

# A Star Storied Career

Star Storied Careers:  
40+ Story Practitioners  
Talk about Applied  
Storytelling

**Compiled by Katharine Hansen, PhD**

A publication of Quintessential Careers Press

# **Storied Careers: 40+ Story Practitioners Talk About Applied Storytelling**

**A Quintessential Careers Press publication**

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By Katharine Hansen, PhD

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## Introduction

Imagine an international conversation about many applications of storytelling. That's what this book aspires to.

"Applied storytelling" covers a wide range of disciplines, such as organizational storytelling, storytelling for marketing and branding, storytelling for job search and career advancement personal storytelling/lifewriting/memoir writing, digital/video storytelling, and more. Representatives of those storytelling genres and more speak their minds in this book.

The book is an outgrowth of the series of Q&A interviews I've conducted with story practitioners since Sept. 2, 2008, on my blog, A Storied Career. In turn, that series of Q&As was inspired by a long-running and popular series of Q&As with career professionals on the parent site of A Storied Career, Quintessential Careers.

The book encompasses 43 practitioners from the United States, the UK, Canada, Denmark, Australia, Sweden, and France.

I love the play of words of this book's title: *Storied Careers*. Because I have a Google alert set up for the phrase "storied career," I see almost daily articles that use the phrase "a storied career" to describe the professional sagas of people in the news. Thus, I view the 43 practitioners in this book as having had "storied careers" because they are all noteworthy professionals. But unlike all the folks in my Google alerts described as having had "storied careers," the practitioners in this book have had careers that have focused to varying extents on story and storytelling – so they are *truly* storied careers.

In the book, you'll find 20 chapters that spin off the questions and topical areas of the Q&As in which these practitioners participated.

In the back of the book (page 81), you'll find a complete directory of all 43 practitioners, with mini-bios, Web and blog addresses, e-mail addresses, Twitter IDs, and photos. Note that I arranged the directory in *reverse* alphabetical order; I grew up with a last name toward the end of the alphabet, and I know how demoralizing it can be to always be near the bottom of a list. I knew I had made the right decision when contributor Mike Wittenstein told me this was the first time in his life he'd ever been first on a list.

**A note about the cover:** Designer Melanie Nicosia created the cover design using a portion of her original painting, *Splash*.

**Notes about format and editorial style:** You'll find a number of pages deliberately left blank. That's so that new chapters always start on right-hand pages, as they usually do in printed books. To emphasize the international flavor of the contributors, I have preserved the British spellings that some practitioners used.

Many, many thanks to the 43 practitioners whose words make up this book. In order of their appearance on A Storied Career, they are: Molly Catron, Jessica Lipnack, Terrence Gargiulo, Jon Hansen, Svend-Erik Engh, Loren Niemi, Gabrielle Dolan, John Caddell, Shawn Callahan, Stephanie West Allen, Madelyn Blair, David Vanadia, Tom Clifford, Sharon Lippincott, Ardath Albee, Sharon Benjamin, Carol Mon, Ron Donaldson, Cynthia Kurtz, Annette Simmons, Karen Gilliam, Michael Margolis, Corey Blake, Susan Luke, Mike Wittenstein, Cathie Dodd, Sarah White, Chris Benevich, Karen N. Johnson, Jon Buscall, Thaler Pekar, Lori Silverman, Casey Hibbard, Katie Snapp, Rob Sullivan, Andree Iffrig, Whitney Quesenbery, Sean Buvala, Stephane Dangel, Karen Dietz, Stewart Marshall, Annie Hart, Melissa Wells, and Jim Ballard.

If you would like to read the Q&As in their entirety instead of categorized by topic as in this book, you can go to:  
[http://astoriedcareer.com/story\\_practitioners.html](http://astoriedcareer.com/story_practitioners.html)

Please enjoy this book. I welcome comments at [kathy@astoriedcareer.com](mailto:kathy@astoriedcareer.com), and I'd love to have you follow me on Twitter: @AStoriedCareer. I will continue publishing Q&As (which, who knows, could result in sequel to this book) from time to time, so please let me know if you'd like to participate in one or would like to nominate someone else.

*Katharine Hansen*

– Katharine (Kathy) Hansen, PhD  
September 2009





## Chapter 1: Defining Story

Some story practitioners consider a strict definition of “story” to be important in their work, while others find little value in defining “story.” Here’s what they have to say about defining story:

**Terrence Gargiulo:** I’m more comfortable letting go of story labels and definitions and getting down to just working and living with them. Isn’t that all we really can do? Definitions fly in the face of the very power of consciousness and awareness that stories offer us. When I work with groups I beg forgiveness for not giving a definition of stories; usually to the frustration of more literal and left-brain dominant types. Then through my interaction with the group I model story-based communication behaviors. I will collage strings of stories, elicit people’s stories, connect stories with one another, use lots of analogies and references to other stories to trigger rich associations in the minds and conversations of people present. All of this is meant to encourage proactive reflection. I want people to remember their experiences and appreciate/respect/take an interest in the experiences of others, look for connections between their experiences, and imagine new possibilities. This is the fluid and emergent quality of stories. And this is the framework I follow in all of my consulting work whether I am designing a large-scale change management, developing a communications strategy, or architecting a learning event.

I have a passion for inciting insights in others. I am a conduit for opening story spaces. These are polyphonic dialogues orchestrated with reflective opportunities for insights to emerge. Recollecting our experiences and the experiences of others are precious gifts of attention that never stop gracing us with sense-giving and sense-making moments. I am committed to living these questions ... Can we be authentic? Can we remember who we are? Can we create connections within ourselves, and between ourselves and others? Can we soar with our imaginations beyond the boundaries we erect in the name of stability? Can we let go of our habits and still feel alive?

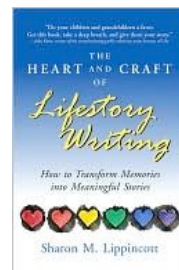
**Loren Niemi:** My fundamental definition of story is that it is the conscious expression of experience and imagination in a narrative form. The word “conscious” is critical and speaks to the idea that a story is chosen and shaped. This definition is intentionally very broad, with narrative forms including a wide variety of expressions – oral, written, visual, ritual, political, etc. On one end of the spectrum, it includes the common daily act of recounting our experience over the dinner table or around the water cooler and on the other end, it includes the whole of culture, historical, political, religious narratives, the myths we live by, etc. I believe that story is fundamental to our being human – the organizing principle that allows us to order the world and transfer knowledge from one individual, culture and generation to another. On a practical level, all the work I do is storytelling and

the core of that work is to make the stories we tell conscious, chosen, artful, meaningful.

**Stephanie West Allen:** I don’t really have a definition. It is the flesh on the skeleton of the conflict. The meat; the heart; the blood, sweat, and tears. How did each of us get here? Where do we want to go now? The paths we have taken and the roads we want to follow.

**Madelyn Blair:** I find it a bit wasteful to spend either time or energy on the definition of story. I know that there are those who feel this is important, but for my work in organizations, I find that people can work effectively using story without burdening them with definitions.

**Sharon Lippincott:** Beyond reminding people that stories have a beginning, middle and end, and that they will be easier for strangers to understand if they answer the “Five W questions: who, what, why, when and where,” I don’t espouse any particular definition of story or story form. I encourage people to write in any way that feels natural and spontaneous to them. There is no wrong way to write, and prescribing forms and styles will stifle more



people than it will help. Some few will aspire to more polish. That’s great too. There are many fine books, my own included [Editor’s note: Sharon’s book is *The Heart and Craft of Lifestory Writing*.], to help those who want guidance.

I often use the example of one of my grandmothers who wrote her autobiography when she was about 70. It is short, and consists of disjointed paragraphs that often raise more questions than they answer. She commits nearly every blunder a lifestory writer could imagine. She comes across as a nut case. But ... she took the time to do this, and I treasure every word.

My mother began writing her lifestory, but was unable to finish before the end of her life. She didn’t tell anyone about this, and we only found her drafts after her death. What a treasure! I compiled what she had written, editing only to fix typos and correct documented factual errors. The story of her girlhood will live on for generations.

Thus my constant admonition, “Any lifestory you write, no matter how crude and unfinished, is better than writing nothing.”

To date, my personal preference has been for writing short vignettes about specific memories. I now have more than 500 of these vignettes and am feeling the urge to begin compiling selected ones into more coherent memoir format.

**Carol Mon:** When I first got involved with storytelling I wrote “Storytelling in its simplest form

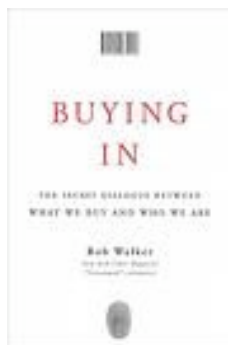
is merely a relaying of events; in its art form, it is a mystical journey the teller and listener take together." Both parts of storytelling have a place in our world. I still like the statement for how I believe it covers the different types of tales and would like to build on it by saying that I do not espouse one definition of story; one size does not fit all. Professional storytellers do not put much stock in anecdotes as stories and yet in the business world, anecdotes are powerful, easy ways to communicate. There are a few commonalities among all forms of story and those probably are what should be used to define story. Whether it is a one-liner, epic, ballad, poem, movie, anecdote, or fairy tale, all good stories evoke some kind of emotion and cause a connection between the teller and listener. Let's not complicate it with pedantic definitions of opening, conflicts, resolutions, and character development. Many non-professional storytellers feel they should not use stories in their communications because their "stories" do not follow a strict form. A looser definition encourages more people to consciously use stories to strengthen their messages.

**Michael Margolis:** I approach storytelling as a management philosophy – a lens through which to examine business challenges and discover breakthrough insights. If you want to learn about a culture, listen to the stories. If you want to change the culture, change the stories. Every business today is in the culture-creation business. I call it the study of Pop Anthropology (which also happens to be the name of my blog) and it deeply informs my consulting business which works with companies in the midst of strategic shifts. Our focus is Brand Storytelling, Constituent Relations, and Change Leadership.

There is the official message your company puts out, and then there are the stories that people tell about you. This complex web of perceptions is what informs your brand's equity and your standing in the marketplace. Brand Storytelling is king – even in enterprises that are not consumer-centric such as nonprofits or community-initiatives.

The most ubiquitous innovators like Google or Apple ultimately transform the everyday habits of our society. The most creative marketers use stories and cultural happenings to embed their brands as a cherished part of our lives. If you are interested in this growing phenomenon, check out Rob Walker, the *New York Times Magazine* contributor who writes the weekly column "Consumed," and recently published the

groundbreaking book, *Buying-In*: This cultural perspective is vital as organizations find themselves in perpetual cycles of change. Change Leadership is ultimately about telling the right stories that people can relate to – whether that is your customers, employees, members, or donors.



**Corey Blake:** I am a firm believer in two things: (1) the three-act structure and (2) characters drive stories. I follow the standard "inciting incident, plot point one, mid-point, plot point two" structure, but within that I have found tremendous freedom. I prepare extensive character bibles before writing any fiction (25-50 pages per main character), and I believe that all the work is done before the actual manuscript writing begins. If the homework is done well, the writing is pure joy. And I've experienced that enough to know that it works! In my early years as a writer, I also experienced what a lack of preparation causes; that pain inspired me to create my writing method!

**Susan Luke:** In my opinion, there can never be just one definition of story. For every individual there are a myriad of stories they can share – each will be as different and unique as the person sharing them.

One of the beauties of story is this difference and the experience behind the stories that makes them live and breathe and have universal appeal. In my experience, the greatest challenge to those of us who tell stories is to give our listeners enough time to not only enjoy and/or learn from the story, but to savor it, to connect it to their own experience.

If there are strict definitions and/or restrictions, the creative process is stifled and the opportunities to share stories in new and different ways/media will not happen.

**Cathie Dodd:** A story is an experience that happened to you or to someone else, or is an experience that is made up in your mind. It can be used to create a mood of laughter or reflection. It can also be used as a parallel to a point you want to bring home, or a moral lesson you want to teach. Personal stories are what we [at my company] focus on because personal stories create a connection between you and the person the story is told to.

**Thaler Pekar:** I find the most useful framework for beginning story sharers is that a story has a beginning, middle, and end. I work with incredibly smart leaders who, when I initially met them, were often reluctant to share stories in professional settings. Precisely because they recognize the power of great storytelling, they were hesitant to share their stories – they didn't think they possessed a perfectly polished, fleshed out, protagonist/compelling conflict/earth-shattering journey/surprising resolution tale to share. The quest for the perfect can be the enemy of the good!

I energize leaders (and, in turn, their audiences), by helping them surface their passion and become the most authentic and persuasive speakers possible. Through several short exercises, I help these bright people see that they are telling stories all day long, and that they possess a lifetime of interesting anecdotes and a multitude of fascinating, powerful stories. To this end, the only story framework I encourage beginning story sharers to use is "beginning, middle, and end."



Then, details that reveal emotion, and trigger the senses, are added. And then conflict, resolution, and transformation.

realize that our lives are built on story and that we can use stories to create a better world.

I've always known that conflict is a critical element in story. But I recently had an epiphany about how even the slightest frame of conflict enables a fact to stick in a listener's mind. At an event in the "Brainwave: It Could Change Your Mind" series at the Rubin Museum of Art, George Bonanno, Columbia University psychology professor and expert in emotion, stated the fact that birds share more computational language skills with humans than our closest primates.

This fact alone was new and interesting to me. But Bonanno added that former President George Bush, who was "unfriendly to science," cut funding for a perhaps silly sounding, but quite scientifically important, study of Pigeon Language Cognition Skills.

Adding this point of conflict turned that fact into a story. Bonanno provided a great example of how to take a fact, add a conflict, and make the fact memorable.

**Sean Buvala:** I think that definition of storytelling is critical for it is within the lines of definition we get the most freedoms. I have worked for some time with the following definition. "Storytelling is the intentional sharing of a narrative in words and actions for the benefit of both the listener and the teller."

Just quickly, "intentional" means that not everything we do is storytelling. Storytelling is a planned activity and process. "Narrative" means what is being talked about has a beginning, middle, and end. "Sharing" means that there is an audience in front of the teller, which can be one person or thousands. "Benefit" means both the listener and the teller leave the sharing of story as a changed person. Even after telling some stories for decades, I still hear new ideas from even my oldest stories. Usually, what comes as new to me is when the listener tells me what they hear. I am not a fan of giving the morals to stories. I would rather the audience work that out with me instead of being told what to think.

That is a rather quick take on my definition of storytelling. We usually go rather in depth in our workshops on this definition so the audience can add to or take away as they need.

**Annie Hart:** I am dedicated to spreading a new definition of storytelling that includes its deeper powers. My personal mission is to create a context in which story can be known and experienced as the force of change that it is. Stories change us individually, collectively and globally. Storytelling is no longer just a medium of entertainment but a context in which to live our lives and a tool for personal and global change. I want everyone to

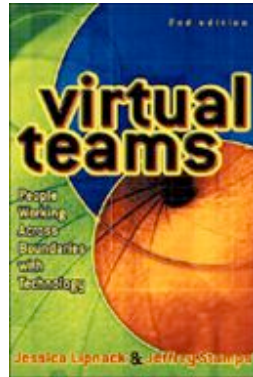


## Chapter 2: Origins of Storytelling Passions

One of the most fascinating stories practitioners tell is how they came to be interested in storytelling:

**Molly Catron:** I came from a family of people who told stories. I didn't realize it at the time, but when I was faced with teaching the principles associated with some of the organizational change efforts, I found myself telling stories. The stories put the facts in an emotional context working in the 18 inches between the heart and the head where true change occurs.

**Jessica Lipnack:** I'm a writer. Writers tell stories regardless of genre — fiction, nonfiction, poets, business writers. I've been writing stories professionally since I took a job as a reporter for my hometown newspaper when I was 16. I worked at *The Pottstown (PA) Mercury* for four summers, eight-hour shifts, five or six days a week, and wrote a lot of stories. When Jeff Stamps and I started writing books for organizations (e.g., *Networking, The Age of the Network, Virtual Teams*), we included stories in all of them. But not just stories. After exposure to the work of Ned Hermann, we understood that people have differing cognitive preferences, different ways that they learn. Some respond most strongly to vision, some to theory, some to method, some to stories. Hermann's approach became a design principle for our books — all four cognitive styles had to be included with every chapter. That said, we've begun nearly every chapter in every book with a story so as to engage people emotionally.



And, I've done some acting. There you learn how to connect your words, your expressions, and your gestures emotionally. Learning to act, at least in the limited way that I have, has helped with presentation skills, critical to good storytelling.

And I'm a public speaker. By the time you've given a hundred speeches, you figure out what connects with audiences and what doesn't, how to pace yourself, when to be funny, and when to be dead serious.

**Loren Niemi:** [My first involvement] came early, first grade, when the teacher asked what we knew about elephants. I gave an enthusiastic answer mixing fact and imagination. She said, you're a liar. I said, no, I'm telling a story. While I was aware of the difference she did not acknowledge or "reward"

the story, but shamed me with the result being that I did not raise my hand or speak unless called upon for the rest of the school year. This moment has remained with me for over 50 years and is core to my understanding that storytelling is fundamental to our education (integrating right and left-brain functions) and that everyone tells stories, consciously and unconsciously, to place themselves in the world, to build relationships and recognized for who they are as they choose to name/claim their identity.

By high school, that deep-seated impulse to mix fact and imagination to make sense of the world led me to the school paper and an award for creative fiction. It also got me my first kiss from an attractive woman when I told a wholly imagined story at a summer-school leadership camp. These reaffirmed my sense of story as a powerful and rewarding use of language. There were also early lessons in these about the value and necessity of crafting material for a specific audience — matching language, tone, rhythm to invite the listener into the story.

In 1971, I was working at an alternative education program for juvenile justice offenders. More than once I sat in a courtroom and heard a judge say to a kid, you can go to jail, into the military or into this program and have a kid think that it was the easy choice. We worked with them 12 hours a day, six days a week — and the core of the work was having them tell their stories over and over again in response to questions that were designed to move them from seeing themselves as victims of bad luck or other people's ill will to taking responsibility for their own lives and decisions. It was a long and emotionally difficult process with more than one kid choosing to go into the military rather than stay with the program. Today it would probably be seen as a kind of Narrative Therapy, but then it was rooted in Gestalt and a Baba Ram Das sense of "Be Here Now." In support of the work I began collecting and telling little metaphors, fables and parables (many from the Sufi, Zen and Hassidic traditions) to provide indirect models of behaviors, values, ways of thinking that supported the change process.

