

Not Quite Random Thoughts About Storytelling

This is a list of things I wanted to be certain I wouldn't forget as I walked on the treadmill and thought about the Art & Science of Storytelling. They aren't polished, complete or necessarily in order. They are, however, significant.

1. **Decide that it is part of your job as a speaker to collect stories.** The first rule of speaking should be listening! Material of all kinds is everywhere! Stories are no different. First you find the stories, later you can determine if they're usable. Don't forget to take a trip down memory lane. You may already have some great stories that you've been overlooking.
2. **Decide how you'll track of your stories.** Finding a story is not the same thing as remembering a story. Take notes and then figure out how you'll keep your notes. Look for an NSA tape by Jeanne Robertson about Jeanne's Journal. Put a section in your Franklin Planner. Set up a computer database. Don't rely on your memory. Have a system that fits your work style. (Ask me about my "slide carousel" system.)
3. **Learn how to decide which stories are worth keeping.** The only way I know how to see if a story works is to tell it - to as many people as possible, as often as possible. Notice I said people, not audiences. Before I tell a story to an audience I've tried it out at parties, in lines at the bank and over dinner. Using the reactions from normal conversations, I can usually gauge their effectiveness from the platform.
4. **Not all stories are born great!** The art of storytelling comes in the crafting of the tale. To become a better story crafter try these assignments: read good fiction, listen to Garrison Keillor, recite poetry out loud, catch quotes, write down interesting word combinations. As you tell your stories, instruct part of your brain to monitor the reactions to the different elements in your story. What makes people laugh, what makes them cry what makes them engage?
5. **Stories are works in progress.** I've been telling some of my stories for over 10 years. They change over time. Some are longer, some are shorter. Most have lines given to me by my audiences. Many have lines that can only be described as divine inspiration.
6. **Every point in your presentation deserves a story.** People don't remember facts and figures very well. They do remember stories. Take one of your presentations and try the following exercise. In *very short* sentences list your key points. Now, identify a story that would make the point without having to say, "and the point is...". Can you do it? If you can, can you find more than one story for each point? Remember we speak to different types of audiences. If you can't, start looking. You won't use them all, but you need to have them ready to go.
7. **Some stories deserve props.** The art of storytelling teaches you to put people *into* the story. The science of storytelling suggests that a well chosen prop can help you do that. I use an overhead of a picture of my son because the story wouldn't make sense if the audience couldn't see him, but I hold up the actual picture and gaze at it with love and amazement so they will be me for a little while.
8. **Practice storytelling with children.** I don't think there is any better way to become an uninhibited storyteller than to say "Once upon a time..." to children on a regular basis. When you have the opportunity, don't read the story, perform it! Try playing the characters. Make your gestures fit the action. Vary your voice tone, levels, and accents. Ask the kids how you did.
9. **Study both the Art and the Science.** Here are some resources. Read *Corporate Legends & Lore: The power of storytelling as a management tool* by Peg. C. Neuhauser. Search for a copy of *Managing By Storying Around* by David Armstrong. Listen to any NSA tape by Lou Heckler or Grady Jim Robinson.

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