



Storytelling Wisdom... a few tips

from Norma Cameron

Listening

Stories move in circles. They don't go in straight lines. So it helps if you listen in circles.

Naomi Newman

The first step in training to be good storyteller is to become a good listener. When working on shaping the story you wish to share, ask others to share their healthcare stories, and then listen carefully. This way, you'll be able to better understand how you, as a listener, respond on an emotional and intellectual level to these stories. By tapping into your own experience of listening to stories, you'll learn so much about how to craft your own. What is it that makes others' stories powerful? Perhaps you'll also learn what not to do. All these 'real life' lessons will help you shape and share your own story.

Some people are natural listeners; others have to learn how to listen. Annette Simmons in her book, *The Story Factor*, relays the story of woman in one of her active listening classes who states: "Surely, listening is just like sex – if the desire is there, the skills will naturally follow". So develop the desire, hone your curiosity and you're half way there. Some key tips on listening:

- Listen with authenticity, listen with all your senses
- "Be" in the room
- Don't just wait until someone finishes moving their lips, so you can say share your thoughts and opinions.
- Listen to understand – not to respond.

Listening and Visualization

A little wisdom from Brian Strum

- When deep reading – you know longer “see” the words... many of us paint pictures as we read –this is often how we remember – by recalling the flow of images – not sentences one after the other.
- When deep listening – you know longer “hear” the words... .in a similar way, we’re creating a visual flow... like watching a movie.

A central, unique aspect of storytelling is **its reliance on the audience to develop specific visual imagery and detail to complete and co-create the story.**

So practicing visualization is a key part to exercising your listening skills.

Crafting Your Stories

Structure of a Story: The “Bones”

The Beginning

- The Platform (Landscape – time and place): Once Upon a Time in...
- The Characters: There lived a..... who....

The Middle:

- The Catalyst: But one day...
- The Consequences: Because of that...
- The Climax: Until finally....

The End

- Ever since then...

Visualization and Story Boards

Your Story Scape – The Visual Depiction of Story

Creating a Story Board involves mapping out the key scenes of the story and sketch them on paper in order of the story flow.

When sketching/drawing, try to incorporate:

1. Where does this scene happen: the ‘backdrop’ or landscape?
2. Who’s involved: each of the main characters in this scene?
3. What Happens: the key changes in the storyline that occurs in this scene?

If there are any key words spoken in this scene that stand out for you (and are crucial for the audience to hear/remember) – you can write them down at the bottom of each individual sketch.

Oral Stories vs. Written stories

When stories are written down, they acquire a literacy quality, a careful polish, which is not always the language appropriate for an oral telling – unless it's a recitation or a poem.

Oral storytelling is a unique form of communication with an audience where the structure (bones) of a story will always remain fixed, but the actual words used by the storyteller can be improvised at every telling to reflect the interplay between teller, audience and story.

Much of the life of an oral story comes directly from the person telling it – so it's important that you are **emotionally invested** in your story.

Note: The ancient bards – would have a store of stock images... and they would shift, include, exclude depending upon their audience, how much time they had, how they wanted to frame the underlying messaging, etc. **But the bones were always there and constant.**

LEARNING STORIES

New Scientist article, Feb 16 2008

Let's delve into some science re: Memory

1. 3 parts to memory: *encoding, storing and retrieving.*
2. Key: Efficient forgetting is a crucial part of having a fully functioning memory (like a good pruning system).
3. Stored in neural pathways... so the way in which you originally memorize creates neural pathways and when you recall a memory the same pathways are reactivated.
4. The more important your brain thinks this memory is, the more likely it is to be converted from short-term to long-term... by creating permanent connections on this pathway.

Key Points to enhance your ability to remember:

1. Pay Attention, Be organized (use mnemonics, visual imagery,)
2. Get Emotional – arousal enhances and tell, tell, tell – in retrieving you strengthen these pathways.
3. Engage all Sensory memories – smell, taste, aural, visual, emotional, and tactile. Think about the culture, sounds, food and music that would naturally surround your story, the characters, their landscape, etc.

Storytelling Wisdom gathered by Norma Cameron
e-mail: thenarrativecompany@telus.net

Be careful not to deliver a canned performance. Instead... have a basic outline and let the story unfold according to the feedback from the audience. Avoid a rote or memorized presentation ...or you could lose the story's deep emotional power.

Although I have one exception – it's key for you to **remember the beginning and end** – so I usually memorize those. So often a story that's not well-told fails because of its weak opening and closing.

Getting the beginning right will secure you on your path... and finishing strong and sure is a great way to tie the bow around the complete story.

Suggested steps in Learning Your Story

1. Try to first **understand then remember** the structure “bones” of your story vs. memorizing words.
2. Listen vs. reading (if poss.) until you have the visual imagery (like a movie). Ben Haggerty says, **“Visualization is key to telling stories”**.
3. The more clearly you **see** your story, the more clearly your listeners will see it – although their versions could be vastly different from yours.
4. Remember – we're “telling” not “reading” stories – so don't try to memorize the whole story script.
5. Practice... tell, tell, tell the **“bones” of the story in less than 3 mins**.
6. Always learn the words for the beginning and the end... **strong bookends are crucial**.
7. Go for a walk and tell your story out loud to the trees.
8. Then find people to tell it to... first few times you'll be **“finding your fit”** with the story, new language, scenes or even characters can emerge.
9. There's a belief that after you've told your story to others approximately 8-10 times, the story will have created its basic pathways in your mind/heart and body... so inflections, tone, pacing and physical gestures and movements will begin to appear – **this is you story being “born”**.
10. **Best way to become a good storyteller is to tell stories.**

TELLING STORIES

What is a telling?

1. The teller's role is to prepare and present the necessary language, vocalization, and physicality to effectively and efficiently communicate the images of a story.
2. The listener's role is to actively create the vivid, multi-sensory images, actions, characters, and events---the reality---of the story in their mind based on the performance by the teller, and on their past experiences, beliefs, and understandings.
3. The completed story happens **in the space** between the listener and the teller and is unique and personal for each individual.

Storytelling is, by design, a **co-creative process**.

Storytelling audiences do not passively receive a story from the teller, as a viewer receives and records the content of a television program or motion picture.

Storytelling is a process, a medium for sharing, interpreting, offering the content and meaning of a story to an audience. Storytelling emerges from the interaction and cooperative, coordinated efforts of teller and audience.

Tips on Telling Stories

- Stories from **the heart – not just the head** and mouth.
- Always go to **the place** where the story happens, and tell from there
- **Physicality...** voice, tone, pacing, and overcoming those Public Speaking fears
- MOST IMPORTANT: You need **passion** for what you're sharing.