In 1978, I was managing projects the City of Minneapolis Arts Commission and was sitting in the bar of the Edgewater Hotel in Madison, WI, between arts conference sessions when I was asked what was it that I actually did. I'm a storyteller, I said. I help organizations and communities identify, shape and tell their stories. Once the words were out of my mouth, I understood that this was exactly what I did and more importantly, it was what I wanted to do. Story was the frame that made sense of the organizing, educational, political, and arts streams that were all present in my life. Story was the common bond and conduit among them. Once the words were out of my mouth I could see how I had been prepared to be a storyteller and after, the doors of opportunity opened to demonstrate that this was my life's work.

Within the next two years, I would meet and work with Ken Feit, Jay O'Callahan, Goyia Timpenelli, Mike Cotter, Elizabeth Ellis, Jim May, and other leaders of the storytelling revival. Within three years I would be the Humanities Scholar in Residence in Northern Minnesota, paid to spend a year collecting and telling stories and documenting the cultural shift from an industrial to a tourism and service based economy. Within five years I would become the ringmaster and tour manager of the Circle of Water Circus, and there would be no turning back.

**Gabrielle Dolan:** I initially came into the field of organisational storytelling when my yet-to-be business partner Yamini Naidu showed me a digital story she had created. While everyone else in the class had created a digital story for personal use, she applied the skill for a business issue. At the time I was a senior manager at the National Australia Bank, and I immediately saw how it could be applied. I had experienced the day-to-day frustration in the corporate world of trying to get employees engaged and motivated. I have also been in too many boring presentations and roadshows that just did not make sense. Both situations are extremely frustrating.

Both Yamini and I realised that the power was not in the technology of a digital story but in the story itself. The more we researched, we discovered the whole field of organisational storytelling that was coming out of the USA, but no one was working specifically in the "organisational storytelling" space in Australia. We spoke to many Australian business leaders and the response was pretty much the same. "I knew that what we were doing was not working but didn't know what else to do." Organisational storytelling gives leaders a way to better communicate and engage with their employees. Not being able to do this is extremely time consuming and frustrating for them and their people.

What I really love about organisational storytelling is the sheer excitement and almost relief from leaders that now have a tangible way to better communicate and engage with their people. And when we hear the successes some of our clients have had with story when every other attempt has failed ... that is priceless.

**Shawn Callahan:** In 1999 I joined IBM in Australia to lead the knowledge-management practice and the first thing I wanted to organise for my clients



was an interesting seminar on the current state of knowledge management. I figured there must be a KM thought leader in IBM, and in my search I found Dave Snowden [pictured], who was renowned for a unique and provocative perspective on knowledge management and was an entertaining speaker. But he was based

in the UK, so I emailed him and asked whether he had a video of any of his KM talks I could show my clients. Dave said he could do much better. He was coming to Australia and would be happy to give a

one-day workshop. I organised the event at Old Parliament House in Canberra, and I was mesmerised by Dave's ideas on complexity and business narrative, and the way he told stories that captured the imagination of everyone in the audience. That's when I said to myself, "I'm going to do that." Eventually Dave and I worked together in IBM's Cynefin Centre for Organisational Complexity where we had four years together with a handful of other inspirational people applying our ideas with IBM's clients around the world. It was a terrific experience.

**Stephanie West Allen:** I first became a big proponent of storytelling when I became a mediator decades ago. I saw the power of telling one's story and hearing the stories of others in resolving disputes. To me, storytelling is a critical part of any effective and lasting conflict resolution. I have seen the "magic" of the telling and hearing too many times to not be convinced of story's integral role in creating collaboration and cooperation. Plus I am lucky to have two friends who are both non-practicing lawyers and storytellers; listening to them has also shown me story's essential role in the practice of law, whether in alternative dispute resolution or the adversarial process.

**Madelyn Blair:** About 10 years ago Seth Kahan arranged for me to be invited to a brain-trust session on story in business. What I found was a group of about 30 people who seemed to understand that story was an important vehicle for communication that could be employed successfully in the business community. As I listened to their ideas, my understanding of story expanded, and I could see that I had been using story for a long time in my own work without knowing that was what I was doing. It was familiar to me, and as I learned more and more, I discovered the power of story in so many areas — direct communication of ideas, team building, understanding culture — all very useful to an organizational developer. After this brain-trust event, I began using story more consciously. As I used story more in my work, I became aware of the efficiency of story to convey ideas and concepts; the effectiveness of story to build solid, trusting relationships; the pleasure of story to engage audiences. It seemed that no matter what I was doing, when I could bring in story, my work was made easier. What's not to love?

**David Vanadia:** It's rather clichéd, but my grandfather used to say, "Tell me a story." My dad used to give my brother and me tape recorders for toys. We'd write scripts and make audio shows. In second grade I became the undefeated champion of the talking contest by being able to speaking sensibly, non-stop, without repeating myself. In sixth grade I wrote a puppet play and recorded it on videotape in the library. Video cameras were something special back then. The librarian at my school (I wish I could remember her name) also allowed me to take home a Super 8mm movie camera (at my request) to shoot my first movie. I got into music in middle school, and art was a constant. By the time I was on my own, I found myself frustrated by trying to choose between one of the many forms of expression I had enjoyed for so long. Any time I focused on one, I'd feel another

was missing. Eventually I discovered storytelling, and all of those forms of media fell into place. What I love most about this field is that it's so old and yet so new. It's like studying the weather.

**Thomas Clifford:** I become involved in storytelling through rock n roll.

Ever since the British Invasion days of 1964, music captured my imagination like nothing else; the lyrics, the rhythm, the cadence all combined to create endless stories in my mind.

One day I found a guitar in the house when I was a kid. I picked it up and taught myself how to play. I eventually took lessons, then studied classical guitar; all while playing Alice Cooper, Steppenwolf and Grand Funk Railroad on weekends throughout much of junior high and high school and into college.

My grand plan? To become a famous rock n roller; the same as everyone else at that time! Those plans were short-lived as my band learned that our performance before a Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young concert were cancelled at the last minute.

I graduated from high school. I came home one day in the summer and found a college brochure on the kitchen counter. It just happened to be open on the pages with photographs of a television studio. I instantly jumped! This was it!

What attracted me to the video/film world was the ability to capture and tell a story and have an audience go, "Wow!" I was hooked.

I loved combining sight and sound to emotionally move someone into action with an interesting story. In many ways, it reminded me of playing live on a Saturday night with my band. Watching your audience, through music or storytelling, is thrilling. I'm fortunate. 25 years ago, I found my passion. I found my voice. It is to enable the voices of others through video stories. I found my calling early in life. I never had another job.

This is what I was born to do.

**Ardath Albee:** I've always written stories — since fourth-grade English class. I have a degree in English literature and use it every single day for business initiatives. I also write women's fiction for fun, although I've come close to publication and pursue that possibility when time permits.

I initially became involved in verbal business storytelling when I was a turnaround specialist for the hospitality industry. Trust me, hotel guests and country club members could care one wit about your business. They care only about the quality of their experience with it.

When I transitioned to the technology industry in 2000, it was intuitive for me tap those insights to generate content-marketing campaigns for

software, as well as in building solid customer relationships.

**Annette Simmons:** I was in grad school studying adult education in a master's program at North Carolina State University. My stepmom thought it would be a good way to get us kids (adults, but barely) together from different parts of the country to meet at the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesboro, TN. I had never heard of it before. I fell in love with the stories, the people, the emotions, and the fresh-made cider they served hot from a long-gone general store.



Over the next few years I was simply a fan. It never occurred to me I could do "that." But Cheryl, a friend of mine saw a change in the way I did my work (leadership training). At one festival, I stopped Ed Stivender on the street just to tell him how much I love him and his stories. Cheryl was with me. He asked, "Are you a storyteller?" I said, "Oh no," and Cheryl piped in, "Yes you are!"

Like any art form, there are many who rush to call themselves a painter, singer, musician, and even a "storyteller." But some of us find the step a daunting bridge to cross. For me, to call myself a storyteller is sort of like being sworn in to a set of unwritten laws. I will tell the truth. I will tell stories that no one else might tell. I will bear witness to remind people of what is most important. Those storytelling principles are what I love most about storytelling. It is an honorable tradition as well as a wonderful way to stay connected to people and to stay connected to what is most important to us all — family.

**Ron Donaldson:** Back in 1998 Dave Snowden introduced us to his newly developed approach to gathering and making sense of knowledge. As he trained us in the principles and methods of what would become Cognitive Edge, he told us hugely engaging and highly memorable stories about water engineers, taxi drivers, and children's parties.

I became fascinated both by the metaphorical meaning and the power of such stories and thought, "I wonder if I could do that for stories related to nature conservation." I found myself avidly reading books and scouring the web for



everything remotely connected to story, community and complexity theory.

I guess it took some courage at first to try out these new methods as serious business tools, but every time I did I came back more and more enthused, as I realised this was so much more productive than my previous approaches of systems analysis and process modelling, but it was the engagement side that surprised me most. People would visibly become friendlier with each other; hardened pessimists would join in and never complain; each time I talked about the approach it would trigger another storytelling initiative or invite for me to get involved.

I loved the fact that using narrative was/is seen as a quirky and alternative approach yet it is based on the most tried, tested and simple to carry out methods available. Nothing excites me more than facilitating a group to tell their stories and watching their different perspectives merge and re-emerge as they make sense of the material as a group. I now keep a regular watching eye on a wide range of blogs in order to learn that extra nugget about how the mind works and which synapses or hormones are responsible for that feeling of community, or how to structure the perfect story with its archetypal themes and characters. But I am also mindful of the fact that stories like communities are much greater than the sum of their parts, and I might spend my time better reading, listening, and watching good stories than following such a reductionist path in a constant search for each and every component part.

**Karen Gilliam:** I actually cannot remember a time when I was not attracted to story. As a child, I hung on to every story shared by my relatives, in particular my grandmother and uncle. Their stories about family told me that I belonged, that I was special and that I was a part of something great and wonderful. As an adult, I've used stories and storytelling in my work as a trainer, coach and organization development consultant. Jerome Bruner defines it best when he says "story is meaning." I love story and storytelling because of its ability to capture emotion and reason, hearts and minds like no other spoken communication tool. And, there's something quite liberating and authentic about being able, as a listener, to take, in that moment or some future point in time, from story only what I need in order to make meaning.

**Corey Blake:** I began and was trained as an actor first (BFA, Millikin University), so I have a strong appreciation for performance and the intimate experience that an audience has with a piece of art (i.e., book, play, movie). After acting professionally in Los Angeles — both on television and in commercials — I realized that while I loved my training in acting and was passionate about performing, I was not in love with the professional side of acting. I showed up on set, shook hands with the director, rehearsed, sat in my trailer for four hours, shot my scene, and then went home. To be included more in the emotional process of creation, I knew that I needed to be part of the conception of a project, and for that I would have to start my own production company. With that intention, I brought eight other professional actors

up to a cabin in Mammoth for a week-long retreat where we discussed story ideas, watched Syd Field's "Story" DVD, and wrote together. From there we birthed half a dozen projects and a production company called Elevation 9000 Films. We raised financing for and shot a great little 35mm film called *The Boy Scout*, which I exec-produced. We toured the film around the globe, and I was then approached by Annie Oelschlager to produce and direct her musical comedy film *Gretchen Brettschneider Skirts Thirty* [pictured]. That film was another hit.



To further my development process, I started the LA Film Lab with Jesse Biltz and David Charles Cohen (producer, *Notorious B. I.G. Bigger than Life*), which was a short-lived but successful development company and production class. We shot two more films, both of which I produced and one that I directed. Ultimately, at the end of what I call my PhD in filmmaking, I realized that while I had tremendous vision and creativity and could produce and direct well, what I lacked was great writing. That birthed my desire to learn to craft great stories.

I started helping other writers develop content both for screenplays and books and was then approached by Angelica Harris to assist her with her book *Excalibur Reclaims Her King*. Then I met with Robert Renteria in 2006, and we started crafting *From the Barrio to the Board Room*. Later that same year, Bea Fields found me, and we wrote *EDGE! A Leadership Story* together with Eva Silva Travers. My work as a writer/director of writing really snowballed from there, and I have since been hired to write or "direct" another dozen book projects. I love the creative process. I love working closely with people who have a story to tell and need guidance both throughout the technical and spiritual aspects of putting a story down on paper.

**Susan Luke:** I have been around stories and storytelling all my life. My father was a minister and used stories in all his sermons, both Biblical and personal. My mother told stories on the radio before I was born and has always used stories in the many speaking opportunities she has had over the years, from teaching to speaking at large national meetings. So, for me it was a natural way to communicate.

Starting my career as a teacher (I've taught at all levels, K-college), I used stories to help my students understand various concepts and events. As a CEO of a technical services organization, I needed to make presentations to a variety of boards and executive teams to sell my product. Using success stories helped me to do that beyond my wildest expectations.

As a speaker, trainer, coach, and consultant, stories continue to be part of how I relate to my clients and audiences. In fact, it was through a client request that I began to focus on helping others to use



story/storytelling as a leadership/communication tool. I had never consciously done that before. That happened about 6-7 years ago, and it was the most natural evolution of my continually changing career path ever.

I love being involved with people and everyone has stories they share. Identifying, creating, and sharing them are what makes us who we are, as individuals and as communities. Focusing on the concept of story, how to use stories strategically as well as tactically, while helping others do the same is my passion!

**Mike Wittenstein:** During the grade-school years, my parents sent me to Hebrew school to prepare me for my Bar Mitzvah. Year after year, we learned the same Bible stories, albeit with more details and added moral lessons each time around. Once, in junior high school, one of my friends used a Bible story learned at (Christian) Sunday school to make a point. I shared a couple of the differences I noticed from the version of the story I learned and quickly found myself on the other side of a verbal fight. It was at that moment I knew the power of a good story. Not only can storytelling inform; it can stir one's soul.

It wasn't until two more decades passed, that I learned the importance of story in day-to-day business communications. I co-founded one of the country's first new-media agencies, Galileo, in the early 90s. My partner and the company's creative director, Jackie Goldstein, taught me to never let technology interrupt the flow of the client's story. What she did with evocative and beautiful imagery, I learned to do with words. As we learned to combine our efforts effectively, our level of success increased.

**Cathie Dodd:** My sister and I (who [are in] business together) have always loved storytelling, since we were little. Our mother didn't read us stories; she told us stories from her own experiences, and her family. Family photos were also important to the family, and she was scrapbooking before it became known as that. All her albums told stories. As my sister and I got older, we both became interested in photography and film. Pictures had to tell a story, and even in our spare time we found making movies with our friends seemed a great way to spend a weekend. Then we started doing weddings, my sister doing pictures and I doing the videos. For a while I also did photography. But it wasn't till after my mom died and my dad asked us to do his biography that we really saw the power of storytelling with pictures and film. We made our own memories come alive, and part of my mom came alive with them. We realized that with this film we had saved a part of our family history forever. From that film came many requests from friends to create one for them. We get the same type of pleasure creating the stories for our clients as we did when creating it for ourselves. Every one of our clients say the first time they watch a video we created, that they are hit

with a wave of emotion. Thus came our business name, Tears of Joy Video. I have heard from our clients that these stories become like a glue to pull their families together. It constantly reinforces in me the power stories have in our lives.

**Sarah White:** For 12 years I directed my own marketing communication firm. After the sale of that business I built a freelance writing/consulting practice, providing marketing communications and how-to advice for small businesses. I was frequently hired to help other authors find publishers and prepare their books for publication. As my professional pursuits have drawn me in different directions, I have sought a way to bring my many skills "back under one umbrella." When I learned about the field of personal history, I discovered my professional skills and my personal interests weaving together. Today I help individuals, families, businesses and communities record their stories for presentation in book form and more. I also lead reminiscence writing workshops and hands-on intergenerational programs exploring personal history.

I discovered personal history — storytelling for individuals — through an introduction to a working professional, Anita Hecht. As soon as I saw what she was doing, the lightbulb went on for me. I was tired of working in advertising/marketing; I sought something that was more about the heart, and less about the wallet. I certainly found that. I think personal history is growing as people discover that the legacy they leave to their families is incomplete without some sense of their lives — what they learned from what they lived through, what they valued, and why. Another factor contributing to the growth of life-story writing is new technology, such as short-run printing, DVDs, and collaborative websites, that expand the possibilities for creating and distributing those memories. As a result, there is a growing business opportunity for professional services dedicated to preserving memories.

**Karen N. Johnson:** Have you ever experienced a pull in a certain direction? That's how I feel about storytelling. It seemed to me like books about storytelling were finding their way into my hands at bookstores. The subject of storytelling kept popping up in front of me from multiple directions. When I first started investigating storytelling it wasn't conscience, I just followed what interested me. After reading, *The Story Factor*, I began consciously seeking out information on the topic and was actively working on ways to apply the concept of using stories in my work.



I joined a local storyteller's guild and started to attend storytelling events. When I met storytellers, especially those who use story combined with business, I began to ask them to tell me their stories about storytelling. One reason I enjoy

asking tellers to tell me about using story as opposed to asking for a story is so I gain a deeper sense of how storytelling has integrated itself into who they are. I'm interested in having a discussion on the topic with them, as opposed to them being "on stage" and delivering a rehearsed story. It's my experience and opinion that strong or perhaps naturally gifted tellers acquire the skill deeply. It becomes part of who they are.

**Jon Buscall:** As an undergraduate I was drawn to fiction and writing. In the late 90s I managed to publish *College.com*, a novel about campus life in the UK. Although British newspaper *The Times* declared it was "essential reading," it didn't become the best seller that I hoped, and I didn't get to retire to the south of France. Nevertheless, on the back of this and a PhD in imaginative writing, I ended up teaching fiction and writing at universities in the Nordic region for the best part of eight years. I found it incredibly powerful to help other fledgling writers get started, but increasingly I grew weary of juggling teaching and my own attempts at writing. A second novel, *Being Helle*, almost finished me for good, but I made a drastic jump one day and walked out of academe to go it alone and start a basset hound kennel.

