have is negative or non-existent. The vast majority of leaders use a communication style that focuses on being the informer; ultimately this style has a negligible impact. Leaders who become influencers can have immediate impact on

the people they are communicating to however this style is not long lasting. Occasionally there are leaders who are inspirers and their impact can be both immediate and long-term. The optimum and by far most infrequent communication style is the igniter. These leaders motivate the people around them and encourage other leaders to be inspiring and therefore their impact can be generational.

Communication Style	Likely Impact
<i>Igniter</i>	<i>Generational</i>
<i>Inspirer</i>	<i>Long-term</i>
<i>Influence</i>	<i>Immediate</i>
<i>Informer</i>	<i>Negligible</i>
<i>Invisible</i>	<i>Non-existent</i>
<i>Incompetent</i>	<i>Negative</i>



Why Now

Significant factors are driving a change in the way leaders communicate and manage, with the ability to engage and inspire now being one of the most important skills someone in a position of leadership needs to possess.

Every day leaders need to communicate. They need to talk about everything from organisational strategy and values to messages of change. They have to deliver tough and unpopular decisions and they have to communicate triumphs and successes. To motivate, engage and excite they have to inspire and ignite.

The reality is that this is becoming increasingly difficult, and skills used in the past are fast becoming redundant. Leaders not only need to be aware of this but they must also understand why this is happening—so they can then do something about it.

Two major shifts have occurred that leaders need to comprehend in order to flourish and grow as leaders.





Generation Y

First is the arrival of generation Y into the workforce who will make up the majority of employees by 2020. Many senior leaders I work with tell me that one of their biggest challenges is to manage and lead generation Y.

Over the past few years, comprehensive studies have shown how generation Y is different from previous generations. For example, Deloitte's third annual Millennial Survey, conducted in 2014, polled nearly 7800 members of generation Y from 28 countries. The findings of this survey outline the significant challenges that business leaders face when trying to meet the expectations of generation Y.

Generation Y have a beautiful and healthy disrespect for authority. They are prepared to follow but that will not be based on title or position, it will be based on our ability to inspire and ignite them. They want to be challenged; they want to be inspired and they will not accept the status quo. It's this innate sense of curiosity and their ability to question tradition that has given them the moniker 'generation why'. With so many options available to this generation, if leaders are not providing a workplace that challenges and inspires them, they will seek to work somewhere that does.

Moreover, leaders who think they need to have all the answers because they are in a position of authority will not relate to this generation. Just as leaders who feel they need to be bullet proof and not show any vulnerability and emotion will also not relate. This generation is looking for leaders to be real, not perfect. Perfect leaders are not real and real leaders are not perfect.

