

What is your story?

Thanksgiving is in a few weeks and many of us will be sharing time with family and possibly with people we do not know well. It is the perfect setting to practice this month's Catalyst topic, storytelling. Storytelling is the basis for interpersonal communications. The goal of a story is to connect with others. In this month's newsletter, I offer ways to improve your storytelling.

Most of us spend 80% of the day in some form of communication. Taking the time to increase your verbal communication skills can greatly increase your effectiveness and influence. The poet and civil rights activist, Maya Angelou said that, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." A good storyteller has that lasting emotional effect. Effective leaders excel at telling a story and conveying their personal brand.

Storytelling without emotional intelligence will come across as hollow and unbelievable. Daniel Goleman says that there are five components to emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. Being a good storyteller requires you to lead with emotion and be humble enough to share from your own experiences. There is no way to tell a good story without sharing something personal. When people trust you, they will trust the story you are telling.

To reap the benefits of storytelling you need to understand the reason for telling the story in the first place. If you are conveying a personal story, some possible goals for sharing might be to share your underlying values, to explain who you are and what you believe, to inspire others by sharing your own growth story or to present yourself as more approachable. If you are speaking to an organization, the goals will be different. Some of those possible goals might be to inspire others to want to learn more, to set a vision, teach

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

1. *What is your story?*
2. *Public Courses*

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a lesson or motivate others. Start with answering where do you want your audience to end up, how do you want to make them feel, what do you want them to learn or do. This is a great application of Stephen Covey's concept of 'begin with the end in mind.'

In Muray Nossel's book, *Powered by Storytelling*, he says that everyone can learn to tell his or her story better and everyone's story will evolve. He also says that the story should stick to answering, "what happened next." A good storyteller will convey the emotions with the sequence of events described without

speaking specifically about feelings. One way to do that is to concentrate on your senses and think about what you heard, saw, tasted, smelled or touched. Remember to keep the details relevant to the context of the situation and do not introduce details that are inconsequential or confusing. The more judgement you put in your story, the more it is up for interpretation by the audience. It is also important to keep the story yours and not interject other people's feelings into story.

If you do not understand your audience, your story will fall flat. The delivery needs to match the situation it is being told in. If you are telling a story in person, consider the setting, the room size, the atmosphere and the number of people who are listening. Deliver the message in an appropriate length of time to the audience's expectation. The new digital and social technologies allow us to connect with people in new ways. You need to understand how your audience communicates and tailor the story to where the audience is most receptive. For example, I chose to send this newsletter via constant contact due to the length of the information I had to share but scheduled it to go out at a time the data showed me people are more likely to read it. Learning how to use today's technology to help you deliver your message and connect with your audience, can give you more options and reach more people.

Whether you realize it or not, stories are being told and retold all the time. Those stories impact the success of your company. Managers need to continually improve their communication skills. One way I suggest you do that is to keep a journal. At work, write down things that are memorable, things that resulted in a change in direction, or things that you are learning. At home, write down why you do your hobbies, what gives you the most fulfillment and what caught you off guard in your relationships. Writing about your experiences can help you learn to describe them better.

My life tells a story and so does yours. Understanding your own brand and being able to communicate it is what differentiates you from others and enhances your ability to lead. As an Executive Coach, I spend time with clients in one-on-one coaching sessions helping them see the threads of the bigger story in their life. Narratives can capture patterns of meaning and motivation. They offer clues about who we are, what we believe and how we'll behave. Since 2001, I have been working with clients to maximize their personal growth.

Harmony helps individuals and organizations navigate change effectively and efficiently through 1:1 coaching, leadership and management skills workshops, and helping leaders add coaching and communication skills, via The Coaching Clinic, to their leadership toolkit. If you're interested in fleshing out your story or improving your management and leadership skills, contact Bill Burtch at Harmony for a consultation at 901-272-7390 or bburtch@harmonycc.net

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Schedule of Public Courses

The following courses are being offered to the public by Harmony Coaching & Consulting. Click on the associated link for more information on the program or to register.

Course Title	Date(s)	Time	For More Information/Registration
The Coaching Clinic	TBD Spring 2020	8:30 am – 5:00 pm	