Faced with having to feed myself and my dogs, I kept writing: I turned to journalism initially but also corporate blogging. I found that the skills I'd learned as a fiction writer helped me craft stories for corporations who were struggling to get their message across.

I got a kick helping to transform the ideas and notions people had about their business into a narrative form that helped build their brand, but also clarified for employees what journey they were on. If everyone in the organisation understands the story of who they collectively are, it can help employees pull together, market, and build your brand.

Ultimately I stumbled into corporate storytelling out of necessity, armed with a hotch-potch of writing skills garnered from teaching and writing and surfing the web.

What I love most about storytelling away from publishing houses is that stories tell us who we are and what we think we're doing. Applied to a business, this can be incredibly powerful.

**Thaler Pekar:** Story is an extremely effective tool for persuasive communication. For many years, I traveled around the world, teaching advocates about the importance of values-based communication as a tool for accomplishing social change. I would assist leaders in articulating the values that support their advocacy positions, and the importance of initiating conversation with those values. For example, I worked with public-health advocates across the globe on initiatives that would be "saving women's lives," and result in greater health, opportunity, and security. I trained hundreds of U.S.-based advocates, state legislators, and Congressional staff to reframe the discussion of low-wage work in America and focus on the necessity of building "an economy that works for all," through the underlying values of responsibility,

fairness, and dignity. And I assisted a national interfaith organization in connecting their work on religious liberties to their foundational belief in freedom.

As much as I believe that articulating one's values and commencing conversation from a platform of shared values is vital to effective, persuasive conversation, it increasingly became clear to me that values are subjective. "Responsibility" can mean different things to different people. Heck, it can mean different things to the same person, given the context. And, in an increasingly ambiguous and challenging world, we often need to make choices about the hierarchy of our personal values.

Story serves to unambiguously define the true meaning of those values. Annette Simmons has written extensively about the use of story to clearly define personal and organizational values, and I have had the tremendous pleasure and honor of studying with her.

At the same time I was learning about the importance of story as a tool for defining values, I was also learning about how the human brain takes in and processes new information. Neuroscience, brain imaging, and behavioral psychology, among other disciplines, have taught us that the brain can only connect information to what we already know. People remember new information more easily when it has some connection to what they already know and has personal, emotional resonance for them.



Chip and Dan Heath, authors of *Made to Stick*, summarize this very well: "The most basic way to make people care is to form an association between something they don't yet care about and something they do care about."

Story supplies that bridge. Story is an extremely effective communications tool for establishing trust and emotional relevance

with an audience. So, that's how I got to story: as a way to articulate values and most effectively connect with listeners.

When my clients reflect on the values that drive their work, they surface the passion that propels their advocacy. I then work with them to elicit and develop the stories that articulate their passion and underlying values. In this way, values drive the emotional connection with their listener — and story cements that relationship and opens up tremendous possibilities for understanding and action.

My brother, Jim, serves on the faculty of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, where he manages the F. M. Kirby Research Center for Functional Brain Imaging at the Kennedy Krieger Institute. He is an advisor to my firm, and he and I have now taken our conversations about brain function and

communication public, on our blog. [Editor's note: The blog is at <http://neurocooking.blogspot.com/>.]

**Whitney Quesenbery:** User experience is my second career. My first was in theatre, where I worked for many years as a lighting designer. When I started working on an early hypertext project, the connection between theatre and UX seemed very obvious. I used to talk about the computer screen as a very small stage proscenium.

We always had activities in UX that were "story-like:" creating scenarios to describe how a site is used, describing what we learned in user research, and creating the stories for usability testing tasks. But, none of this was formally connected to "storytelling" in my mind. That came when I first heard Stephen Denning speak, and read *The Springboard*.

What I love about using stories in user experience design is that it allows me to add some of the complexity and serendipity of life to the logic and analysis that dominates work in technology.

**Stewart Marshall:** My background is as a Designated Management Accountant working in industry. Over the years I've sat through countless business presentations from all levels of management. The vast majority of these have been terrible! Typically, there are too many slides with too many words that the presenter reads to his/her audience, half of which are busy reading their email on their Blackberrys whilst pretending to listen. If the presentations include numbers they are usually far less engaging!

I looked at my own presentations, what I was reading and what I was starting to learn at Toastmasters. I realised how powerful a good story could be and how much I enjoyed using it. What's more when I looked at my career I realised that a lot of what I'd been doing all these years was storytelling. I also realised some of my heroes were great storytellers. From Winston Churchill "We'll fight them on the beaches ..." to Sir Alistair Cooke ("Letter from America") and more recently Stuart McLean (Vinyl Cafe). The more I read, be it Joseph Campbell, Annette Simmons, Robert McKee, or Steve Denning the more storytelling resonated with me.

What I love about using storytelling is the emotional connection I can create with my audience. I love the fact that if I am successful they are sitting there making up their own personalised versions of my story in their heads. When numbers are involved I love being able to demystify the data and enable more people to understand and benefit from the stories within.

Some influential references:

- *Winston Churchill's famous speech:* <http://www.fiftiesweb.com/usa/winston-churchill-fight-beaches.htm>

- *The Toastmasters District I belong to:* <http://www.toastmasters.bc.ca/>
- *Alistair Cooke's home on the BBC:* [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/letter\\_from\\_america/](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/letter_from_america/)
- *Stuart McLean's home on the CBC:* <http://www.cbc.ca/vinylcafe/>
- *Information about Joseph Campbell:* [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph\\_Campbell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Campbell)
- *Annette Simmons' website:* <http://groupprocessconsulting.com>
- *Robert McKee's "Story" website:* <http://www.mckeestory.com>
- *Steve Denning's website:* <http://www.stevedenning.com>

**Annie Hart:** My mother tells the story of how she would take me out to the woods as a little girl and she would put me on a fallen tree stump and listen while I told her stories! This was my first form of theater. I had no idea that I was a storyteller; it was just a natural way of being for me. Then years ago when I was applying for an apprenticeship in the expressive arts, my mentor told me that I was a storyteller. I had no idea what she was talking about. Later I realized that I thought and spoke in story, very much as indigenous people do. I chose storytelling as the focus for that training and I studied storytellers for a few years to learn about it. I had no idea that I was destined to be a storyteller or that I would end up using story in my career. For me storytelling is more of a worldview and a way of being than a form of speaking. It's in the being and the bones, not just in the telling.

I live for stories. I love story's power to express that, which is inexpressible. I love its ability to create deep and lasting change. I love seeing how people come alive through story and how it connects us and creates bridges across our human divide. But most of all I love the magic that story creates. When I tell stories I can almost see the magic happening in the room. Stories take us into other beautiful worlds and for a time we can forget about all our cares. I know of no other form of expression that moves us and hits our human bedrock as deeply as story does.

Storytelling is the greatest and oldest power in the world for transmitting wisdom and oral teachings. I am most fortunate that story is my medium for change.

**Melissa Wells:** Life is about stories, whether you choose to express your stories through the arts, the sciences, or helping people. Whatever it is, your talent in turning your experiences into a narrative is what is important to me. That includes your whole life, in an important way. As a career coach, I guide talented people to create lives that represent their best stories. Life itself is can be a splendid story, if done with flair.

As for my own story, another part of my life is that I work in rainforests and deserts, documenting new species and behavior of animals around the world. I am just back from Botswana where an elephant charged me from only a few yards away-now that, at least for my life, is a wonderful story. I ask people, "What experiences make you proud or do you love to remember?" The key to creating a self-determined work-life lies in the stories of our past and the experiences we hope for. I extrude those stories from clients. The magic is in the real-world planning and execution. I was a management consultant for more than 12 years. Clients love to be escorted over that threshold from idea to reality. That's what I love, clients realizing the most powerful stories of their careers.

**Jim Ballard:** When my kids were small, I was a summer camp director a couple of summers, and I would spin yarns to them every night in our tent. (Even now they joke about the series we did about the exploits of a superhero insect named Snyder the Spider, who could spin a steel-strong filament to catch criminals and save falling people and breaking bridges.) During years I spent training teachers, I owned a small publishing firm for printing and disseminating the story-based curriculum I wrote. Four fables I published for my children were sold when we sold the business, and have made the rounds. One entitled "Warm Fuzzies" became widely told, and in time became a part of the language.

I have had a number of fables published in the business and spiritual-self-help categories. Ken Blanchard, a frequent co-author, taught me how to write fables, following the lead of his and Spencer Johnson's bestseller, *The One-Minute Manager*. I came to see, with Aesop, that storytelling is still a way to get a point across. I continue to use the fable as the basis for my books, including five projects that are under way now.



## Chapter 3: Storytelling Influences

Practitioners discuss the people – authors, family members, and others – who had been influential in their storytelling journeys:

### Jessica Lipnack:

1. The best writers — or at least the ones I love, big names like Doris Lessing and Geraldine Brooks, both of whom write both fiction and nonfiction, and best-kept secrets, like Roland Merullo, who writes superb novels and superb nonfiction — have had the greatest effect on my storytelling. I've learned technique by reading them.  
The list of all who've influenced me could be very long but Annie Lamott's *Bird by Bird* is a popular and recent book that's been helpful; EM Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*, a lecture series from long ago, is worthy of study; and Ursula Le Guin's advice is in a category of its own for its usefulness for anyone truly committed to storytelling.
2. I've been influenced by business people who tell good stories: an oil company executive who put his company's 100-year history on huge wall boards that he walked his colleagues around, explaining the challenges facing them; an Army general who has the authority to require senior officers to blog, which he has. These people understand the power of story — and how to reach people deep inside, where truly meaningful change transpires.
3. I've benefited immensely from being a member of Francis Ford Coppola's writers' site, Zoetrope.com. Although the site is for fiction writers — including screenwriters, poets, short story writers, and, inevitably, novelists, its structure encourages writers to critique one another's work constructively.
4. My literary agents and my editors have been terrific and indispensable teachers about language and shaping big stories.



**Svend-Erik Engh:** Steve Denning and the group of people involved in Golden Fleece, Washington, DC, combined with the work here in Scandinavia with The Storytelling Academy because of the unique combination. The Washington scene was in the beginning very much a group of former World Bank people combined with a group of actors and storytellers. So they knew a lot about the work in organisations. And my work with The Storytelling

Academy was only concentrated on the storytelling issue. So I combined a research in organisational storytelling with the research of purely entertaining/educational storytelling.

I have a lot of experiences in listening to stories and giving feedback in a constructive way. This was something the group in Washington could benefit from. And the Scandinavian group loved the knowledge from the group of people from Washington.

**Madelyn Blair:** For the last 7-8 years, there have been two conferences in DC that have been most influential to me. Steve Denning hosts day-long sessions at the Smithsonian Institution, and Golden Fleece hosts a day-long international conference the day after the event at the Smithsonian. I usually speak at the Smithsonian and play a major role in the creation of the Golden Fleece Day (as it is known). At these two related events, some of the very best people in the use of story in business come to speak. Moreover in preparing my own talks, I find it a strong learning exercise for myself as well. More recently, the collaborative space, Worldwide Story Work, on ning.com [Editors note: Web address is <http://worldwidestorywork.ning.com/>; you many need to join to see the site.] has become a great source of insight into the topic of the use of story in general. Such luminaries as Limor Shiponi of Israel and Victoria Ward of London contribute to the discussions along with those of us from the US such as Karen Dietz, Terrence Gargiulo, Steve Denning, and more. I have found that the international perspective has been enhanced in this forum. Lastly, there is the Center for Narrative Studies, here in Washington, DC. Paul Costello is stellar in his understanding of narrative practice and shares his insights with alacrity.

**Thomas Clifford:** I have been blessed with so many remarkable people who have shaped my life. Here's a short list of the most influential people who helped me open my eyes and discover new dimensions in my mind, heart and soul. All these remarkable people have influenced my story work by the very nature of who they are.

How did they influence me? They taught me to question. Question reality, my purpose, my work, my legacy. They taught me to push and not settle for "good" or "average." For that, I am thankful.

- **Ira Glass.** Ira is a magical storyteller. Pure genius. Ira hosts "This American Life" on NPR. In addition, "This American Life" on Showtime continues Ira's storytelling format for television with short "slice of life" stories from around America. Believe me, the stories Ira discovers and captures are extraordinary.

His ability to ask questions that few dare to ask is what inspires me most about his work. Sometimes I'll watch his DVD before I film an upcoming interview to remind myself how

powerful great questions can be in getting to the heart of a story.

- **Seth Godin.** From the time I read Seth's first book, *All Marketers Are Liars*, I was instantly hooked!

I've read every single book from Seth because he's like a modern day Columbus; he discovers *and* creates new territory before almost anyone else. Seth's marketing/business background often crosses over into the psychology of why we do what we do. Seth presents different angles into how life works so few others are capable of doing.

- **Errol Morris.** Errol is my favorite filmmaker. Period.

Errol Morris is the Oscar-winning director of "The Fog of War."

Like Ira Glass, his inquisitive nature is apparent when he interviews his people. Sometimes we hear his questions off-mic while the camera is rolling.

The camera zooms in capturing a close-up of the person; sometimes thinking, sometimes laughing, sometimes confused.

I enjoy Morris's inquisitiveness into the nature of the people he films.

- **Michael Moore.** I love Michael's ability to take a simple point, sometimes an abstract idea or concept, and capture it on film in a scene that allows us to "get it" immediately. I think he's a master at metaphorical storytelling. To me, that's his greatest gift as a director.
- **Ben Wren.** My world totally flipped when I met Fr. Ben Wren at Loyola University in New Orleans, LA.

A Zen Master? A Jesuit priest? At the same time? Is that even possible? Indeed, it is!

Not only that, Ben taught several classes in Zen. Of course, I took every Zen class and from that time in 1977 till now, meditation has become my daily foundation.

Ben quickly became a friend I could count on at any time of day for anything.

While studying under Ben, Eastern philosophy and spirituality absorbed every spare minute I had.

I practiced Zen meditation, kundalini and hatha yoga, tai chi. I read Alan Watts, the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita*. I couldn't read enough of these ancient teachings.

My soul was happy. I was being filled with experiences I always longed for but didn't know where to look. These disciplines pointed to realities beyond our everyday senses. These teachings began answering the many questions

I had about the deeper underlying truths about the nature of reality.

Ben was the first person to open my eyes and mind and show me there's more to life than what we see in front of us. He passed away in 2006 from lung cancer.

While at Loyola, Ben pointed me to Bede Griffiths, the next most influential person in my life.

- **Swami Dayananda (Bede Griffiths).** I first met Bede in 1979 while in New Orleans. It was Bede's first visit to America from India. This was my introduction to Hinduism, the Upanishads and the Vedas. I finally felt at home.

Bede Griffiths was a Hindu-Christian sannyasi; a monk, a holy man.

Bede left England while still young and spent most of his life in southern India. While there, he headed up an ashram; the East's version of a monastery, welcoming everyone of all faiths. The ashram is still very popular to this day.

I was immediately attracted to Bede. If you've never been in the presence of a saint, it's extremely hard to put in words. It's life changing.

Since Bede's first visit to America, I had the good fortune to see him many times after that when he returned to the States. My days were spent listening to his teachings, meditating with a community and exploring new ideas. I can't imagine my life without having met Bede.

Bede passed away in 1993 but his holistic teachings are close to my heart.

- **Deepak Chopra.** If you want to see a current master storyteller, look no further. For me, it is Deepak Chopra. I can't think of a contemporary teacher who pushes, challenges and integrates cutting-edge concepts for the layperson to easily access any more than Deepak.

A great storyteller will grab your full attention without you even noticing it. Weaving poems from Rumi, quantum physics, science and breakthrough medical findings into his seminars, Deepak can hold your attention for hours at a time. And you never look at your watch.

I have spent many days in Deepak's presence and can tell you this with full certainty; every time I see him, I'm more impressed. He answers everybody's questions. He spends time with those needing it.

I start seeing the inter-connectedness of life when I read Deepak's words and attend his seminars. I'm whole again. I'm reminded of my purpose in life.

- **My parents.**



**Ron Donaldson:** My top 10 in no particular order (to avoid offence):

1. *The Seven Basic Plots (Why We Tell Stories)* — Christopher Booker (2004): This is a massive book, but I just could not put it down. Detailing the plotlines of almost all famous stories it builds and builds a theory of how writers externalise their internal thoughts, worries and concerns into basic archetypal themes and why we must keep our egos in check. This book really did change my life and made me look at all movies and stories in a different light.
2. *Dave Snowden and Cognitive Edge web site* [<http://cognitive-edge.com/>]: By far the biggest influence in my approach and understanding, as detailed above. Dave's approach has always been to share everything, so this site contains all his published materials, links to podcasts and videos and his blog is well worth a regular visit as it contains some of the most thought-provoking ideas, and probably the best example of blogging on the web.
3. *Soil and Soul* — Alastair McIntosh (2001): I met Alastair at a recent "Vine" Environmental Conference and was so taken by his tales of using stories to take on (and win against) corporate power that I bought his book. His intelligent writing, threading in cultural, ecological and some of the best understandings of community I have ever read, are hugely readable, but his explanation of taking on "the dominion system" ("an emergent property of ordinary human failings and commonplace darkness") is breathtaking, and resonates with every monster, giant, and wolf archetypal story you have ever encountered.
4. *The Workingstories listserv* [<http://lists.gjhost.com/mailman/listinfo/workingstories>]: I registered on this a few years ago, and I get regular emails from other individuals interested in storytelling from across the world on new articles, interesting blog posts or websites and other resources.
5. *Stephen Denning and Springboard story*: I attended one of Steve's Ark storytelling master classes several years ago, bought *The Springboard* book (2001) and tried out his advice on a number of projects and presentations, carefully crafting a story, and it worked every time. The real strength for me is how it really cranks up the level of engagement of the audience and does inspire involvement and further action on the part of the listener. Last month I had the surreal pleasure of watching a football match with Steve while eating fish and chips in an English pub.
6. *The Uses of Enchantment* — Bruno Bettelheim (1976): Probably my favourite book (despite the warnings about over-analysis) this details the importance of fairy tales in our lives and the possible psychoanalytical meaning within some of the most well known. Packed full of the how and whys of symbolism, phases of growth and of course the development and control of the ego. I am particularly taken by the idea that fairytales develop the paths for problem solving and making sense of the world in later life.
7. *The Worldwide Story Work group (on Ning)*: Very recently set up by a fellow Cognitive Edge practitioner — Shawn Callahan, this is a useful web community, again of worldwide "story workers," this is a great place to pose questions, connect with people of a similar interests and share ideas, resources etc.
8. *Surlalune website* [<http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/>]: Time flies by whenever I visit this amazing website, a huge resource of annotated fairytales detailing history, variants, symbolisms and psychological meaning.
9. *Sands of Time* book — edited by Claire Weaver (2000) — currently being re-printed: This was an English Nature publication that commissioned Joan Barr, a storyteller from Leicestershire, to collect the stories of everyone connected to or who lived near the Satfleetby National Nature Reserve on the Lincolnshire coast. The result was a loosely themed collection of anecdotes that give a real understanding of the reserve and its important to the local population as you read through its amazing tales about smugglers, unexploded bombs, and conservation work. This is an exemplary example of narrative work as a consultation exercise with the use of storytelling sessions in the local pub becoming a constant (and very well received) theme of my storytelling talks.
10. *Planet of the Apes* and its associated commentary on DVD: I first saw this film with my dad when first released at the cinema in 1968 when I was 11, and we sat in awe as the ship flew across the mountains and eventually crash-landed, and it has been a constant happy memory and family conversation piece ever since. I was fascinated recently to listen to the DVD commentary that Taylor (Heston) is in almost every scene, and the audience is asked to identify with him, see what he sees and feel what he feels. I have read a lot of the recent research on mirror neurons, which I think give us an insight



into part of the reasons why stories and storytelling like this are so effective.

