



BATES EXPI™ TOOLS

STORYTELLING FOR LEADERS



About Storytelling

Storytelling is one of the most powerful—and underrated—tools available to leaders. Over the years we've worked with many hundreds of leaders on storytelling through coaching and programs, and it's fair to say that a very tiny percentage of them initially thought of themselves as natural storytellers.

As our Vice President Craig Bentley says, though, "If you're breathing, you have stories." At least once a week, we can guarantee that something happens in your life that can be turned into a story.

There is also a treasure trove of stories that you can tap from earlier in your life. As the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke once said, "And even if you found yourself in some prison, whose walls let in none of the world's sounds—wouldn't you still have your childhood, that jewel beyond price, that treasure house of memories? Turn your attention to it."

Whether the story happened earlier today or decades ago, there is a proven formula for turning the "raw ore" of a story into a polished gem that fits perfectly in the right setting. That's our goal with storytelling—being able to take an experience that may or may not be from your professional life and showing how it has a lesson and theme that resonates beautifully with a challenge or opportunity faced by your team today.

Storytelling is a muscle, and for many of us it's a flabby one because we have failed to exercise it regularly. With time and consistent effort, you can tone this muscle and add real strength to your ability to influence in a variety of situations. The keys to unlocking great stories follow in this short handout.



How Storytelling Can Help with Executive Presence

When you tell stories consistently and effectively, it will help you improve how several facets of executive presence are perceived by your stakeholders:

Authenticity – Leaders sometimes underestimate how much people really yearn to know who they are and what they stand for. When you openly share life lessons and personal experiences to reveal your genuine identity as a person, you greatly increase the likelihood that others will connect with you individually and understand where you're coming from.

Concern – Your stakeholders are far more likely to go above and beyond for you if they believe that you truly care about them and their development, personally and professionally. When you tell a story about the accomplishments of someone on your team, it has a double benefit: You're showing your genuine concern for that individual but also reminding everyone of the values and behaviors that you want everyone to develop across your organization.

Humility – As you'll see on the subsequent pages, we believe that it's crucial for your story to cast you as a learner rather than as a hero or heroine. In fact, some of the most powerful stories we've heard over the years are when leaders recall awkward moments, dumb ideas, and failures. But even if you're talking about an achievement, the moral of the story should be what you learned—not how great you are. People will connect with you much more if they see you as someone who recognizes that learning is a never-ending journey.

Resonance – Another key to being a good storyteller is not just sharing a powerful story but also connecting it to a lesson and theme that are urgent and relevant for the audience who is hearing it. Whether it's a story about managing change, customer focus, or any other business imperative, we often find that stories are far more effective in resonating with people emotionally than abstract concepts or plain statements.

Storytelling also may lift perceptions with specific items in other facets:

Practical Wisdom – “When he/she speaks, people listen.”

Vision – “Paints a compelling picture of what could be.”

Composure – “In critical moments seems to be at his/her best.”

Intentionality – “Takes time to explain his/her rationale or the principles underlying his/her decisions.”



Storytelling for Business Leaders

1. What happens to presenters when they tell stories?

- **They become animated:** Their eyes light up; they get excited.
- **They inject *themselves*** into their presentation.
- **They capitalize on the audience interest** that they generate.

2. Why tell a story in a business presentation?

- In the digital age, we **create a reason for people to keep listening.**
- We can **engage our audience** by taking them on a journey.
- We can **speak more conversationally.**
- We **respect the wisdom of the audience** by making them wonder where their story is going to go.
- **People remember your points** when they're linked to memorable stories.
- When we only speak from slides that are riddled with bullets, we go against a long history in civilization about how **stories engage our interest, answer our deepest questions, and satisfy our intellectual curiosity.**

3. Whether in books, movies, and plays, what do all good stories have in common?

- They have a **central conflict, problem, or challenge** that moves forward and intensifies, making us intrigued with the narrative.
- They have a **protagonist who interests us...** but only if the protagonist is humanized through some insight into his or her emotions, thoughts, and actions as they struggle through the challenge.
- There is always at least one critical scene—a **“moment of truth”** where we zoom in for the extreme close-up that is particularly gripping.
- We ultimately reach a **satisfying resolution** to the conflict, problem, or challenge.



How Stories Convey What Matters Most

Storytelling is a critical skill in communicative leadership. Stories not only entertain and inform, they convey meaning that informs our work and invite connection to organizational culture and values. A story well told drives organizational performance. How?

- **They highlight behaviors and values:** Stories with leadership lessons are one of the most effective ways to clarify values and behaviors that enable people to see the why of what they do and make choices that create positive outcomes. A well told story highlights lessons about values like integrity, honesty, courage and perseverance.
- **They motivate and inspire performance:** When people hear a story they envision themselves in similar situations, stimulating their imagination and stirring their emotions. Winning hearts and minds is critical to getting buy-in, as well as encouraging people to believe in themselves, overcome challenges, and go the distance. When people feel emotions like pride, joy, courage, and confidence, they are more likely to take positive action.
- **They demonstrate resonance and connection:** Stories demonstrate you are a human being just like all of us, and the leader's lesson should highlight the fact that, like all of us, you're on the path to growing and becoming the leader you want to be. And, if you share stories about your team with lessons and themes you demonstrate how in touch you are with their worlds.
- **They ignite purpose and passion:** People long to feel a mission and purpose in their work and their lives. A great story can ignite in others a sense of meaning and belonging, enabling them to bring their best toward a worthy goal. You give people reason for taking on challenges and connect them to a cause greater than themselves, while infusing in them a belief that what they are doing matters.

