



People Make The Difference whitepaper

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Are you leading by snorey or by story?

Anyone employed in the corporate world is likely to have snored their way through a 'death by Powerpoint' leadership presentation at some point in their career. Conversely, you may have also experienced leadership presentations that connect, engage, motivate change, and have you walking from the room inspired.

This is not because some leaders are more naturally talented at presenting than others. Rather, great leaders employ the art of storytelling.

Storytelling is not the domain of children's books. Stories connect us. Studies show people make decisions largely based on emotional reasons, and then rationalise them afterwards so they feel logical. Stories appeal to the emotional side of the brain that drives connection. Making a connection allows people to engage more easily; using a story is far more compelling than rattling off the corporate vision and mission.

It is so powerful, global corporations invest heavily in leadership storytelling. Kimberly-Clark, for example, provides two-day seminars to teach its 13-step program for crafting stories and using them to give presentations. 3M banned bullet points and replaced them with a process of writing "strategic narratives." Procter & Gamble has hired Hollywood movie directors to teach its senior executives how to lead better with storytelling.

When to use storytelling

If you're setting a five-year plan, you need a strategist. But if you want your 10,000 people team to engage and unite behind that five-year plan and deliver on it? Then you need a compelling story.

If you are poised to buy your largest competitor, you need a CFO to guide you. But once purchased, and you want the 2000 people who work there to stay – then you need a good story to persuade them to stick around.

Storytelling is for inspiring, setting a vision, teaching important lessons, defining culture and values, and explaining who you are and what you believe.

But it's also good for delicate issues like managing diversity and inclusion, or giving people coaching and feedback in a way that will be received as a gift. It can help bring out people's creativity, or to rekindle passion for their work.

Your team will always remember the story of Janet - who followed the rules, received a pay-rise and it helped fund her safari in Africa - over your directive to read the new company rulebook.

The only barrier to telling stories as a leader is not having any stories to tell. So start collecting your own. When something teachable and memorable happens to you, write it down.

Some guidelines for great storytelling:

- Begin with the context of the story
- Use metaphors and analogies
- Appeal to emotion
- Make your story tangible and concrete, avoid management speak and vague generalities
- Include a surprise as they make your story more memorable. Studies show surprise triggers the release of adrenaline in the brain that heightens memory formation
- Be concise and to the point – it may be a story, but it's still a story in a business context

My own story: after I was coached on storytelling I changed from a 30 slide Powerpoint to two or three. I changed my narrative from bullet points and the company 'spiel' to stories and experiences.

The reaction from people was immediate. After I had finished, they wanted to come up and tell me about their shared experiences; weeks later they returned to tell me how they had used storytelling in their own teams that had resulted in greater empathy and motivation.

Importantly, stories that get retold become a part of an organisation's culture and heritage—and they can come from the CEO or a new hire, or anyone in between.

People will tell stories about you and your company whether you want them to or not. Fortunately, you can help choose which ones they tell. It starts by telling them a great story first.

Want to change your style to lead by story not snorey? Have a story-telling experience in leadership you'd like to share? Comment or contact People Make The Difference via our website or on 0412 333 415.