**Annette Simmons:** Doug Lipman remains the single most important influence on me. I attended his workshops and I've hired him as a personal coach. I've chosen to stay as close to the "source" as possible when I study, work on my storytelling and consulting. I have hired Elizabeth Ellis and Nancy Donoval as personal coaches. I have attended workshops with Judith Black and Jay O'Callahan. All of these people are star performance storytellers I first saw at the National Storytelling Festival. I try to limit my use of "derivative" sources. We have such amazing talent available for such a low cost. Conferences can cost thousands, and the festival costs only \$150 for a full weekend. It is a great resource for learning and based in ancient "truths" craved by those adrift in numbers, money, and market reports.

**Corey Blake:** Barry Pearson's work with me in his Shakespeare classes at Millikin University meant the world to me. He used to make us parade on stage as we recited Shakespeare, moving in one direction until we hit a piece of punctuation and then we'd have to streamline on a different course. That exercise formed the basis of my understanding of the rhythm of words and has had a profound impact on my writing. My study with Jeff Goldblum and Christopher Liebe at Playhouse West was also inspiring. Chris had high standards that pushed me to my edge, and Jeff had a curiosity and playfulness that I adopted and still use to this day in my creative and business work. Ultimately, my clients are most influential to me. They walk away with a book, and I walk away feeling as though I have absorbed their wisdom. For story structure, I am a Syd Field fan. I love his simplicity. I'm a chameleon by nature, so I suppose that I have picked up thousands of useful tidbits from people who have no idea they have influenced me.

**Cathie Dodd:** My mom ... could tell a story and have the whole room drawn into every word. I have felt like I lived her life over and over again as I asked her to tell her stories. I never tired of hearing them. I cannot tell them like she could, but if I close my eyes and picture the story; I can hear every word she used to tell and exactly how she told it. Storytelling is an art, and she definitely knew the art of how to relate a story. I don't have that same talent in speech, but put me behind my computer and I can make my clients stories come alive with pictures, titles, music, and video. While I am working on a video, it's as if I put myself in my clients' life. In the end I feel that I have come to know them as I do my own family. I have created their story. When they come back and say to me it is perfect, I know I have captured exactly what they wanted to say.

**Sarah White:** I have been a member of the Association of Personal Historians since 2002. I have attended our annual conference every year, and served on the board 2004-2008. Why? This group has a remarkable culture of generosity. I've learned so much from my colleagues in APH.

**Rob Sullivan:** From a speaking perspective, the person whose storytelling work I admire most is

Doug Stevenson, the creator of Story Theater International.

The workshop with Doug was a terrific investment that changed the way I approached my workshops and keynotes. First, I discovered the magic of truly being myself as a speaker without worrying about what the audience might be thinking. Having gone through a variety of popular speaking programs, I was under the impression that speakers were always responsible for their audiences.

Doug doesn't believe that. Instead, he went as far as to say: "Some audiences suck."

I resisted at first. But later I realized he was right. Rather than worry about the audience, he says:

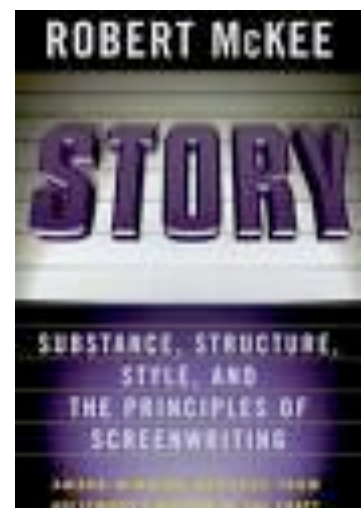
"Love yourself and let them watch."

In other words, do what you know works, and don't worry about the people watching. If you have fun, they'll have fun.

If that seems counterintuitive, look at it a different way. As storytellers, when we craft the message, we have to take the audience into consideration. But when we perform the message, we have to do what we know works.

Not long after the workshop, I proved to myself that Doug was right. I was doing a workshop for a crowded room of college students who, for the most part, sat there motionless. I'll never forget how surprised and disappointed I felt at their lack of responsiveness. Had I listened to the voice in my head from my early training, I would have spent the rest of the workshop exploring different ways to get their attention. Instead, I heard Doug's voice saying, "Love yourself and let them watch." So, I didn't change a thing. I did what I knew worked and did my best not to think too much about the audience. I wasn't feeling especially good about the session until three weeks later when the school called and said, "Everyone loved you. You are our top choice for commencement speaker." Had I changed my story or my approach, the commencement invitation would never have been extended. Thanks, Doug!

**Stewart Marshall:** My two favourite references are Steve Denning and Robert McKee. Steve has written extensively about springboard stories, storytelling in leadership, and many other applications. I use springboard stories a lot in my work; they become key components of any presentation or pitch. Steve's writing has also targeted business specifically, something I find to be a rich source of ideas and inspiration. Robert



McKee's book *Story* had a huge impact on me. Whether it's a formal presentation or a prepared speech I simply love the metaphor of screenwriting. One example of this is about preparation. The amount of work required to research your subject fully and understand as much as you can about the context really helps you deliver an authentic story. In a movie, it might be learning how people spoke to each other in for instance, 1920s Paris. In my work it might be about understanding the daily routine of a salesperson. The movies are all about connecting with the audience on an emotional level. The discipline and insight offered by McKee is to my mind directly applicable to financial storytelling.

**Melissa Wells:** As a career coach, my purpose with story work is to teach people how to imagine, communicate, and allow a different story about themselves into their lives. I'm most influenced by those who are not only good storytellers, but also passionate about another subject in life. One without the other is useless. Too often a speaker has something brilliant to say, but cannot express it (lack of storytelling skills). Or someone is an engaging storyteller, but doesn't know enough about the subject matter to create a lasting impact or establish credibility.

I'm influenced by variety. The scientist Gary Strobel tells stories about his discoveries, such as a microbe whose byproduct is the equivalent to diesel fuel. Al Gore took on a mammoth story-telling project to communicate his knowledge and passion. JetBlue and VirginAmerica created new stories about domestic air travel (for a frequent flier like me, this is no small feat, where US air travel is often less pleasant than the Madison Avenue bus at 6 o'clock). Conferences such as the EG and Adventures of the Mind feed me. I believe some of the most powerful storytellers are talented psychotherapists who get mentally ill clients to disengage from beliefs (stories) that cause debilitating pain. The truth is that my partner and husband, Mark Moffett, is my favorite storyteller. He uses the stories of his experiences in the wild to get people to fall in love with the little known in nature.



## Chapter 4: An Explosion of Storytelling?

To me, storytelling seems to be everywhere – more popular than ever and applied in more ways than ever – but that perception could be because I am more attuned to it. I wanted to know if practitioners felt storytelling is “exploding” at this time in our history, and if so why?

**Molly Catron:** When getting my master’s in storytelling from ETSU, I remember sitting in a class and hearing Dr. Joseph Sobol say, “Anthropologists say storytellers arise when the society has lost its way.” Wow, that resonated in every part of my body. I think too often storytellers do not understand the power they hold in the spoken word ... power to influence ... to inform ... to inspire ... to change. We are needed more than ever in this society, which, in my opinion, has somehow forfeited its soul in the name of progress.

Everything was mechanized in the Industrial Age. We became “human doings.” We severed our connections. We learned to praise logic and ridicule emotions. We became like our machines ... different parts operating separately at breakneck speed disregarding any interdependency. I think we long for the lost connection. We were not machines. Our emotions reflect our humanity. Without them we are cold and deep down within us, we feel the void and fill it with a lot of bad things. We want to love and be loved (warts and all). We want to share our experience with life. We need it to have meaning. Somehow, in that magical space between the teller and the listener, we feel that connection and once felt, it isn’t easily forgotten.

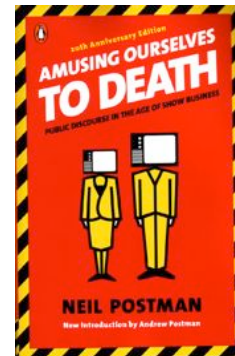
**Jim Ballard:** Not long ago I heard Bruce Springsteen say on “Larry King Live” that “When people are in trouble, they go to storytellers.” That intrigued me, because the link must be age-old. We certainly live in a time of confusion and uncertainty. I guess when people find themselves cut off from their accustomed assurances, their minds and hearts open to things they would have dismissed before. The usual image evoked to illustrate the age-old-ness of story is that of our ancient forbears around a fire, listening as someone spins a tale that helps them forget their hunger and cold, or the wolves at their backs. This time is no different than others, for today’s stories continue to take us away, entertain and inspire us. But this moment in history may be special. Perhaps a storyteller will arise that will do for our nation what Abraham Lincoln did for a farmer who said, “I went down there to Alton feelin’ pretty burdened, but ‘twan’t long after he begun to speak that I felt I had no troubles a-tall.”

My wife and I went to see “Joseph and His Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat” last night, and thrilled again at perhaps the greatest Bible story of all. It was about a storyteller, a man who could interpret dreams. He was ill-treated by his brothers, who sold him away into slavery, but in the end his

marvelous ability to reveal the meaning of dreams enabled him to save Israel. A story of how storytelling redeemed a nation. Perhaps it will happen again, Perhaps, in a world weary of scandal and subterfuge, a truth-teller will arise. Perhaps he already has.

**Jon Hansen:** I do not believe that [storytelling] is so much growing, but is rather in the early stages of a renaissance based on the need for people to connect at multiple levels of understanding. Social networks certainly provide the “architecture” for communication on a global basis; however, content, and more specifically meaningful content, has not yet caught up with the technology.

I often refer to Neil Postman’s book *Amusing Ourselves to Death* and in particular his reference to the fear Aldous Huxley expressed in his book *Brave New World*. The fear of course being that “truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance.”



Given the unfathomable sea of information afforded us through the Internet, storytelling is an invaluable resource as it provides the means for delivering substance and meaning in a form that can be readily grasped by the masses.

It reminds those of us who are willing to admit our true age of a time when the radio with tubes crackling and the dusty light from the station selection window took us on a journey of unlimited potential.

For today’s younger set, it provides that valuable link that spans generational experience, which is especially important since recent studies have found that it is not uncommon for four different generations of workers to be employed within the same organization.

No, I do not really think of storytelling’s appearance on our collective radar screens as being a product of growth, so much as it is a result of rediscovering our elemental roots of communicating.

**Gabrielle Dolan:** I think it comes down to two things. Firstly people are inundated with information; they are overloaded, and we have known this for a long time. I think leaders are starting to realise that it is not just enough to provide information; the very good leaders will help people make sense of the information, and story can help them do that.

Also, we hear more and more from leaders the challenges in managing and leading the Gen X and



Y workforce. This generation really wants to be inspired, challenged and motivated and again it is through story you can achieve this by showing them how they can make a difference and not just providing the reasons why things need to be down. Story is all about making the emotional connection.

**John Caddell:** There has been an immense amount of investment in the last 20 years in business-process re-engineering and process standardization and in IT systems and to support those initiatives. We've taken process improvement about as far as it can go. In fact, we've taken it a bit too far. With companies applying Six Sigma to things like sales processes (???), and not surprisingly achieving poor results, it is time to seek new tools. And narrative is a perfect tool to help shed light on complex questions (Is our reorganization helping the company to perform better? Is this a good or lousy place to work? Why aren't people buying our new product?).

Businesspeople are finally realizing that this "soft" tool actually has very practical and useful applications. A separate but important benefit of storytelling in the workplace is that it helps bring the whole person into the office. For most of history, work and personal lives were completely separate, not to be intermingled. Now, with telecommuting, flextime, job sharing, anywhere-anytime communication and global organizations, it's dysfunctional to keep work and home separated by a firewall. Storytelling, then, allows us to communicate who we are to our co-workers and managers, what we need, and how we can be more successful — not just more productive.

**Shawn Callahan:** Businesses have made tremendous progress in the past by dealing with their organisations as if they were machines. It was all about making the parts more efficient, oiling the cogs, turbo-charging the processes and pulling the right levers. But things are getting more complex, and the old ways of dealing with problems seem to be losing traction. People, particularly professionals (and there many more professionals in the workforce these days) hate to be told what to do. Consequently leaders are looking for new ways to understand what's really happening in their organisation, they are looking for better ways to engage and better ways motivate people. Stories are integral to the new ways of working in complex environments. They are effective as a way to work out what's happening. In our work we call this story listening. It's a kind of anthropological application of narrative. Then there is the skill of telling stories, which seems to have a tremendous effect in motivating people to take action. Business people are recognising the utility of stories.

**Madelyn Blair:** Life in the 21st century has begun to embrace the true complexity of life and the challenges that emerge from such complexity. Having been introduced to chaos theory, the world no longer sees itself the same. Problems no longer have smooth, clean edges, and trying to understand these more complex problems taxes the mind to just get the whole problem in the mind at one time. As one aspect of the problem enters the mind, another aspect leaves consciousness. At a time when the problems of the age are completely

overwhelming, having a means to at least take the problem into the mind is essential.

Story has the wonderful ability to capture great complexity into a simple form, allowing listeners to take in the concepts, ideas, challenges, without feeling overwhelmed. From this first step, the mind has the opportunity to explore the apparent ambiguities, the natural linkages, the interactions, and more by exploring the story. Because the story holds the problem in a container that can reside in the mind in its entirety, the mind is never turned off by the enormity of the problem. Partitioning of large, complex problems was the manner in which such problems were dealt with in the past. This partitioning is no longer possible if the problem is to be properly dealt with. Thus, being able to hold the problem in the mind all at one time is a breakthrough. Often unconsciously but not always, I feel that people appreciate this ability of story to help them deal with the complex issues of life. One could also say that story resonates because there has been a confluence of authors (Annette Simmons, Steve Denning, Rick Stone) and others (Karen Dietz, Seth Kahan, Victoria Ward) who have begun to articulate the power of story, offering ways and means of using story. This has been helpful as well, and one can never ignore this work. But in the end, it is the ability of story to capture the enormity of life's issues and our nascent understanding of the complexity of the universe that has come together. Oddly enough, early civilizations and cultures saw and used the same power of story to capture and hold great truths in the simple container of the story. Just check out any of the great Greek myths.

**David Vanadia:** It's the media. People who create media are going through tools at a rapid rate. Just 20 years ago students of a photography program in college were learning darkroom and film techniques. Today they're learning Photoshop. They upgrade cameras every year (if they can afford it), and the same thing has happened in other areas of focus. When your livelihood is threatened on a regular basis, and the tools you use are obsolete as soon as you purchase them, we examine what skill we can latch onto and develop through the changes. The one thing that everyone can do regardless of where or how they work is create and tell stories. By focusing on the storytelling aspect of their work a photographer, for instance, can use the latest format and still produce amazing photographs. By focusing on story, it doesn't matter if people use cell phones, RSS, webpages, newsletters, management meetings, or movie screens. Telling a story is something that everyone does and something to which everyone responds. It's all about the story, and now we can more easily discuss narrative via the Internet.

**Sharon Lippincott:** Several years ago I heard someone on NPR describe "The Confetti Generation." He explained with increasing diversity in our culture, more than 100 television stations to choose from, the Internet to take you anywhere in the world, and similar factors, society was becoming





fragmented, without much cultural cohesion. Connections between people were breaking down, and their souls were suffering. I think people are hungry to rebuild this sense of connection, and we are doing this through the medium of stories, whether oral or written.

My specialty is written stories. Computer technology seems to be the primary force in this current explosion of life writing. Few people would bother writing more than a few pages if they didn't have computers on their desks to make it easy to edit, compile, print, and share with an unlimited audience. Print-on-demand publishing has made it feasible to create bound books for about the same cost as photocopies. Technology is empowering people to realize dreams they wouldn't have had in the past.

Coupled with that, interest in genealogy has skyrocketed as people are now able to sit at their desk and search archives the world over, connecting with other researchers, sharing scans, and making contact with relatives they never knew they had. The realization that most ancestors have been reduced to nothing more than names on sketchy public records is sobering, and motivates many to take steps to ensure their descendants will know something about the person who bore that name.

Some are writing about the past in the hopes that a way of life will be encased in a written time capsule of sorts. In little more than 100 years, our nation has gone from horse-powered transportation to space probes. I want my descendants to know what life was like in the mid-twentieth century, and about changes that have occurred over the course of my life. I suspect that some drastic changes lie ahead rather soon, and I want them to know how those changes impacted me and people I know.

Finally, many are discovering that writing about their past brings richer meaning to it. They savor the good times and in retrospect often find hidden blessings in the darker moments.

**Ardath Albee:** I think there are a number of influences, but mostly I think the reason is the control people are exercising over selecting what information they spend their time with. There are more choices than ever before, people are busier with limited time, so why would they choose to spend that time on things that don't meet their needs?

