

# Be Unforgettable

## How to Write Inspiring, Message-Driven Stories

Tips 1 through 10

Everyone is a storyteller. You are a storyteller. You tell personal and professional stories every day. You tell them to friends, colleagues, family members, and even to strangers you meet while waiting in line at the grocery store.

Whether you direct an international association, manage a government program, run a small business, or serve as the CEO of a Fortune 500 company, consider every written, verbal, and social media communication as a **business story**. Think of it as your association story; your government story; or your corporate story.

Storytelling is the oldest, most effective form of communication. That is why stories are in everything we do and say as professionals. Examples include your elevator speech (your answer to "What Do You Do?"), presentations, proposals, emails, website, success stories, testimonials, and social media content.

By reaching your audience's heart and mind, you access the part of them that wants to believe in what you have to offer. We need to motivate and work with our colleagues, partners, and staff to achieve our goals. The greatest bonding and trust-building tools we have are stories. Business stories are designed to:

- Inspire action, change, or new ways of thinking
- Bridge gaps (e.g., culture, generation, gender, and understanding)
- Build a shared vision of a better future

*Every word has a story...one word can tell an epoch of history, define the attitude of an era, or reflect an ancestral sense of humor.*

— Eugene Finerman, *The Toastmasters*, 5/23/2003

Great stories are easy to tell and easy to remember. Great stories are easy to share and retell. Great stories travel™.

Here are 10 tips to help you leverage your innate skills as a storyteller and turn you into a more compelling communicator—a business storyteller.

## **1. Have a Clear Beginning, Middle, and End**

Follow a story structure. While there is no absolutely right way to tell a story, personal stories are frequently shared more for entertainment and enjoyment than for a specific business objective. For this reason, look at business stories a little differently. One of the most important differences is the need to use structure. People want to know your story is going “somewhere” and will make a point. We suggest using the classic storytelling convention of beginning, middle, and end.

## **2. Grab their Attention in the First Sentence**

Start strong. Your first sentence must grab your reader’s attention. Examples include an anecdote, joke, personal story, statistic, fact, quotation, question, or phrase (e.g., *once upon a time* or *imagine if*).

## **3. Tell Your Story with a Specific Message in Mind**

Ensure that your story has one clear message. As stated in Tip #1, your business story must have a clear point. Now, imagine you just finished telling your story. What do you want your reader to learn, do differently, or think about? A helpful way to develop a targeted message is to put it in a category. Examples include: process, communication, customer service, safety, leadership, strategy, teamwork, innovation, and quality assurance. Some famous examples include Nike’s “Just Do It,” Disney’s “Happiest Place on Earth,” and Evian’s “Stay Young.”

## **4. Create a “Shared” Experience**

Make your story pass the “so what” test. Invite your audience into your experience by sharing the WIIFM—What’s In It For Me. Well-told stories create a shared experience. This enables them to understand your message on a personal level. Your words should crystallize common values and experiences. Be sure to answer the audience’s question of “Why is this important to me?”

## **5. Ensure it is Your Story**

Be authentic. Audiences are perceptive. If you are borrowing even a little bit from your imagination, the reader will know and your story will likely lose credibility. Be 100% confident in every aspect of your story. Share your passion, let your hair down, and allow your audience a peek into your personal experiences. Allow them to appreciate fully your business message through your story.

## **6. Identify What is at Stake**

Share with your audience your challenge or conflict. Share the obstacle you needed to overcome or a conflict you needed to resolve. The bigger the challenge or the more elusive the resolution, the more compelling the story. The stake needs to be easy to understand and relevant (see Tip #4). One challenge might be senior management moving a deadline up by six months. Another might be the need to collaborate with colleagues from a newly acquired international company by overcoming separations of distance, language, and culture.

## 7. Include a Clear Call-to-Action

Identify what action you want your audience to take. Make your call-to-action specific and obvious. Examples include: develop a plan, embrace a process, and enroll more members. A specific call-to-action spurs activity and helps get your business message adopted and implemented.

## 8. Tell Your Story to the 10th Grader in Us

Write simply. To reach you, articles in most mainstream publications are written between the 6th and 10th grade levels. Why? Because they are trying to cut through the clutter of message bombardment. Just like the media, you need to effectively engage your audiences by keeping your stories simple. Simply written stories are conversational and easy for others to understand and in turn, retell. To help you write your messages, look to Microsoft® Word. It comes bundled with two easy-to-use tools: The Flesch Reading Ease and The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level tests (see *Write for Readability* Tip Guide 06-015 to set up these tools).

## 9. “Texture” Your Words

Use a variety of language styles. Imagine you were in an audience listening to some of our greatest contemporary storytellers.

They use a variety of written and spoken techniques and styles such as metaphors, alliteration, repetition, analogies, and historical reference.

Be deliberate in your word choices. Be deliberate in using character dialogue. Be deliberate with your non-verbal communication to complement your message. Be deliberate with your rhetorical devices (by way of example, starting several consecutive sentences with the same words or phrases is a figure of speech called *anaphora*). Since a picture is worth a thousand words, use a variety of word texturing to bring your story to life.

## 10. Finish Thoughtfully

End your story inspirationally. Because you are telling a business story, it must have a clear message (see Tip #3). Remind your audience of this message and end with a recap of your call to action (see Tip #7).

This is your last chance to leave your audience members with something to think about—with a specific “something” you want them to think about. Suggestions include repeating a sentence already stated in your story, sharing an insightful quote complementing your message, and reviewing powerful statistics underscoring your message.

## Add these Tip Guides to Your Library

We have over 30 tip guides available. Topic areas span a variety of areas such as marketing, storytelling, communications, language, presenting, and social media. Contact us for a complete list with descriptions.

Title	Number	Cost
<i>Unforgettable Written Stories: How to Write Inspiring, Message-Driven Stories, Tips 11 through 20</i>	05-002	\$3.97
<i>Unforgettable Spoken Stories: How to Present Inspiring, Message-Driven Stories, Tips 1 through 10</i>	05-010	\$3.97
<i>Write for Readability: Reach People by Keeping Your Messages Simple</i>	06-015	\$1.97
<i>Powerful Messages: How to Use Metaphors and Analogies to Inspire Action</i>	06-020	\$2.97
<i>It's Who Knows You: Transform a "Vanilla" LinkedIn Profile into a "Contact Me Now" Profile, Tips 1 through 10</i>	10-001	\$3.97

## About The Chief Storyteller®

We make your communications unforgettable. We help you develop compelling messages to your target audiences. Expand brand awareness, improve business outcomes, and strengthen financial results with better spoken, written, and online communications.

Examples include your elevator speech, website, proposals, presentations and webinars, service descriptions, and LinkedIn profile. Our team can also assist with editorial calendars and developing content for your social media (e.g., blogs, newsletters, articles, Tweets, Facebook, and video).

Services include:

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- Customized consulting
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