



STORY SELLING

by Will Marré

When I was a young father, I made up bedtime stories that transformed my children into adventure heroes who saved the world nightly from evil villains. Now my children are grown up. But when we unite at holidays, it amazes me how they want me to tell similar stories to their children.

In life or at work, stories have a magical way of connecting people and strengthening trust.

The appeal of a good story is universal. Storytelling creates instant bonds. It reveals the values of the storyteller and affirms the unique importance of the listener. This builds mutual trust.

Trust is treasured because it is fragile. It takes major investments in time, consistency and competence to build trust, but trust can be shattered by one bad experience in mere moments. We have all been assaulted by smiling faces fresh from sales training, who use “listening,” “affirming” and “solving” skills with the sincerity of an undertaker. When communication becomes manipulation, our guard goes up and our trust goes down.

So what do we want? Simple. We want confirmation that we are intrinsically important. And whether it’s in life or in business, sharing stories has an uncanny way of doing just that.

We human beings make sense of our worlds through narratives. The most powerful ones are those in which people overcome challenge and achieve the extraordinary through courage and creativity. Stories are the most potent force of human persuasion because they fully engage the mind of the listener. They quiet the listener’s inner critic and

give him or her something to comprehend rather than object to. Stories defuse skepticism and invite belief in new possibilities.

Great stories always have a moment of truth when challenge is confronted and then overcome. Whether it’s hero stories like Captain Sullenberger landing on the Hudson River, or love stories like my father’s sudden and impetuous pursuit of my elusive mother leading to a wonderful 50-year relationship, engaging stories create new possibilities because we see ourselves in the stories we listen to.

These stories are most powerful when both practical and emotional factors are blended in a narrative that builds confidence, commitment and connection.

Seeing ourselves in another’s story

Recently I was trying to help a client get emotionally connected to his 13-year-old daughter. He felt hopeless. His work demands were relentless and his scheduled “dates” with her seemed awkward and artificial. Instead of giving him direct advice, I simply told him a story of a friend, who years ago decided to drive his young teenager to school twice a week. The drive took 25 minutes, but he said it

was the best time the father and daughter ever spent together during that phase of her life.

My client lit up with new possibilities of finding more natural ways to connect. He literally said, “I think I could do that.” The telling of this true story of my friend broke through my client’s hopelessness almost instantly.

Becoming a “storyseller” opens doors to helping others like nothing else. We can become the hero in a story because we have unique knowledge that saves the day. By telling stories of similar situations in which our proposed solution was ideal, we open closed minds. We entertain possibilities. Our sales stories need to be authentic accounts recounted in visual detail of how customers who faced similar challenges were helped.

When your customers or members can see themselves in the story, they are much more willing to engage with us in creating a new story in which they live happily ever after. In this way, the basis of the customer relationship changes from *What can you do for me?* to *What might we do together?* And when we become heroes in one another’s story, a bond gets forged that makes the relationship intrinsically and mutually rewarding.



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Marré received an Emmy Award® for his writing of the documentary, Reclaiming Your American Dream, aired on public television stations across the country.

Will’s new book, Save the World and Still Be Home for Dinner: How to Create a Future of Sustainable Abundance for All, was released in September 2009 by Capital Books.

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