The more personalized and relevant information is to the person presented with it, the more engagement is possible. Storytelling is in our genes. We tell ourselves stories every day to explain the world around us. We like to think we have control over our lives, our circumstances and our choices. The beauty of storytelling is that it allows us to put ourselves into the action. The more we can relate to a situation or character role, the more "real" that

situation is to us, and so are the possibilities it offers.

Dry statistics, facts, product features, technical details, etc., don't mean anything without context. Relevance directly correlates to the background information a person has available as recall. This is why change is so hard. If your audience can't "picture" the new way, then it's very hard to embrace. Businesses that can help people visualize the differences their products and solutions will make have a better chance at success.

To my way of thinking, visualization is storytelling.

**Carol Mon:** Humans have always used story to communicate, even when it was not recognized as "storytelling." Before the explosion of the written word there was the oral tradition. History, culture, ethics, morals, and traditions were all passed along through stories. It feels like we got lazy when books became so readily available and then music, movies and TV all conveying stories in different formats. As we got busier we lost patience to sit and listen and yet we humans all crave to have our story heard. Since the explosion of digital media people are finding it easy to write or record their stories for their descendants and by all accounts many are taking advantage of the technology.

Digital technology might be one answer as to why an explosion of storytelling now, but I believe there are several contributing factors to the renaissance. I don't believe we humans ever stopped telling stories; we just didn't always call it that. Marketers are now calling it storytelling and demonstrating how powerful a story is to making a message memorable. Since so many people don't feel heard the venues extended by companies to let customers tell their stories are growing in popularity. Customers feel a bit of celebrity and mostly they feel heard.

The development of technologies like PowerPoint also has inadvertently pushed the effort to bring back more stories. What seemed like a great communication tool has been overused and abused.

Audiences are lulled to sleep with dull slide after slide or dazzled with the technology and miss the point of the presentation. Experienced presenters are finding that the good old story is still the best way to get the message out.

Families are spread across the country; we communicate via email, text messaging, and quick hellos as we pass in halls, shops or even the home because of busy schedules. All very impersonal, yet



as humans we crave, and according to some studies, thrive on contact and interaction with others. Stories connect us and ground us. As we grow apart with over-scheduling and technology choices we also seek out ways to connect resulting in the explosion of the storytelling movement.

**Annette Simmons:** I think that our feelings of alienation from core human experiences arise from too much “virtual” reality and not enough real reality: TV, radio, texting, cellphones, restaurants, gyms ... all are substitutes for personal experiences like face-to-face interaction, growing and cooking food, hiking, experiencing labor that results in value (chopping wood), personal intimacy (stuck without TV forced to talk to family) ... all of these conveniences have created a shallow experience of being human. People crave depth. In business this shallow attachment (It isn’t personal) was drilled into us so we could make decisions that were inhumane (downsizing at Christmas) without having to *feel* inhumane. So ... we got what we wanted – limited intimacy increased convenience with life so that we don’t have to feel beholden, overwhelmed, or overly responsible. Unfortunately when we limit negative emotions we also limit positive feelings of trust, belonging, emotional safety. The back-end costs of reducing emotional inconvenience and increasing speed now leaves us craving depth, even a little hard work, or risked vulnerability so we can feel human again.

Story reintroduces intimacy and emotions to communications between people. It is a co-created acknowledgment that we (I, thou) are humans who feel, taste, touch, see, and hear in ways that make facts less important than who and what we love. Story gives us permission to take life personally again. Story reintroduces permission to care about what happens to others. Story allows our imperfections to be set in a context that shows we are still good people.

The business interest in storytelling is riding this “crave wave” as well as a parallel realization that designing messages that create emotions like desire, craving, and/or trust towards a product requires that the message tells a story. Nothing is important or unimportant to someone except for the story they tell themselves about it. You want your product to be important to a consumer? Inspire them to tell themselves a story about it that makes it personally relevant.

**Michael Margolis:** Humans have always been hard-wired for storytelling. In my opinion, storytelling is the evolutionary leap that led to the growth of culture, commerce, and civilizations. It just so happens we have reached a new inflection point in our collective evolution.

The implications of Web 2.0 and technological innovation on humankind are staggering. As I like to describe it, “the means of story production have become democratized”. Consider that just 10 years ago – email, cell phones, websites, blogs, digital cameras, Facebook, video cameras, etc – either didn’t exist or certainly weren’t ubiquitous part of our everyday lives. Now, anybody who has a story to tell can choose from countless affordable, sophisticated, and easy-to-use platforms to get

their story out to the world. Now getting people to listen to your stories, that’s another matter. In a complex, interdependent world where worldviews and value systems collide, we naturally turn to storytelling as our most basic coping mechanism for making sense and meaning of everything around us. We are swimming in a sea of stories, trying to find our way in a universe and commercial marketplace of infinite choices. Have you counted lately how many types of toothpaste you can choose from on the supermarket shelf? That’s a lot of competing storylines from the most mundane to the sacred.

**Susan Luke:** Stories have been used since the beginning of time, in one form or another for one very important reason — they are universal and speak to our humanity. This moment in our history is significant because, as a planet, we are in a place we never imagined and we yearn for comfort, understanding, reason, and most of all *hope*. Stories give us all of that and more, allowing us to reflect on the past, imagine the future, and accept the changes brought about by the challenges of today.

Much continues to be said about the ability of President Obama to speak and relate to all levels of people. It is my belief that he does that as much through his “orastory” as through his intense focus, extensive research, organizational ability, and presentation skills as anything. In my experience, leaders who are as good at shaping and using stories as they are at collecting and analyzing data, have a much easier time guiding the behaviors and decision making necessary for a healthy, forward-thinking organization. We are our stories, and now is the moment we are recognizing that and sharing who we are with others in are increasingly shrinking world.

**Cathie Dodd:** I think stories have always been there; it’s just now people feel more disconnected than any time in history. With divorces, many are searching for family roots. Also I have heard it said that people are more in a cocoon state. With crime and terrorism many people feel safer to stay home. But they reach out to strangers through email and social networks. A good way to connect with people on social networks is with stories.

Stories draw families together, help them remember their past, their good memories, their sense of family, even if it isn’t “perfect,” the stories make it theirs. Stories also make perfect strangers draw closer to you, give that person on the other side of the keyboard a personality, and more depth. It helps them relate with you, and feel they know you.

**Sarah White:** In our world of 24/7 news feeds, social media, etc., we are trying to drink from a firehose of information, and we’re finding ourselves bowled over yet still thirsty. I believe this is because we perceive there is “no time for story” — we’re served up information in a cut-to-the-chase, just-the-facts-ma’am style and it is simply not meeting our needs. The



storytelling movement is about restoring — “re-story-ing” if you will — a more authentic means of learning from each other and drawing meaning from our own experiences.

**Katie Snapp:** Storytelling has been around since the beginning of time and was critical because it was the primary medium for passing along culture, history, lore, lessons learned. I believe we are simply re-labeling it and deploying it just a little differently.

Now that we have such powerful communications tools, it is still as important, but more massive than we can digest. So, we find those areas that we can relate to. We find the channels (blogs, websites, newsletters) where there are people to which we can personally relate. The stories have always been there, but now we have vast media to broadcast them.

Corporate storytelling is new on the scene though, at least in title. Take anything you might have previously labeled as “rumor” or “bad customer experience” and refine it a little. It makes a *great* story when told with the key elements of storytelling — which include plot, people, problem, place, emotion, and hopefully the eventual solution.

**Whitney Quesenbery:** In my world of user experience — which usually means technology-mediated experiences — I think it’s about finding ways to connect. We are craftspeople, in the sense that we make things for other people to use. But we often have a very tenuous relationship with those people.

Think about how strange it is to have a group of people working on software or a web application who have no real, practical understanding of the daily lives of the people who will use what they create. This is very different from the lives of traditional crafts people. When you built a house, or made a tool, you could see and touch the world and lives it would be part of.

Technology is such a paradox; it allows us to connect in so many new ways, but it also allows us to be apart.

Stories are a way of rebuilding that connection. There are many ways to tell user experience stories: personas, scenarios, comics, storyboards. They are all ways of letting us see more than just the technology we work with and give us a window into the context of the user experience.

This is increasingly important now because of how pervasive technologies are in our lives. We need to understand all the possibilities and variations. Stories help us do that.

**Stephane Dangel:** We hear a lot about “narrative turn.” I don’t see storytelling as a turn, but as a story “to be continued.” Organizational storytelling is a modern form of the very ancient art of

storytelling, adapted to contemporary needs. Storytelling is not a revolution; it has accompanied evolutions. As Robert McKee [pictured] says, “stories are the currency of human relationships,” basically.



Marketing, management, and other disciplines integrate some structured narrative dimension because the focus is now on these disciplines as the focus was in bartering (with a strong narrative dimension) yesterday when bartering was the way things were going on in the world. So it’s somewhat natural.

Another dimension is related to “the quest for sense.” We hear a lot about the lack of sense. I think it’s more a lack of sense quest, because sense quest is complex and time spending. As storytelling is already deeply anchored into each of us, it’s a relatively low-cost solution to engage in sense quest. So it’s a solution for lazy people, but lazy, that’s what we are all, and it’s not negative. A problem occurs when corporations are extremely lazy, so they only grab and arrange stories in a database, instead of pursuing the quest till the patterns-finding stage.

**Sean Buvala:** Storytelling has been bedrock to all cultures through history. In that, I mean the process of telling a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end to convey a particular thought, a societal idea or to entertain. With the advent of so many electronic communications, people are just growing more aware of their need for deeper communication and connectedness. Our neighbors are no longer the people who live next door. Now, neighbors are the communities and people we self-select. Since so many people are now engaged in long-distance communities, families and friends spread out, people are feeling a lack of something in their day-to-day existence. That longing is being met in sharing of story in its many forms.

There are many folktales that talk about wholeness or one person separated into two beings. It is only by coming to terms with one’s story and wrestling with oneself that these two parts can be made whole. Our stories are native and entwined in each of us.

I am not so sure “storytelling” is growing explosively. I know that the use of the word “storytelling” is growing at a rapid clip, and it is being applied to all forms of communication. Therefore, now, everyone who shares any idea at all is a “storyteller.” I think this does a disservice to other art forms. For me, storytelling is the “mother” of all other communications. A person who excels at writing a story is an author, not a storyteller. A person who creates great videos is not a “digital storyteller” but rather a gifted filmmaker. There has been a dilution of the word storytelling. If everything we do is storytelling, then nothing is

storytelling. I am neither a gifted author nor a filmmaker and do not wish to be. I am a storyteller, and my work needs the presence of an audience right in front of me. Without an audience and immediate interaction, then whatever the artist is doing is not storytelling. It may be any of many other gifted and needed art forms.

I am critiqued for expressing my understanding of what is and is not story. Essentially, I am accused of keeping people "out of the tent." That is not my intention at all. "Story" has many ways to be expressed and there are tents all over the field. In my tent, story is presented in an oral expression (or ASL manual communication) called storytelling that requires a live audience of at least one person. Over there, there's another tent filled with talented filmmakers expressing story. In a third tent, maybe there are talented dancers, scrapbookers, or authors. I do not want to dilute any of the art forms by having to cram us all into the same metaphorical tent. I want the freedom to go enjoy the filmmakers in their tent and maybe even join them in a few attempts of my own. I also know that all the artists in those other tents will benefit by coming and learning foundational things in the storytelling tent.

I think I know that we in the storytelling communities have lost grip on the word "storytelling" and I am banging a drum that no one will really hear. Nevertheless, my place in life is to call the crowd to many different ways of thinking and says, "Look over here." I would be untrue to my art and myself if I did anything less.

**Annie Hart:** The indigenous peoples from every tradition, had a prophecy that this would be a time of great change. They literally had that recorded in their stories and their calendars of this time. They are in agreement that this time has finally come and that it is up to us to create a new future. And how else do you create a new future but by using story? Stories create our cultural paradigms, the norms by which we live. If you think about it the world is built on stories. That is why I believe the time is now and that we need stories more than ever. We need a new story to live by.

It's intriguing to me that storytelling is spreading like wildfire in the area of business, particularly for use in marketing. Storytellers have always known its power, but finally the rest of the world is catching on. Savvy media gurus have come to realize that storytelling is the quickest and most relevant way to share information. Its ability to cross cultures and to spread ideas and information is unparalleled. The time for story has truly come. The last reason for storytelling being so relevant in today's world is because everything is speeding up. Everything is quicker, especially communication. Just look at Twitter for example. It's basically a medium for a 140-character story. In today's faster paced time, storytelling is essential because captures the listener. It is the deepest and most lasting form of communication known to humankind.



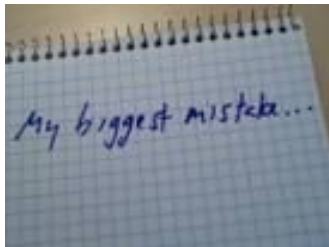
## Chapter 5: Social-media Storytelling

Some of the many emerging social-media venues (such as Facebook, Twitter, Second Life, YouTube, blogs) bill themselves as storytelling applications. Practitioners weigh in on the storytelling characteristics of social media and discussed their own participation.

**Jessica Lipnack:** I keep [the blog] Endless Knots, an active blog, am on LinkedIn (though I'm trying an experiment there where I only accept inbound links but don't actively link to others), Facebook, and, yes, I have my avatar on Second Life, plus a bunch of others. You're telling your story everywhere you appear online — when you write your profile, list your favorite music, post your pictures or videos. All of it together becomes your story.

Of these, the blog is the most powerful storytelling device for me — and, I think, for some of my friends in professional positions. (Much as I'd like to make films, I'm not a filmmaker — yet ☺.) The power of storytelling for executives cannot be overemphasized. One colleague is using his blog to help transform his hospital's culture — and clinical outcomes — simply by telling the ongoing story of what's happening in his academic medical center.

**John Caddell:** I use storytelling all the time in my blog — perhaps 50 percent of the posts have a narrative component. Twitter is all narrative to me — like an online diary of minutiae. YouTube is a great home for storytelling. It's so much more powerful to hear and see a storyteller than to read the words on a page. The social-network tools aren't very storytelling-focused (except for the "what are you doing?" bits they stole from Twitter). My site, The Mistake Bank [<http://mistakebank.ning.com/>; you may have to join to see the site], is in a social network form, but is story-driven. It's first-person stories from members, and the social-network features make it easy to discuss stories and share experiences connected with the stories.



**David Vanadia:** I feel that all media is storytelling media. That's what media is. Media is a way to tell stories over distances of time and space. I take part in web 2.0 by creating my own website and maintaining it to the best of my ability. I take part in some social networking sites but mostly it makes my head want to explode. I don't have time to wake up every day and Twitter on Twitter, connect on Facebook, link in on LinkedIn, and make friends

on MySpace. I look at the web like the suburbs. I take care of my own yard. Social networks are like nightclubs where you're trying to pick up as many people as possible and bring them home with you. Although some people live there ...

**Ardath Albee:** I think a lot of blogs are storytelling venues. I also think a lot of them are thinly veiled sales/marketing content vehicles. The difference is in the personal tone and style of the author(s) and their intent/focus for the blog.

When a blog post is written in a way that gives you a glimpse of the person behind it, someone whom you can relate to, the engagement is higher. Whether it's because they agree or disagree doesn't matter. Although lots of people try to avoid controversy. I know I've written some posts where I took a stand I knew would be in conflict, hit publish, and then worried that I'd upset someone. Turns out that those posts are the most fun and the ones people respond to and talk about on their own blogs.

Best of all, blogs allow people to voice opinions, extend other ideas and express themselves. And, in a world that's increasingly putting distance between people by becoming more virtual, it's important to build a new social structure to maintain a level of involvement that helps you feel a part of it.

There are a lot of different ways to tell stories. Every impression you make online tells a story. Whether it's a picture, an article, a video or the comments made linking to someone else's "story." All those interactions become a cumulative representation of your (or your company's) story.

LinkedIn is a bit harder to define. You can have a profile and never do another thing. Or you can answer questions and search for and add connections at dizzying speeds. The question I have about those who add anyone and everyone to their contact lists is — what's the value? Is it like being the most popular kid in school, or do you really know and maintain relationships with all those people?

That said, I've also met and done business with connections made on LinkedIn. As in all things, I think it's in how you use them. How you choose to present your profile is currently the biggest story you tell on LinkedIn. How you answer questions is giving that a run for its money, in my opinion. For example — your profile may look great, but if your extended story is displayed through argumentative answers to questions, without substantiation for your opinions, I'm going to think twice about wanting to do business with you.

Twitter is still up in the air for me. I love the shortness of 140 characters, but I haven't quite figured out the value of knowing what people are doing all the time.

I also think there's a lot of storytelling going on in the ways customers review and rate products, like

electronics or books. From a B2B perspective, think user/customer forums. You can learn a lot about what resonates and what doesn't. And, if you look closely, you can learn a lot about the people posting the comments. It's a great view into how well the story of a company plays with its customers.

**Jon Buscall:** I like social media and participate through blogging and Twitter, but I'm not a fan of Facebook. I think I almost burst a blood vessel the day I got an invitation to be "friends" from someone that used to bully me at school. Still, it's a useful way of keeping in touch with the friends I do have. Blogs and Twitter are incredibly important, though, to the work I do, and I do think they are storytelling media. Each post shows your audience who you are; it helps you tell your story step by step, one post at a time.

I started out blogging back in 1999 on LiveJournal. It was anonymous and a way of sharing my diary with a small group of friends. As I readily embraced the Net, however, I moved more and more of my writing online. As part of a creative-writing program I ran at Stockholm University between 2000-2004, I encouraged all my students to blog regularly. Looking back I can see that we used those blogs to encourage each other in our writing journey but also as searchable online notebooks. This wasn't storytelling. It was a way of building a resource for "real" writing.

Nowadays I see blogs as having a variety of uses and one of them is storytelling for businesses. Blogs are wonderful ways of giving an insight into who



you are and what you do. Even for companies, organizations, schools, etc. I helped a local senior high school, for example, turn to blogs to promote themselves and generate interest in who they are. I also blogged the story of a litter of basset hounds, posting a picture each day at

[www.bassethounds.nu](http://www.bassethounds.nu). This brought me into contact with buyers but also has led to things like an invitation to participate in a podcast about dogs. My long-term ambition is to combine more of my writing with my love of dogs so this has been very useful in helping me grow that side of my business. Twitter is a much newer phenomena and one I've readily embraced in the last six months. Very quickly I've found it's a way of entering into a dialogue with people. I don't like the spammy aspect of it and don't believe that regularly offering or promoting your services on Twitter works. But I've found that talking about the story of my daily life — whether that involves translating, journalism, breeding basset hounds, or consulting with businesses — has led to work. So, yes, I do see how Twitter can be a storytelling medium, one tweet at a time, building a variety of narratives, showing people what your story is.