Continued on the Next Page



Over time, your collection of stories starts to create a *narrative* about your organization, resolving conflicts that may arise around mission and purpose:

- **Who** are we as an organization?
- **How** do we behave as an organization?
- **What** are our cultural norms, behaviors and values?
- **Why** do we do things the way we do them?
- **What** will our legacy be?

Developing personal stories also helps you explore *who you are* as a leader. As you work toward storytelling mastery, you will:

- **Get in touch with the experiences that shaped you:** Telling stories about your challenges, turning points, and discoveries builds self-awareness and self-assurance.
- **Help people connect with you as a human being:** When others hear your stories, they understand who you are and what you're all about.
- **Grow more confident as a leader:** When you connect with your audience, people light up and it enables you to see the impact you can have.
- **Turn the raw ore of experience into polished gems:** As you incorporate storytelling into your leadership style, you'll learn to easily translate experiences into lessons you can share.

"We are in the twilight of a society based on data. As information and intelligence becomes the domain of computers, society will place new value on the one human ability that cannot be automated: emotion. Imagination, myth, ritual—the language of emotion—will affect everything from our purchasing decisions to how well we work with others. Companies will thrive on the basis of their stories and myths. Companies will need to understand that their products are less important than their stories."

—Rolf Jensen, Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies



Questions Help You Develop Stories

These are prompting questions designed to help you develop a story. Get a partner to ask you these questions, or use these questions to prompt your memory. Be sure to “write out loud”—use a recorder to capture your ideas before you start writing. Keep going until you hit on a significant moment, realization, conversation, or outcome. Don’t leap to conclusions too soon about what the story is about. Allow the details of the story to tell you why it was important, and what the lesson is:

Set the scene: Who, what, when, and where?

Who are the key characters?

What happened first?

What happened after that? And after that?

What else?

Why was that significant?

Who said what to whom? Use exact words (or come as close as you can)

Why was it significant?

What was the painful, difficult, or challenging part of this?

What was the significant moment?

Why do you recall it now? Why was this a pivotal moment for you?

What did you learn? What is the point of your story?

How does this apply to others? Why does the lesson matter to your specific audience?



Key Points: Bates Story Structure

<p>The Setup</p>	<p>Who, what, when, where, how</p>
<p>The Buildup</p>	<p>Obstacle, conflict, challenge, difficult decision, choice, impossible odds</p>
<p>The Scene</p>	<p>Action, conversation, key moment</p>
<p>The Resolution</p>	<p>Outcome, revelation, epiphany</p>

Continued on Next page



The Lesson

This often starts with: What I saw..., What I learned...,
What became clear... What that taught me...

The
Audience
Theme

Audience application, analogy or comparison to today,
interpretation for future—as it relates to *this* specific
audience.



Key Points: Tips on Writing Great Stories

As you continue to work on your stories, here are some tips that will help you to maximize their impact:

- **Think of your story as one snapshot in time.**
 - Be sure to get beyond describing what you *usually, sometimes, or always* did; drill into the specifics of a given day, interaction, or sequence of events.
- **To be appropriate for a business presentation, the story must have significance beyond the event.**
 - Without that significance, you might have a good cocktail party story... but not one that you would want to use in a speech or presentation.
- **Pull us into your story by concisely describing the who, what, when, and where**
 - Establish these elements efficiently and then move on.
- **Include specific details, but only those that are relevant to the point.**
 - Emotions, thoughts, dialogue, and setting details are all great... but be selective about what is “need to know” versus “nice to know.”
- **Once you get to the scene, expand that critical moment with action, dialogue, gestures, and facial expressions.**
 - Think of yourself as a film director: This is where you want to zoom in for that extreme close-up.
 - Look for opportunities to help your audience create a mental picture of your scene by using gestures, body language, and verbatim dialogue.
- **Look for the point or lesson “inside” of the story.**
 - Don’t force a theme onto a story. If you drill into the details of the scene and the resolution, trust that the theme will emerge.

(Continued on the next page)



- **Make sure that the audience theme is relevant to your specific audience.**
 - You might need to change your audience theme if you use the same story repeatedly with different audiences; the theme should always be a bridge between your experience and *that* audience's needs and interests.



Performance Stories

A performance story highlights a current, recent, or even past business experience, and it usually involves how a team or individual performed. Typically that team or individual overcame a challenge, and the lesson is in how they did it. You may have been on the team, leading the team, or you may have been a witness to what happened. The purpose in telling the story is to highlight the lessons and values that inform others.

How to find and write a good performance story:

- Contemplate a **present** business challenge or opportunity or value that you want to celebrate or drive.
- Ask yourself, “What is this *like*?” In other words, **how have you seen this challenge or opportunity** been addressed successfully, either recently in your organization or in the past? Where you have the value that you want to celebrate or drive, in action?
- While the two events may initially feel like apples and oranges, it’s likely you’ll find similarities or analogies. **You don’t need an exact match**—just similarities that make the point.
- Focus on the **theme** of the current business challenge that connects to an important behavior or value you want to highlight.
- If you’re stuck for an idea, think of situations like this:
 - A challenging project that succeeded in spite of the odds
 - An unexpected change that threatened the outcome of a project
 - An individual or team that performed above and beyond without time/resources
 - An innovative idea that came out of people’s creativity or resourcefulness



Performance Story Kit

You may find it helpful to keep in mind the values of your organization as you think about the meaning behind your performance story.

- **Value/Behavior #1:**

Ideas:

- **Value/Behavior #2:**

Ideas:

- **Value/Behavior #3:**

Ideas:

- **Value/Behavior #4:**

Ideas:

