

Maximizing the Power of Story

Everyone whose success depends on the ability to influence can benefit from learning how to use the power of story effectively. Whether you are telling the story of your business or illustrating a point, stories are an effective way to engage and relate to your listeners. A well-told story gets attention and drives home points in a way nothing else can. Stories create a visual image and connect emotionally in a way that grabs attention and gets remembered. When you tell a story effectively, your listeners will remember it long after they remember anything else that you may have said.

Effective stories don't just happen. They all share certain characteristics that you can learn as well. Below you will find five keys to telling powerful stories that you can start with to increase your ability to influence. Apply them each time you tell a story for maximum impact.

1. **Make it personal** – The best stories come from your personal experiences. First, because you are emotionally connected to your experience, you will naturally convey more emotion when retelling it. This will enable you to connect better with your listeners. Second, your preparation time with a personal story is much shorter because you already know what happened and don't have to try to commit it to memory. You have experiences every day that can be turned into engaging, purposeful stories. It is just a matter of creating a list so you have them when you need them.
2. **Keep it genuine** – If you aren't telling the truth, listeners will know and you'll lose credibility. In addition, there is a natural passion and ease that comes from recounting an experience that connects you with your listeners in a way exaggeration or fabrication can't.
3. **Co-create a mental picture** – Allow your listeners to experience the story with you. Create a mental picture that puts them right in the middle of it feeling what you felt and experiencing what you experienced. For example, "The flaky pie crust made a slight crunching sound as my fork cut through it allowing the smell of warm cherries to escape. As I took my first bite, each smooth, plump cherry exploded with intense sweet flavor. I smiled as I enjoyed the reward I had given myself for achieving my goal." The best mental picture engages all 5 senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.

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4. **Use variety in tone and movement** – Vary the tone, pitch, speed and volume of your voice to engage your listeners. Research shows that using gestures that help your listeners “see” your experience also helps them remember it. Keep in mind, variety of both tone and movement grab attention and add energy to your story.
 5. **Tie your story down** – A tie down is a tool for reiterating a point and is critical when telling stories. Make sure you clearly tell your listeners the point of the story. Too often we mistakenly think the point is so clear no one will miss it. That simply isn’t the case. Many people tell a great story and then lose the impact in the end because they didn’t tie it down. You are telling the story for a reason. Make sure that reason is crystal clear to each listener. For example, “Just as I used that pie as a reward for achieving my personal goal, we all need to come up with ways to celebrate our successes, even the small ones.”

Story is an invaluable tool for anyone whose personal or professional success depends on the ability to influence. Adhering to these 5 keys is a great start to adding story as a tool for your success.

If you’d like additional keys to telling impactful stories for greater influence and an opportunity for practice and feedback, join us for one of our Maximum Influence sessions.

Contact Dr. Heather Johnson at heather@klassenperformancegroup.com for more information on the course and how to register.