In real terms I can say that in 2008 blogging and Twitter landed me three major deals that helped me grow my business.

I encourage any small business to embrace blogging and Twitter, but you have to be in it for the long haul. It takes time to build relationships and grow your online public story. People buy or hire your services when they get a sense of who you are and what you do. If your story fits theirs.

**Corey Blake:** I am on Twitter, Facebook, Ping, YouTube, and about 15 other sites. My blog feeds into each of those profiles, so obviously I am a believer. Bea Fields is at the cutting edge of social networking, and I am privileged to watch what works and what doesn't through her experimentation and insight. My marketing director is actually taking a 12-week course with Bea to increase her understanding in this area, which undoubtedly I will be fortunate to gain from!

I was reflecting on [social media as storytelling] the other day while going through my Twitter account and looking at what people I follow were talking about. I started to sense that there was a story developing around each of them. Little pieces of insight about a person that build over time and create a story about who they are, what they believe in, what they are terrified of, and what they are chasing or running away from. In a sense, social media is the building of character bibles; little bits are revealed over time that eventually build a three-dimensional impression of someone.

Facebook is the same. I especially love finding old friends from my youth and slowly morphing what I remember about them with these delicious morsels I learn about their new lives. A new story merges with the old. If anything, social networking has proven my theory that there are six billion people on the planet, and every single one of them has a story to tell!

**Mike Wittenstein:** Like many others, I'm experimenting with various kinds of social media. The hardest part for me is determining the right formula for time spent and value received by others — and for my business. For people who market by their names, such as authors, doctors, speakers, trainers, accountants, and many other professionals, I have found a name-promotion service by QAlias to be extremely effective. They have a deal with the major search engines to put your name at the very top of the left hand side of Google, Yahoo, Microsoft and other search engines. Try it. Google "Mike Wittenstein" and see what happens. Sign up and you can get the same results.

Someone recently told me about the notion of "ambient awareness." It's an academic term that describes our interest in the small and continuous goings-on of others. Much like a soap opera, where we sit glued to the TV screen to find out what happens next to one of the doctors in "General Hospital," Twitter, micro-blogging, LinkedIn, many of the social media sites give us the opportunity to read a diary-like synopsis of our friends' lives. The disadvantage may be the clutter of intermittent interruptive communications. The advantage may be a sense of connectedness it seems to generate. I remember mentioning to someone I hadn't seen for a while something about the details of their life I learned on-line. They smiled. So did I.



What will become of all this social media, innovation, and energy? It's too early to say, but, if this "stuff" goes the same way as software, sites that are popular today may become features of larger programs tomorrow. It's been that way with traditional software, with automobile brands, and in financial services for many years. I don't see that pattern changing very much with regard to social media.

I also believe that the staccato nature of this kind of storytelling makes it more important for each of us to become better communicators. In order to be understood by others, especially over long spans of time, we have to learn how to say what we mean and mean what we say.

**Cathie Dodd:** All these sites allow you to blog, and what are blogs, but stories about you? Some of them actually have regular columnists that contribute stories about themselves or a subject, and then allow people to interact with that story by adding their comments. The same is true of the video-viewing sites, and YouTube actually has a feature that allows you to watch a video and comment back with your own video. So now you can video back and forth your stories.

**Casey Hibbard:** I'm still exploring how story fits into this new development.

They all have the potential to be storytelling media but in different ways. Some formats are more suited to telling a complete story in a single serving, such as blogging and YouTube. Others are more about building a story about yourself, your business or your brand in bite-size pieces, such as on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

What's fascinating is that they're all interactive. Stories are not just told, but people can immediately comment and add to the understanding, or share their own similar stories. In my realm of marketing communications, this is unprecedented access and communication between an organization and its audiences. It's part of a greater movement of authenticity and bringing down barriers. They're letting go of control of every single word, and the result is impressive. Many companies are also now creating their own online communities that foster relationships and storytelling between their customers.

I think organizations have to find ways of weaving story into social media without sounding too contrived. A company can share a story on its blog or link to a YouTube video from Facebook, but ideally their customers are the ones freely sharing the stories and links in social media venues. The most compelling stories will be ReTweeted and shared again on any of a number of other sites like Reddit, StumbleUpon, etc. That's when the real momentum starts to happen.

**Sean Buvala:** I like Twitter (and I have the fun ID of @storyteller) for the immediacy of having some

very smart people sending bits and pieces of wisdom and fun my way. I enjoy podcasting as a way to let people think about ideas. Although audio stories in podcasts in themselves are not storytelling, recorded pieces do open the door to live interaction. I have had some fun with YouTube, most recently making a video-podcast of our "gestures" training. Storyteller.net embraced technology and storytelling very early on. I love seeing what's next in the tech world since I am one of the "early adopters" we keep hearing about.

**Stewart Marshall:** Some are more effective as storytelling media than others, but most of them have a role to play. Twitter for instance, is very interesting. It can give you insight into the stories of those you follow. It reminds me of a series of photographs. Each individual picture can speak a thousand words, but it is the stream of photographs that exposes the true story. It also works the other way around. What does the collection of people you follow say about your own story?

Blogs are another example, whose story has changed itself. Now I am seeing a lot longer entries than in previous years. Writers seem to be articulating in more details the thoughts and ideas they have. In many cases they really are exploring the story. Web-based tools like FriendFeed are also story aggregators, pulling large parts of the Internet from multiple sources into one easily digestible place. Collectively the tweets, blog entries, shared items, photos, status updates, etc., provide you with an ongoing and live story where you can choose your level of involvement. If you do get involved (by commenting for instance) the story becomes interactive, which is really exciting!

**Annie Hart:** I am a former technophobe and I thought Twitter was the most ridiculous thing I'd ever heard of. But then through a personal transformation, in which I forced myself to get up to speed on technology, I've become a social media queen! One of my mentors recently said to me, "You're on fire as a Web presence!" He couldn't believe how I have been using blogging, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn to make my work known in the world.

Now I'm having so much fun using blogging and social media that I'm even teaching it to others! What a riot. A lot of people of my generation have a fear and a distaste of social media. I try to hold their hands while they learn and I make it fun for them. I use a lot of social media now. It's one of the mainstays of my business. By the way, blogging is the most fantastic medium for storytelling!



## Chapter 6: Troubling Uses of Storytelling

Practitioners talk about uses of storytelling they found inappropriate.

**Terrence Gargiulo:** Stories can be used as weapons. Given their persuasive and emotional qualities they can be used to spin messages and misrepresent things. This sort of behavior eventually rears its ugly head, as in the case of short-term forms of self-serving manipulation, but it can be hard to detect or fend off. I see some of these types of abuses in the brand, marketing, and corporate communications arenas.

I also lose patience with some of the overly simplistic ways we all get sucked in to when we use stories to encode information in a moralistic fashion. I am just as guilty of this as the next person. Using stories to land a message or sound the trumpet of change and rally the troops around a single campfire reeks of top down command and control applications of didactic forms of communications. I'm not suggesting we never use stories to help illustrate points but such uses only scratch the surface. I see too many of these abuses in the field of leadership development and personal growth.

One way of discerning the difference between more traditional forms of communications and story-based ones is shown in a table that can be found at:

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/9656489/Comparison-Traditional-Communications-StoryBased-Terrence-Gargiulo>

Think of story-based communication strategies as cloud chambers in your organization...

*(Cloud Chamber — apparatus that detects high-energy particles passing through a supersaturated vapor; each particle ionizes molecules along its path and small droplets condense on them to produce a visible track [definition courtesy of [www.answer.com](http://www.answer.com)])*

They create a space of dialogue and sense-making. This "story space" is where people interact with each other's stories in different ways. Some interactions might occur as people reflect and react to organizational collaterals peppered with stories; some interactions might happen when we create formal and informal opportunities for people to respond to the stories we use to incite dialogue; and still other interactions; once we have put the initial stories out there, will happen without us doing anything whatsoever to orchestrate them. As stories elicit more stories by bouncing off of each other, organizational trajectories of meaning and understanding emerge. People's actions provide a visible albeit subtle and ghostly trace of the impact of story-based communications.

Stories are not another lever in a machine. Machines or systems take known controlled inputs that produce reliable and consistent outputs. Stories are more chaotic. Once you stir up or perturbate the social fabric of individual nodes of sense-making (aka the people in an organization) unexpected behaviors emerge. What is lost in control is gained in the propagating strength of the communication signal and the rolling waves of self-directed behaviors it has the potential to create. Communications function less like instructions and more like picture frames waiting to be filled with collages of vibrant photographs.

I see the world through a lens of stories. The world unfolds as translucent, crisscrossing patterns of possibilities and meanings. It is my intuitive eye, fueled by my commitment to listen deeply, which sorts through this overwhelming array of perceptions. Here there is a mingling of vulnerabilities, differences, tensions, and myriad intersecting points of connections. It is this self-sustaining structure-less structure that potentiates powerful dialogues that lead to solutions. I want to write and perform the dynamic melodies and harmonies that resonate for others and call them to the dance of life.

When working with a group that wants to delve into stories I will throw up some images on a screen like a rotating diamond with light streaming through it, a strand of DNA, raindrops hitting a pond of water, holograms, or a visualization of zooming in and out on a mandelbrot set. I will invite the group to



work with the images and suggest how they provide insights into the nature of stories beyond the obvious ways people are accustomed to thinking about them. Instead of offering definitions I will talk about some of the functions of stories and the effects of these functions shown [in the table here: <http://makingstories-storymatters.blogspot.com/2009/06/nine-functions-of-stories.html>]

Let me close by offering the following: Stories fold in and out of themselves to reveal subtle worlds of meanings, purpose, and connections.

They are gentle transporters bound by time but that travel beyond the boundaries of what we have experienced at any given point in time.

Stories free us to move through a landscape of change. We leave the dusty road of the familiar and embrace a void where we can find the freedom to choose and perceive new realities and project worlds of our own making.

Stories can either crush illusions we have become enslaved to due to habit or they can lift our veils of fear and familiarity and give us a glimpse of new ways of being. Here we will find a place where we

can be our unique selves while in communion with others.

**Stephanie West Allen:** [Stories] that don't come from the heart [are inappropriate]. When you ask yourself, "Wonder what book on storytelling he/she read to prepare this?" Lots of the stories used by motivational speakers. Stories that lead with the desire to manipulate. Getting someone to do something is often a good time for a story but if that is the only motivation and the teller lacks the connection factor, I tune out — or walk out.

**Madelyn Blair:** When the news media manipulate the story, I am outraged. Stories are used to tell a truth or a fact in a manner that helps the listener get beyond his or her biases. Thus, the implied truth or fact assumes higher credence when told as part of a story. When the news media purposefully alter stories either through commission or omission, it is a violation of the trust that citizens place in the news media. Their range of influence is broad, and their sense of responsibility should reflect this reality.

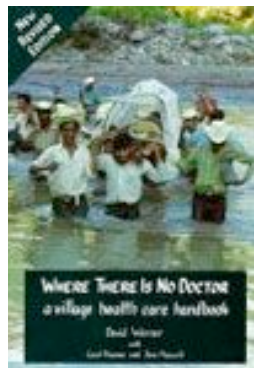
**David Vanadia:** It's the so-called "repulsive" uses of storytelling that are even more fascinating to me because these areas are overlooked or ignored, yet most often play a vital role in being human.

**Cynthia Kurtz:** I'm sad about how much packaged entertainment and crafted messages have changed our world. Sheet music and novels were met with wide condemnation when they came out because it was said people would no longer come up with their own music and stories. The people condemning those media would hardly recognize the world of today, where it seems people have barely a thought to themselves but spend their time listening to other people sing, watching other people play games, and hearing what other people think. With kids it's even worse. It's a difficult task to keep our children from being inundated by media-generated images, which erode their innate abilities to create their own stories and worlds.

When I found the excellent book, *Where There Is No Doctor*, the paragraph that surprised me the most was this one:

Today in over-developed as well as under-developed countries, existing health care systems are in a state of crisis. Often, human needs are not being well met. There is too little fairness. Too much is in the hands of too few.

In the same way that people in the "over-developed" countries have given doctors too much control over their health and reduced their ability to heal themselves, people (mostly in those same countries) have given commercial imaginers too much control over their imagination and reduced their ability to make up their own stories.



The other day I came across an review in *Parenting* magazine of story cards that solve the problem "we all face" of having a child ask for a story and "coming up blank." What? Why should any healthy adult be incapable of making up a story? Isn't there something wrong there? I don't think people have lost the ability to tell stories as much as they have lost the expectation that it is their place to tell stories. I don't know how many times I've heard people balk at being asked to tell stories because they don't think their stories are good enough to be "real stories." Would that have been true a hundred years ago? A thousand? Of course there have been storytellers since the beginning of time, but I don't think there has ever been a time when ordinary people were so removed from ordinary storytelling. I would like to see people get back to telling more of their own stories, singing more of their own songs, and playing more of their own games. Having said all that, I do believe that crafted stories have their place in the world, as they always have. Long ago, when to tell crafted stories you had to memorize long epics and travel from town to town to tell them in person, it was difficult for crafted storytelling to get out of balance; but things are far out of balance now. I'm not sure how to set that balance right again, but I do have two suggestions. The first is that people who find they tell stories well and want to do so professionally should do the hard work to get it right. They should respect stories, make them their own, and work with integrity, passion, and care.

Second, professional storytellers (and others working with narrative in other ways) should never allow themselves to believe that any crafted story is better or more entitled to be a "real story" than anyone's raw personal story. Storytellers should radiate respect for raw stories of personal experience. It would be wonderful if all the professional storytellers out there could think about making it part of their responsibility to find more ways to help people tell their own stories. I applaud everyone who gives adult education classes about writing memoirs or putting together family stories, and I'm excited when I see people sharing personal stories online, and I am encouraged by projects like StoryCorps and books like *Gig: Americans Talk about Their Jobs* (of which there are far too few) that help raw stories of personal experience get to where they need to go. I hope more people will get involved in such things in the future; maybe then the balance can be restored.

**Cathie Dodd:** I don't like dirty jokes, and I don't like stories that are basically bragging. These are just self-serving stories that have no benefit.

**Thaler Pekar:** Advocates must take care to share stories that further their true agenda; it's too easy to share stories that result in quick fixes as opposed to systemic change and sustainable support. Stories that elicit a purely sympathetic response can ultimately distance people from deeper societal problems.

I want people to embrace my client's solution because it is the right thing for them to do, because the solution my client is offering makes perfect sense given their value system. This will elicit a

much more profound and lasting response than their doing something because they feel they have to. People don't want to be told what to do; they want to discover it on their own.

I go into some depth about this in my article, "Framing for Advocacy Communications," available on the Tools page of my web site: <http://thalerpekar.com/tools.php>

Also, if non-profit organizations are going to share compelling stories and elicit emotional responses, I implore them to please remember to give the listener something to do!

Too often, audiences are engaged — and then dropped; the story sharer fails to invite the listener to be a part of the solution. I see this, especially, with visual storytelling: too many videos offering up compelling stories but failing to invite the viewer to participate in the solution.

This is the "hand" part of my practical Heart, Head & Hand™ approach to persuasive communications: place something in the listener's hand at the close of the communication. Invite them to be a part of your solution. For example, ask them to donate, purchase, volunteer, visit, call their Senator, or, simply, think about the issue.

**Andrée Iffrig:** I have been listening to stories in professional and personal settings for more than 20 years. That experience has led me to some firm convictions about the kind of stories that are productive and life-changing. It is with dismay that I read some of the commonly-accepted literature in the business community. Some of these corporate experts in storytelling are condescending to employees; reading their books, I have the impression that storytelling for them is about spin and marketing.

While storytelling can definitely be used for these purposes, I believe the future of organizations lies with employees who become accountable for creating workplaces where people like to work. *Find Your Voice at Work* is a call to arms: an invitation to employees to find their voices, be genuine and support each other.

The fall of the old economic order and Obama's election are two signs that all of us who care about employee and community wellbeing need to find our voices and stand up for what we believe in. It's time to create new paradigms for development. Storytelling in peer or community settings can help us find common ground for repairing and healing a broken world.



**Stephane Dangel:** Not everything is storytelling, but storytelling is able to be integrated in almost everything.

What I see, especially in France, is that some users in the political area have written the screenplay of a soap, and they even have already shot season 1, 2, 3, and more in advance. How could such a practice operate within an ever-changing world? It doesn't fit the very basics of storytelling requirements. It's like displaying, say today, an episode of a soap featuring Saddam Hussein, head of Iraq, as if he was still there. Irrelevant and ridiculous.

**Karen Dietz:** Storytelling has immense power to both heal and harm. It bothers me to no end that as a profession, we aren't actively discussing examples of great organizational story work and those that are deficient or abysmal. What passes for organizational stories/storytelling in a lot of cases is just pure junk. It's terrible. Too many people treat stories and storytelling many times as if it is trivial, instead of immensely powerful. People with no or very little training think they can effectively work with stories and storytelling in an organization, which creates only mediocre results, I'm afraid. And we rarely talk about the dark side of story — those times when stories are deliberately used to harm and destroy others.





## Chapter 7: Transformational Storytelling

Practitioners share favorite stories of transformations that resulted from stories or storytelling acts.

**Loren Niemi:** Megan Wells, Nancy Donoval, and I did a project with DDB advertising focused on financial and wealth-management services. The creatives were skeptical that we had anything to offer them that they did not already know but as part of our metaphorical examination of wealth, I told "Rumpelstiltskin" and described the challenge the Miller's daughter faced (turning straw into gold) as "an impossible task needing to be done in an unreasonable time." There was an audible gasp that went through the room which was confirmed when we talked about the story – that phrase described their situation, their feelings. They were the Miller's daughter expected to turn straw into gold. From that moment on, the tone changed and everyone in the room was engaged in the same task for the same ends.