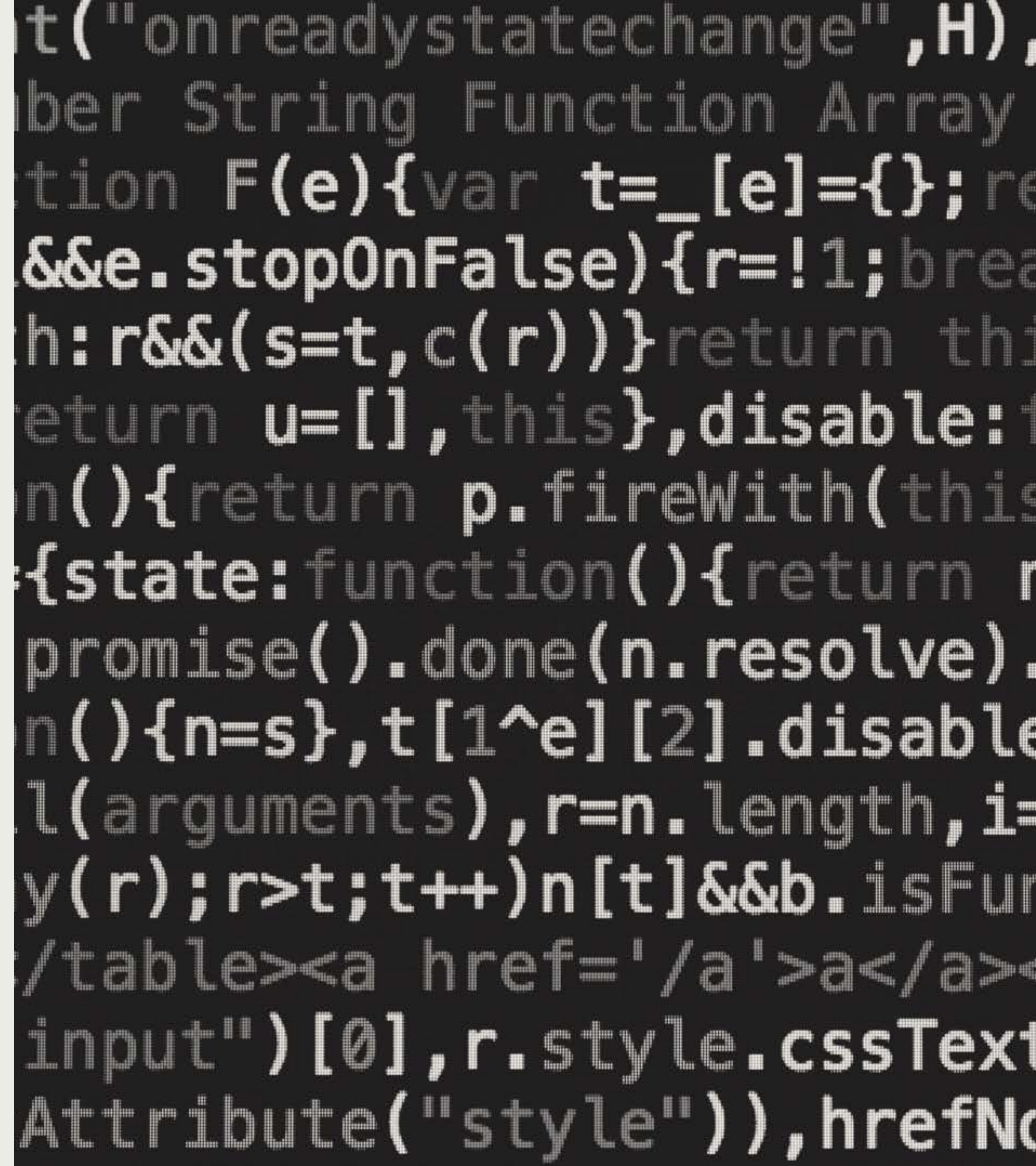


Information Overload

Besides Generation Y demanding leaders to be more real, another shift in the game is the surplus of information. There is nothing new about informational overload but it is not going away and it continues to grow at an exponential rate.

Humans are creating, transferring and storing an incredible amount of information every day. Information Fatigue Syndrome (IFS), or information overload, occurs when we are exposed to so much information that our brains simply have trouble keeping up with everything. When the volume of potentially useful and relevant information available exceeds processing capacity, it becomes a hindrance rather than a help—and this is when we start suffering from IFS.

Today, we are experiencing information overload more than previous generations ever did. We have so much information available that people do not want more information. Rather they are looking for leaders to create meaning and relevance to the material given. In turn, they want leaders to stop with the corporate jargon and communicate in a way that is genuine. In a way they can truly connect with. Consequently, the way we currently lead in this unreal way is not working for them. to flourish and grow as leaders.





Why Storytelling?

Generation Y isn't going away and judging them will not help. We need to understand them, and adjust the way we lead accordingly. In addition, information overload is only going to become worse so we also need to change the way we communicate.

Leaders who have the ability to engage employees and motivate them are needed and sought after more than ever before. Consequently, organisations are looking for leaders that can inspire this generation.

Storytelling is a critical communication skill, as it will help leaders communicate in effective and authentic ways by creating a personal connection that engages and inspires.

Who

Storytelling in Action



Cindy Batchelor is Executive General Manager, NAB Business. She is a long-term client and a woman I admire and respect. Cindy is tall, and extremely fit and healthy. She plays basketball, runs half-marathons and recently completed the Kokoda Trail. She is also strong and forthright in her opinion and is not afraid of showing

emotion. Cindy understands the power of storytelling and, if you ever have the pleasure of hearing her present, you will no doubt hear her tell a story—and a personal story at that.

Here is an example of a story Cindy shares often to deliver the message of how important it is to be positive and to ‘reframe’ any

“Two years ago I lost my husband in a tragic paragliding accident. In our time of dealing with this loss, my youngest son Billy said to me that his greatest fear was, ‘If it could happen to Dad, it could happen to you’. As a parent, this is a tough one to respond to—there are no guarantees in life.

Ten months after John’s accident I was involved in a car accident while driving home from work. I had stopped at the shop on the way home to pick up some groceries and rang my eldest son Jackson when I was about five minutes away to get him to meet me outside to help with the groceries. Two minutes from home I was ‘T-boned’ in my car and instantaneously six airbags deployed. In a sliding doors moment I pulled up just before I ran into a power pole. The car was a total write-off but luckily both the other driver and I walked away a little bruised but okay.

The only thing that was going through my mind at the time was the memory of Billy saying, ‘If it could happen to Dad, it could happen to you’ and thinking that at that moment Jackson was standing outside at home waiting for me — and I was not going to be turning up anytime soon.

A lady walking by and allowed me to use her mobile phone to ring Jackson. He was 500 metres away and he immediately ran across the park in his school uniform and socks to find me. As you can imagine, I was pretty upset and I just said how scared I was of what could have happened. Jackson gave me a hug and calmly said to me, ‘Mum, you can’t think of it like that. You need to think of it like this—you drive a safe car and the airbags worked.’ I just hugged him with pride about his perfect, powerful and positive response.

I am sharing this with you because every day when I am faced with the challenges of running this business, I often ask myself, ‘How would Jackson reframe this?’”

I spoke to Cindy about how and why she used such a personal story. She said, "It was a few weeks after this incident when I needed to address my team about the challenges of delivering outcomes in the face of obstacles and Jackson's words of wisdom came back to me. So I told this story and introduced the notion of 'reframing' as a concept in business. Due to the power of storytelling to get your message across, 'reframing' quickly became the language of positivity in my business. This story has had the most incredible impact on my business and the way I connect with my people. There is a real strength in showing vulnerability as a leader."



How

When introducing storytelling into an organisation it is best done strategically. My 5 top strategies to implement storytelling effectively into your business are:

1. Attach storytelling to a current business issue

Bring in storytelling for a specific purpose, such as to communicate the new strategy or change initiative.

2. Provide business storytelling training

Storytelling in business is a skill. Just like any other skill you expect your employees to undertake, you need to provide the training to do so effectively.

3. Capture stories

Use a structured approach to capture stories from the frontline and find ways to share them.

4. Proactively and strategically share stories

Start to share stories across your already established channels of communication as well as exploring mediums that lend themselves to gathering stories.

5. Generate stories

Ensure your actions and decisions, at an organisational and individual level are generating stories that are positive and congruent with what you are saying.





Success Criteria

Before you introduce storytelling into your organisation you will need to consider if the following is representative of your organisation.

There is commitment to the storytelling approach from the CEO down.

- Your executive leaders are prepared to role model storytelling.
- You have a culture of seeing vulnerability as a strength.
- You have the budget to invest in skilling the appropriate people within your organisation in storytelling.
- You will train leaders in relatively quick succession including the senior leadership team.
- You are willing to build in accountability around storytelling and explore the various applications for storytelling.

Is this for you?

The Clients normally make contact when they are addressing the following challenges. If you are facing any of these challenges, storytelling would be a key solution to consider.

Rolling out new values and you need a better way to bring them to life.

Embarking on a new strategy and this time you know you need to try something different so people actually get it and are engaged in it.

Going through major change and want your people to understand the bigger picture and the potential and opportunity instead of seeing it as another cost cutting exercise and restructure.

You see the need to increase leaders communication abilities. You have technically good leaders but they need to communicate and engage people better.

Your current communication is not working and you are looking for a better way to connect, engage and inspire your people.

The need to drive sales and you want to do that by connecting and engaging with the client more effectively and authentically.

Next Steps

If this sounds like something you want to explore, contact us to discuss tailored in-house workshops and how we can work with you to implement storytelling strategically across your organisation.

Contact us by calling +61 3 8383 2128 or send an email to enquiry@gabrielledolan.com.

To download a checklist on how to introduce storytelling into your organisation and access other free resources go to www.gabrielledolan.com



G a b r i e l l e D o l a n



References

Deloitte, 2014 Millennial Survey <https://www2.deloitte.com/al/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/2014-millennial-survey-positive-impact.html>



About the Author

Gabrielle Dolan can tell you a story or two.

In fact, it was while working in a senior leadership role at National Australia Bank that she realised the power of storytelling in effective business communication. Since that epiphany, Gabrielle has found her calling as a global expert on strategic storytelling and real communication.

A highly sought-after keynote speaker, educator and author, Gabrielle's extensive client list includes Telstra, EY, Accenture, VISA, Australia Post, National Australia Bank, Amazon, Vodafone and the Obama Foundation.

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.

In 2024 she launched the successful podcast *Keeping it Real with Jac and Ral* that

consistently ranks well in the best business podcast charts. Episodes explore different topics such as personal brand, public speaking, energy management, negotiation and other great ways to keep you real.

Gabrielle is also the bestselling author of seven books. Her latest title, *Magnetic Stories: Connect with customers and engage employees with brand storytelling* was published by Wiley in March 2021 and debuted at number two on Australia's best-selling business books.

Bringing humanity to the way business people communicate isn't just a career, it's a calling. Her dedication to the industry was recognised when Gabrielle was awarded the 2020 Communicator of the Year by the International Association of Business Communicators Asia Pacific region. The ultimate expression of her passion for the cause is her Jargon Free Fridays global movement (jargonfreefridays.com).



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Books by Gabrielle