**Madelyn Blair:** I wrote a paper on this called "Renewable Energy: How story can revitalize your organization."  
[<http://homepage.mac.com/pelerei/pelerei/publications/jqp0406blair.pdf>] It is all about finding stories inside words, and allowing the stories to reenergize even redefine the words. I have used this technique in several situations to great effect.

**Sharon Benjamin:** One of my favorite transformative moments — when story was key to transforming a group — came in a group of storytellers. Golden Fleece, a DC-based group of people interested in narrative in organizational settings, used to meet once a month, for an in-person conversation about uses and applications of narrative — it was an interesting, interested group, and extremely diverse — held together almost solely by a topical interest in story. Many people in the group didn't know (m)any others — there were times when it was clear that the group was having trouble navigating among its many roles — was it an "Association of Organizational Storytellers" a "community of storytellers" or all of these things at different times for different reasons ... these were rich questions that many of us discussed, contemplated, and navigated.

Anyway, one night, Kelly Cresap [pictured], was facilitating and asked the group to think about a time when "they got unstuck" then tell that story (in triads) to one another. After a couple rounds of sharing, it was clear that something big was shifting in the group — Kelly closed the evening by having 3 or 4 people — chosen by the group (re)tell their story to the full group — and in the hush of the circle — looking around at



the expectant, rapt faces of both the listeners and tellers, it became so clear that the shift in the group was enormous — from the professional body armor many of us came in wearing, to the emergence of wonder and heart.

The whole session didn't last more than three hours, and yet, hearing tales of derring-do (of the heart, mind and body) in how people got themselves unstuck created a lovely spirit of recognition and learning and authentic camaraderie in that space.

**Cathie Dodd:** I am going to share a story told by one of my clients who we created a memorial video for her father's funeral:

I heard from one of our customers this morning and she told me about a showing of one of our videos. Her story gave me chills. I had created a video for her father's memorial. They decided to play it at her brother's house afterwards. They played it in his family room and kept it playing over and over again for hours.

During all that time, her mother sat a watched the video over and over again. For a number of years her mother has had Alzheimer's and hasn't even recognized her own children. But her daughter told me as she watched this, her face started to light up. She used music that was all her father's favorites, and her mother started moving to the music.

After a while she started recognizing her husband and her children on the screen. By the end of the evening she was telling people, this is my daughter. She was recognizing all her kids. Her daughter said it was amazing how she reacted to the video. She called me to talk to me about creating her mother's story now. She wants to do this while her mother can still respond to it.

Even now this story is getting me emotional. To know that something I created allowed these kids to have connection with their mother again. That is priceless!

**Sarah White:** In 2006 I was asked to help a community center preserve the stories of the people it serves. Not sure how to begin, I founded a "History Club" and began inviting people to join us for reminiscing about neighborhood history. Young homeowners came to learn the history of their houses and the streetscape around them. Older residents past and present reunited with childhood friends. The fun was contagious. We began capturing their stories and images of the mementos they brought — scrapbooks, old menus, high-school trophies — you name it! In 2008 the community center agreed to fund a publication, and "An East Side Album" was the result — more than 160 pages of stories, photos and recipes from 100+ contributors, of which I was the lead organizer and editor. Sales benefit the community center but the

real story here isn't about fundraising — it's about "fun-raising." We created a venue for a kind of socializing that hadn't existed before.

**Casey Hibbard:** The best stories of transformation through story are those that mobilize people to give or do for great causes. There's such an emotional component to putting a story behind a problem. *Made to Stick* by Chip Heath and Dan Heath recounts a couple of these stories. Their book names Stories and Emotion as two of the six principles of sticky ideas.

They share an anecdote about a study where people were asked to consider donating to Save the Children. Two different appeal letters were used to portray the problem of hunger in Africa. One gave statistics about food shortages and the number of people affected. The other recounted a brief tale about a single 7-year-old girl who would be helped by the money. Those who received the second letter gave more than twice as much as those who received the first letter. Putting a face and story behind a problem truly makes a difference. Kiva.org, which gives microloans to entrepreneurs in developing countries, has been very successful with this concept as well.

**Katie Snapp:** Gregory Maguire is a prolific author of children's stories, and other stories, including *Wicked*, which went on to become the well-known Broadway musical. After roughly 23 publications, he observed that every one of the central characters he wrote about was missing a parent or had a dead mother. Odd pattern, and not recognized for years. Recently, though, Maguire noticed it and explained how his mother had died during childbirth. After



all, if the mother is there, what's the problem? How could there possibly be a story? This recurring theme is now a part of his newly aware belief system.

**Rob Sullivan:** It isn't a coincidence that most of my favorite transformational stories are about career changers. After all, these are the people who have the most difficult challenge from a job-hunting standpoint. To make matters more difficult, traditional job search tools like résumés are practically useless because, by definition, a career changer is unlikely to have formal experience. All of this was definitely true for Jill, a concert violinist who approached me about getting a job in advertising account management. When Jill first applied to Leo Burnett, the company was completely confused. When the interviewers looked at her résumé, they saw that she had played with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Sir Georg Solti, Daniel Barenboim, and the Moody Blues. It was a great story for a violinist. Not so great for a future advertising professional.

Looking at her résumé, I could only imagine the confusion in the mind of the recruiters who were probably thinking, "This looks great, but we don't have an orchestra."

At first, I was a bit confused as well. On the surface, it didn't seem to make sense. However, after I encouraged Jill to chart her accomplishments in every area of her life, underlying themes of marketing and leadership emerged in almost every area of her life. She was recognized as a leader at age 12 when she began teaching violin at the music school's request. From there, she marketed herself as a teacher, classroom instructor, musician, and manager of a string quartet. As she described the various marketing challenges, a more focused, enthusiastic person emerged.

Until that point, her cover letter, résumé — even her interviewing style — positioned her as a concert violinist who suddenly wanted to pursue advertising. By tracing her passion, quantifying her accomplishments, and retelling the story, we were able to position her as an accomplished marketer, problem-solver, and strategic thinking — who also happened to be a concert violinist.

After we repositioned her experience, Jill reapplied to Burnett and was hired — just a few short months after she was initially rejected. That's the power of a great story.

**Whitney Quesenbery:** My favorite moments in [user experience] stories are when a story can make a point and help a team see a problem or opportunity clearly. Without going too deeply into the specifics, perhaps this example will work:

On our web site, some people seemed to get lost on the opening page of some great information. They missed all the navigation and links to get started, and would just... wander off. We'd seen this behavior, but never really understood it, until we looked closely. They were reading the page, and clicked on the first link, ready to dive in when... WHAM. They were thrown into a page to order bulk copies of printed literature. Someone else skipped that link and took the next one. WHOOPS. She was back at the same page she'd started from. So she tried again. And it happened again. She went around that merry-go-round at least three times. Now we understood. We'd dangled "garbage" links in front of someone, and distracted — or frustrated them. Now we knew how to fix it. Happy reader.

**Stephane Dangel:** In the winter of 1954 in Paris, there was a man named Abbot Peter (Abbé Pierre). He was willing to launch some initiatives to help poor people, but nobody cared about that unknown guy. At this time, you got very low, minus temperatures in Paris. Abbot Peter managed to convince the biggest radio network to let him address a message to the population. So 20 million French (half of the population) heard the message while being around the table for dinner. Here are some excerpts from the message:

A woman has just died tonight, frozen, on the sidewalk of Boulevard Sebastopol in Paris. She was keeping in hand the paper by which she was expelled from her home two days ago. Each night, there are 2,000

persons who have no home, no bread to eat, some almost naked.

They need your help. In each Parisian borough, in each French town, boards have to be put under a light in the night, in front of houses where you can read. You, who suffer, whoever you are, come and sleep, eat, regain hope, here we love you. Weather channels announce terrible freezes for the next weeks. Thank you.

The most interesting fact is not that barely he had finished to address the message people began to act and help those poor people with great success, but the wave of collective innovation that followed after that emergency need for help.

While some weeks before, the government refused to take money to build homes for poor, this single story was sufficient to trigger what will be called "the revolution of Good," whose actors were an anonymous team constituted by people from the whole country, who didn't know each other but were united by the same spirit. The days following the radio message, money could be collected, people joined Abbot Peter [pictured], acting as a team. As a result, several organizations were created — an association called Emmaüs, a sub-division dedicated to the building of low-wages houses, the first non-profit organization dedicated to the defense of tenants, the creation of communities for homeless people where they could find a roof and a job (collecting old objects and reselling them). The Emmaüs organization still exists (Abbot Peter is now dead) and has an international scope, spreading in a lot of countries worldwide.



**Annie Hart:** One of my favorites is when I was doing a stage show with seven women and we were performing for 200 nuns. I was really nervous because my piece was very personal and provocative. I had gone to Catholic school as a kid and I had this idea that either the nuns or God were going to judge me! I was really scared. But after the performance, the nuns came rushing up to me. They sat me down and fed me lunch while they asked me a million questions about my work, including how they could do what I did. That was a very sweet and touching moment in my life in which I found that I could inspire some of the people who used to scare me.

**Sean Buvala on his doubts about the possibility that transformation can come from storytelling:** I am not so sure that transformation comes from story. I think stories of transformation are powerful, but not sure story alone causes transformation. I have many stories about how the use of "community service" has transformed teens,

for example. If in some way the sharing of these stories creates an open door to other opportunities for service, then that is a good use of the story. In most cases, I think story is there to "frame" the facts, ideals, and purposes of groups, actions, or information. I know recently a woman, who was in one of my youth programs two decades ago, found me to tell me about her life now. She shared with me how one of my stories in particular led her to her public service. Did the story cause that transformation? I do not know. More likely, it gave and gives her a framework from which she moved forward into community service. Stories carry the message, but I am not sure they *are* the message. I also have experiences of storytelling in corporate training that caused people to both recommit to their jobs and also caused at least one person to quit. Story, in those cases, was an amplifier of values and decisions already in existence in the listener, the catalyst to have them take transforming actions.





## Chapter 8: Storytelling Advice

Practitioners offer the one piece of advice about storytelling they felt was most important to share.

**Molly Catron:** I think it is very important to find your own unique voice. Some say that stories seek out the teller to be told, and I know I have experienced that feeling. If I come from an authentic place and take the journey of the artist, I will be a good vessel for the story. When I first met David Novak, he reminded me that you don't construct a story, you grow it. It is an organic process. Some stories take form in a matter of minutes and others take years. If you rush the process, the story is not all it could have been. This was hard for me because I had been trained to produce a "product" and usually with a deadline. I had to learn to love the process and wait patiently for the story to form first in my heart, mind, body, and spirit before I could carry it out to the world with my words.

**Jessica Lipnack:** Learn the craft of storytelling from the geniuses who write and who perform.

**Jon Hansen:** The illustrative nature of storytelling must be both entertaining and insightful.

**Svend-Erik Engh:** Don't make such a fuss about it — go up there and tell them your story.

**Gabrielle Dolan:** Be true to yourself ... make the stories your own, narrate them in your own style, share stories that mean something to you. If you do this, people will listen and every time you tell it your listener will see your passion and feel your emotion ... and for a leader that is very powerful.

**Madelyn Blair:** Stories are powerful. They can change lives completely. Use them with care. Use them with great care.

**David Vanadia:** Make sure you actually tell stories in "real life." Get up in front of audiences and do it. That's the best way to learn about the art. Everything else (media) is a box that you place between you and your audience further distancing you (and in some cases keeping you safe) from them. Nothing compares to the real deal.

**Sharon Benjamin:** We have to do our own inner work with sufficient aerobic exertion that our own hearts are growing and deepening ... because the danger in working with narrative is that we run the risk of, as David Whyte says "reenacting ourselves." Telling stories in organizational settings (for transformation, change, learning, etc.) requires some structure and does have an inner logic — maybe I should say there are "liberating structures" to using narrative ... and knowing those requires practice and mindfulness — and in developing this mastery the risk is that we can become glib or rote — and the power of story — especially in

organizational settings, is directly correlated with our ability to be vulnerable.

So, doing our own inner work is a prerequisite — just as is practice in using of story forms and structure.

**Carol Mon:** A big mistake that I see many novices make is to write out their story and then try to tell it by reading. For the most part, the way we are taught to write is very different from the way we speak; therefore, the stories don't flow. Complex sentence structure, multi-syllabic vocabulary, in-depth descriptions, and emotive words are all part of what we might include in a written story that may not be necessary in an oral presentation. When listening, people don't have the luxury of going back to re-read a complex sentence or to savor the beauty of the sentence as they would if they were reading it. Yes, using elegant sentence structure can make the story come alive but too much in an oral presentation may tax the listener. The same is true with "big words" in an oral presentation. This is more from the presenter's standpoint; too many multi-syllabic words in a row will slow the pace of the story and won't always roll off the tongue easily. Some less commonly used words will add sophistication to the story — used sparingly is best. An oral presentation filled with many unusual vocabulary words will leave the listener translating definitions in his head, leaving little time for the imagination to develop pictures of the story. In written form, the reader is able to slow down when necessary, but in the oral form, the listener is forced along at the speed of the teller or risks being lost.

Part of the beauty of oral storytelling is the listener participates in the building of the story by using her imagination to fill in the full picture based on the description given by the teller. And part of the beauty of the written story is full descriptive scenes. Emotive words also are used very differently in the written form and in then oral form. When speaking, gestures, facial expressions, and vocal changes all demonstrate emotions and different speakers. These must be translated into words to express what is going on in text form. Many of us are probably aware of the old saw, it's not what you say but how you say it. Taking a dialog and copying it on paper can be flat; words might be needed to communicate the true meaning of what is being said. i.e., "Look! a fire" can be followed with, "how beautiful; let's sit around it and toast marshmallows," or "quick, call 911."

And finally, for the storyteller who may not be a talented writer, telling the story orally can help in the writing process. Numerous tellings can be compared to several written drafts without the labor of writing and editing. Telling a story over and over will help get the emotion and feel for the story so that when you attempt to write it many of the bugs will be worked out and can make the conversion to a written form much easier. Writing stories and

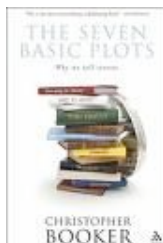
telling stories are both satisfying experiences but take slightly different talents.

**Ron Donaldson:** We all make sense of our world by telling stories. But we experience the world through a lens or filter of what makes sense to us at the time, what John Bowker in his interesting book *The Sacred Neuron* calls a "Circle of Coherence." Such circles of coherence are integral to our understanding of how religions have developed and communities and identities are formed.

Stories of the past, i.e., history, are subconsciously and sometimes malevolently biased to paint a picture of what teller assumes the audience want to hear. In short, stories can often tell us more about the person who wrote, re-told, or even translated the story than the experience that the story explains.

The subconscious has its own feedback mechanisms to tell the conscious when it is straying from the 'norm' and this emerges as nightmares, dreams and creative thoughts. In early times these would have been giants, dragons and monsters, now they are paedophiles, despots and corrupt politicians.

Christopher Booker in his fantastic book *The Seven Basic Plots (Why We Tell Stories)* postulates that this is mankind's way of saying to itself "beware of the emerging ego in yourself." Great writers and film producers have known this for years from Tolkien to Spielberg, but for me it is summed up by my favourite quote of all time from the great GK Chesterton: "Dragons tell us not that dragons once existed, only that they can be beaten."



**Mike Wittenstein:** Listen. No matter how good you are or think you are already, make the effort to continuously improve at this skill. Listening and storytelling skills go hand in hand.

Many people believe that storytelling is about talking, or relating one's past experiences or making something up. Good storytellers are, first and foremost, great listeners. They have the ability to find important details and small nuances, and to put words to hard-to-describe feelings and emotions. These are the essential ingredients story consumers need to process what they hear and create their own meaning. Without those valuable little clues, stories are nothing more than poorly written, foreign-language instruction manuals, taking us step-by-step through difficult-to-understand processes with poorly illustrated pictures.

**Chris Benevich:** There's a Zimbabwean proverb that goes something like, "If you can walk, you can dance; if you can talk, you can sing." If you have a story to tell, don't wait for formal training or to be appointed or for special inspiration. It's your birthright to contribute to humanity's fabric of shared experience and knowledge.

**Karen N. Johnson:** Experiment and find your own voice. For as certainly as we can bring concepts from other fields into our work, storytelling is another opportunity. Like any skill we pick up — it won't suit the occasion all the time. There may be situations where storytelling isn't the best approach, but I like to have as many different techniques, ideas and approaches in my skill set as possible. The combination of story and software testing is a great pairing. Try it, experiment. Storytelling is like presenting. When presenting you have to find your own voice, your own style, and your own way of presenting. Storytelling is the same. In order to be authentic you can't mimic someone else's style, delivery, tone or mannerisms. You have to find your own way to tell.

**Jon Buscall:** Write regularly. Just like going to the gym, you have to keep in (writing) shape. Writing regularly is the only way of maintaining and growing your story-telling skills. I find that a lot of customers get excited about, say, blogging initially but they don't post frequently enough after that initial kick-off.

Software like Eastgate's Tinderbox (Mac only) makes it very easy to collect stacks of notes and ideas that you can subsequently edit and craft and ultimately publish. This is how I've managed to keep producing material over the years. I have all this boxes of notes (to match the paper notebooks I used to keep).

**Lori Silverman:** We've overlooked a critical fundamental concept in the field of story work. All story is narrative. However, not all narrative is a story. It's extremely important to be able to distinguish between a story and all other forms of narrative (e.g., case studies, examples, profiles, news reports, etc.). Without this, you may invest money in a story-based initiative that will not provide the level of payback your organization desires. These distinctions are brought forward in the piece, "Narrative Forms" [Go to <http://www.wakeupmycompany.com/biography.htm> and see downloadable articles in left-hand column.].

There are specific qualities that are integral to stories: They need to have a plot (a conflict), characters, dialogue (preferably both internal and external), a universal theme (key point that applies to all who hear, experience or read it), drama/intrigue, contrast, and sensory information (the ability to paint a picture in the mind's eye). To use the word "story" for narrative forms that do not have these elements is misleading — and it causes a huge problem in the field: It waters down the meaning of the word, "story." The consequence of this is that many organizations do not think they need internal or external "experts" in the field of story work to help them with their story-based initiatives.

**Casey Hibbard:** Since my focus is customer stories (which can also mean beneficiaries of a charitable cause), my advice is to keep it real. By that I mean try to maintain authenticity in the customer's voice.

A major pharmaceutical company recently came out with customer success-story videos. The customers

were real, but they seemed very coached to the point of sounding like actors. The videos completely lost the real quality, and man-on-the-street style endorsement that carries power. It was really a lost opportunity. They had these customers with great stories, and they manipulated them to the point where they felt just like all the other drug company stories with actors. It would have been much more effective if they had spent a lot less money and just let customers tell their stories.

**Rob Sullivan:** If you haven't seen the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, rent it.

If you have already seen it, watch it again. Then, look back on every aspect of your life — not just your career — and ask yourself the question: "How are things better because I was here?" In other words, take yourself out of the equation. What happened that might never have happened without your input?



I call this the "It's-A-Wonderful-Life-approach" to marketing yourself. And it's the best way I know to make your story memorable and impactful.

**Andrée Iffrig:** Be genuine. And be brave: your story, no matter how ordinary it may seem to you, could be life-changing for someone else. We need to hear your stories.

**Sean Buvala:** You must tell stories to get better at stories. You can no more be a storyteller by thinking about stories than an artist can create beautiful water-color paintings by thinking about paint. One must pick up the brush or open one's mouth as the case may be.

**Annie Hart:** Everyone has a story to tell, and the world needs to hear it.

**Melissa Wells:** A gripping story has changes and growth. You must realize this, and not be afraid to change, even when others see you as a success. Stagnation is not good, not for your mind and not for your story.



## Chapter 9: Change Your Story, Change Your Life

Several practitioners share thoughts on the notion of personal transformation through re-storying.

**Karen Gilliam:** I absolutely believe in the statement, "Change your story, and you can change your life." As human beings we have freedom of choice. We are not robots. Even as we are presented with certain circumstances, we still have the choice of how we react and respond and what story we tell. It is the latter – the story – that occurs first and where we don't stop to question.

One symbol frequently associated with the first interpretation of the term Sankofa is the Sankofa bird [pictured], which is also referred to as the bird of passage. This mythic bird is a bird that is looking behind it. This represents the fact that although the bird is constantly moving forward, it continually looks behind it – to its past, with an egg (symbolizing the future) in its mouth. Rev. Joseph E. Lowery, who is the past president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, having retired in 1977 after 40 years of dedicated service, once visited our church and shared this message: "If you don't know where you come from, you won't know when something is trying to take you back." So while you don't want to hold the egg too tight or risk breaking it; don't hold it too loosely either.



Sankofa can be translated in various ways:

- No matter how far away one travels, one must always return home.
- It is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot.
- To move forward, you must reclaim the past.
- We should reach back and gather the best of what our past has to teach us, so that we can achieve our full potential as we move forward. Whatever we have lost, forgotten, forgone, or been stripped of, can be reclaimed, revived, preserved and perpetuated.
- In the past, you find the future and understand the present. And, in doing so, we can change the story and change our life.

**Molly Catron:** I taught the *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey) as part of an effort to encourage character building (personal mastery) within the company culture. As part of my

certification process, I went through the painful process of writing a personal mission statement. Although, it was painful, it was one of the most beneficial things I have ever done for myself, and it ultimately led to an early retirement and a change of career. I had let society write my life script and had never questioned its interpretation of my purpose and value. As part of getting the master's, I took a postmodern psychology course and was so absolutely excited to learn about the "dominant story" we tell ourselves and how it influences our lives without our conscious knowledge. I studied the women's movement and realized how that movement fragmented because groups within the movement could not agree on the new dominant story for women. I think we still haven't defined it, and that contributes to all the stress for women and men. Well, anyway, that's a whole other area of work I am interested in, and that's bringing women back together in groups to redefine our story. When we were in the red tent or gathered around a quilt, we shaped our story and supported each other in its plot, but now we are apart. Women must gather again.

**Andrée Iffrig on changing one's "victim narrative" into a more helpful survivor/hero story:** ... Everyone has a victim narrative, and you need to tell it and know you've been heard before you can move on to becoming a survivor or hero.

Victim narratives are not helpful if you never move on from narrating them; if you remain permanently stuck in the victim's role. In [my] book [*Find Your Voice at Work: The Power of Storytelling*] there is a story about a dean of a large faculty at a university who concludes his 10-year tenure as dean feeling like a victim. Can you imagine what it would be like to work for this man, even assuming he tried to be nice to his employees? It would be punishing. People who have read the section on victim narratives in my book report that as they read Jake, Melanie, and Alistair's stories, they experience an "aha" moment, recognizing themselves in these stories. Everyone has been a victim at some time, often unwittingly; we just didn't recognize it. I have learned that victims need to be heard before they move on to being accountable. A story is a way to go from being a victim to becoming a survivor. For more on this aspect, I recommend two books (both featured in my book):

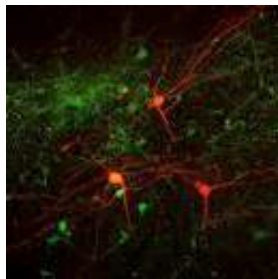
- Cloke and Goldsmith, *Resolving Personal and Organizational Conflict*.
- Kurtz and Ketcham, *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Search for Meaning*.

**Madelyn Blair on using a "future story" as a roadmap for personal change:** A future story can be used most definitely by an individual. In fact, I have used this in my coaching work with individuals. Moreover, I have used it in the work I do on keeping current. A great future story truly energizes the person to actually be the embodiment of the story. For example, on a trip I took about two years ago, I decided that my story was an



adventure. I was visiting several places I had never been before, and I was traveling alone. As I told myself the story of the trip being an adventure, every glitch (and there were several) ended in laughter and eventually, success. It was a wonderful adventure. The body follows what the mind is thinking, so think a great story.

**Katie Snapp on the relationship between neuroscience and “change your story, change your life:”** I love science. At some level we think of “behavior” as being something intangible and therefore more difficult to manage. But not so true if you have some fundamental concept of the science behind our brains and our conscious minds. Our neuronal networks are built over repetition.



Firing them enforces hardwiring them. So those deeply entrenched beliefs or repetitive thought patterns that we just mentioned that are drilled into us are changeable, whether adopted early in childhood or just a part of what we

believe work or leadership should be like.

These beliefs (and the same thing goes for habits) are pathways in our brains that are easily accessed because they are strongly wired. We used them a lot so they became hardwired. BUT ... that does not mean we cannot unwire them. True. Through conscious behavior change, we can avoid using those old networks and can start building the ones we want.

The journey begins with recognizing your patterns and habits, owning them, reassessing them, and then changing those that we want to let go. Try telling your story in the future. Where do you want to be? Who do you want to become? What do you want to extend that you are successful at now? Then focus on that desired outcome — the future story — and you will be setting the new paths in your brain to make them happen.

It is a little more complicated than that, but our minds have a way of making reality of whatever we focus on. You are reinventing your story!

**David Vanadia on using story to encourage people to give up sugar:** People read my story about struggling with sugar addiction and see themselves in it. It's like watching a movie and suddenly recognizing, “Oh my gosh, that's me!” My story acts as a model that shows them that quitting sugar can be done. It makes people want to act because they can see that they are in the midst of their own addiction and heading down the wrong path. Since they are already looking for a way out, it's not hard for them to follow the path I already carved. My story becomes their story.

## Chapter 10: Storytelling in Relationships, Teams, and Community

Practitioners discuss diverse views on the role of storytelling in relationships, teams, and community.

**Ardath Albee on how story generates active relationships with customers:** People want to have relationships with people “like” them. To generate active relationships, stories must be told from an almost peer-to-peer perspective. That said, the other ingredient is value. Stories must first be relatable and then add value that’s relevant to the person you’re telling the story to.

This is the biggest argument for segmentation and getting to know your customers. People are interested in different aspects of the story based on their relationship to the subject matter. For example, a CIO will have different interests than a VP of sales. Telling the same story to both of them is not likely to have the impact you want. You’ll either make your story so general it doesn’t interest either of them, or it will focus more heavily on the interests of one or the other.

Additionally, it’s important to remember that to remain relevant your stories must evolve over time. Just as versions of fairytales have been updated to resonate in today’s world, your stories must do so. Changes happen fast, priorities are shuffled with the latest quarterly results, so you must pay attention and continuously adjust and tune your stories to build engagement with existing and potential customers.

**Andrée Iffrig on whether non-face-to-face communications (such as online social media) can be harnessed for storytelling activities:** Advocates of social networking will insist that it enhances relationship building. As someone concerned with employee wellbeing, I beg to differ. Human beings need Real Connections in addition to digital ones, and if you create a problem or misunderstanding with an email or other digital technology, you cannot solve it with more of the same; you absolutely have to phone the other party or meet.

I sit on the program committee for Canada’s annual conference on Health, Work and Wellness. The statistics from the conference are worrisome: many professionals feel isolated; they are incredibly stressed at work; their lives are filled with busyness, but there are few opportunities to de-stress.

At the stage they become cynical or depressed, creating connections with others who may be struggling becomes paramount. To revive the heart of work requires subtle techniques that help people rise above their current perspective. Storytelling conducted in peer settings can help people.

**Jessica Lipnack on the role for storytelling/sharing in building cohesiveness in virtual teams:** When you’re bringing together people from diverse organizations, disciplines, cultures, countries, and timezones, i.e., virtual teams, it usually means they don’t know one another. They come to know one another by sharing their stories, so this is a critical part of their work. Even the lowly conference call is a venue for telling stories. As a matter of fact, every conference call is a storytelling opportunity. To get “the voices in the room,” the opening to any good conference call, good facilitators/team leaders in essence ask people to tell a little story: What did you have for breakfast? What’s your favorite movie of all time? What music were you listening to before this call (or, if you’re one of the old breed that still travels to work ☺, what were you listening to on the commute)? These answers are mini-stories that build trust and cohesion.

**Jon Hansen on the story elements that he advocates that professionals integrate into social networking:** Merely having the infrastructure in place to effect real-time communication on a global basis isn’t enough. One interesting statistic from a study that illustrates this point found that 80 percent of all information that appears as a result of a Google search is largely irrelevant. Eighty percent is a significant amount of non-useful misinformation!

The strength of storytelling is that it requires an understanding that is based on actual life experience combined with a clear vision of the targeted audiences areas of actual interest. This can be achieved only through building relationships that are predicated on mutual interest rather than tied to the “number of connections” one can establish in the shortest period of time.

To be effective, social networking has to start to ask the question is establishing the link worthwhile versus the proclamation “I have 2 million names in my personal network.”

(NOTE: Web 4.0 is based upon the former by employing a strand commonality architecture that effectively links seemingly disparate interests into a collective beneficial outcome for all stakeholders. Ironically, and on a more basic level, storytelling does the same thing in terms of the potential for universal appeal that transcends diverse sectors and even cultures.)

**Loren Niemi on how storytelling helps build community:** On the most basic level, storytelling builds community by identifying “us” as family, clan, neighborhood, village, religion, ethnicity, nationality, etc. The fundamental kinds of story that exist in every culture – myths, hero tales, trickster stories, humor/jokes and stories of the spiritual – offer us models of who we are, who “they” are, how we think, act, believe, live, etc.

Beyond that the four kinds of storytelling – personal stories, oral histories, metaphors and rituals – that exist in every organization from families to clubs to businesses, invite us to identify and share beliefs, values and behaviors with each other. The thing is the same stories and mechanisms for storytelling that bind us together can also exclude.

So once again I come back to the issue of consciously identifying, shaping and telling our stories. If we want to build strong inclusive communities, we need to be intentional in the



stories we tell and the way we tell them. This requires more time, focus and resources than many of us are willing to commit without support from the “powers that be” and then we wonder why there is so much distrust and lack of understanding. Lakoff

[pictured] says that whoever frames the argument controls the argument, and I say that if we want to build a healthy community we need to expand the “us” without necessarily having to demonize “them” in the totality of the stories we tell.

### **Shawn Callahan on his motivation for creating Worldwide Story Work, a Ning social network:**

In 1998 Kate Muir and I started the A.C.T. Knowledge Management Forum. We started with a handful of members in Canberra and met monthly to learn about knowledge management. We also linked everyone together on an email list. Today ActKM (as it is now known) has more than 1,000 members and is arguably the most active and influential online knowledge management community in the world. We learned a lot about online communities with ActKM so Madelyn Blair (the co-coordinator of World Wide Story Work [WWSW]) and I thought we could take these learnings and our other community-building experiences and build something useful for story practitioners.

I expect WWSW [Editors note: Web address is <http://worldwidestorywork.ning.com/>; you may need to join to see the site] to develop slowly and gradually find its feet, so it's living up to my expectations. It will be interesting to see how the culture of the community emerges. I'm keen for it to be a friendly place where everyone feels they can ask questions and they will get answers.

## Chapter 11: Story Techniques and Tools

Most practitioners who work as consultants and facilitators with groups and organizations have developed story-based tools and techniques. Participants share a few of these:

### Terrence Gargiuolo's Story Scrap Book Technique:

#### Objectives

- Create a conversation piece to encourage open communication.
- Capture key stories to examine the connections between them and transfer knowledge.

#### Background

Thank heavens for big sisters; especially mine. I was over at Franca's house sipping hot chocolate and catching up on life. While we spoke she was immersed in assembling another one of her family scrap book masterpieces. I'm one of those unfortunate types who love trips down family memory lane but lack the discipline and patience to keep scrap books. We started talking about Franca's work. She is an international marketing and public-relations consultant. As we discussed the internal communication challenges one of her clients was facing I had a flash of brilliance. What if we helped the client put together a story scrap book and then used it to facilitate conversations around the organization? That's exactly what we did and with fantastic results. Since then it has become one of the standard tools and interventions I use. My clients have anecdotally shared some of the following results with me. Story Scrap Books ...

- Increase the number and quality of communications between management and employees
- Engender greater willingness among employees to share information
- [Help organizations] develop a repository of stories to incorporate into other collaterals
- Create a repeatable communication business process that people look forward to and enthusiastically participate in
- Facilitate improvements in organizational morale and sense of community

How do story scrap books encourage meaningful conversations? Story scrap books promote reflection. As we create them we remember our experiences and uncover new insights in the process. People respond to scrap books with stories. Our scrap book is a ritualistic object that achieves its highest purpose when we use it to facilitate dialogue with others. Scrap books promote community because they are shared record of identity. Think about how a family photo album functions. Our stories trigger other people's stories. Through a dynamic exchange of stories our conversations become insightful gold mines full of authentic pieces of ourselves. We see ourselves for how we are and we generate meaning from how we

reflect on our stories and how others respond to them.

How do story scrap books help transfer knowledge? The most valuable information in an organization is unstructured data. This is data that lives in the minds and experiences of people. It is not easily captured or stored in central repositories.

Furthermore in most organizations there are few if any incentives to share knowledge. As a result knowledge sits

untapped. People do not speak with one another in ways that enable knowledge to flow. Stories activate informal peer-to-peer networks. The scrap books are wonderful



tools for recording and transferring knowledge.

Every story chronicled in a scrap book has relation to other stories. The collection of stories forms a cluster of knowledge that can be tapped. Patterns of organizational best practices, experiences, and encoded organizational cultural values reside in these clusters of knowledge. Through dialogue these can be clarified, brought to a focus, and cultivated to inform future successful behavior.

#### Case Study

The CEO of a Fortune 500 manufacturing company pulled me into his office and closed the door. He had just spent a mint on printing 10,000 extra copies of the company's annual report. He motioned me to take a seat and dropped one of the annual reports on my lap with a beaming grin of satisfaction. "You're going like this," he said. "I want every employee to be proud of our accomplishments so I am distributing a copy of this report to every employee. I'm having all my VPs go around the company to hand these out during special town hall meetings. This is just the sort of thing that will get people fired up to exceed next year's goals."

I had already seen the annual report and despite its spectacular design, stunning photographs, and stellar numbers, it was as drab as drab can be. I was nonplussed. It was the right idea but the wrong tool. I acknowledged the merits of his strategy and then I asked him if he was open to trying an experiment. He asked me what I had in mind. I told him to identify a division or area of the company that was going to be critical to the achievement of next year's goals. There were some unused days on my monthly retainer that were going to expire so I asked him for a couple of days to do some digging. I held a couple of meetings with groups of people from the division and ran them through a version of the story scrap book activity. I started each meeting by handing out the annual reports and asking people to thumb through them looking at the key objectives that had been achieved during the year. Then I asked them to develop a story scrap book for the year that captured their personal experiences of how they had played a role in the

achievement of these key objectives. Next I scheduled a town hall meeting for the entire division and invited the CEO to attend. I asked two people with very compelling story scrap books to share them with the group. Then I gave everyone 10 minutes to speak to the person next to them and share their experiences. I reconvened the group and opened the floor for 10 minutes so that people share some of the stories they had heard. Finally I had the CEO briefly share the organization's new goals and ask people to imagine how their stories next year would be different. We were thrilled by people's energy. We succeeded in engaging people's imaginations. I coached some of the CEO's directors and VPs and we rolled out a similar process across the entire organization.

**Madelyn Blair's Future Story:** The future story is the strategic direction that calls for defining specific strategies in order to get there. Thus, gleaming strategy from a future story is how to define the specific strategies.

From my experience with groups, the most important thing is to create a future story that resonates with the group. As they read it or tell it, it becomes a part of them. As it becomes a part of them, they begin to 'embody' the story. If and when this happens, the means to achieve the story begin to happen. In the words of Aristotle, "A vivid imagination compels the whole body to obey it." In an organization, this kind of self-energized action does call for some coordination. In my experience, the best way is to allow the group (who created the future story) to begin defining the actions needed directly. Their interest and excitement in the story tends to energize their imaginations as well, and actions are identified fairly quickly. Critical to achievement of the future story is to revisit the planned actions to assure that they are still the best given that the world doesn't stand still while you implement. Some would say that this is not strategy, but indeed it is. And allowing it to be refined over time allows it to respond to the emergent (some might even say resultant) world in which the group finds itself. [See also Madelyn's paper, "Future Story Told in a Day," which can be downloaded from [http://info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/library/121203/683\\_future\\_story.doc](http://info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/library/121203/683_future_story.doc).]

**Andrée Iffrig on Storytelling Dice:** I have just returned from a conference where participants played Storytelling Dice. Participants came from the disability services sector; they have heavy caseloads, low rates of pay, and few opportunities for connecting. They told me that the game is one they can take back into their workplaces to play with employees who report to them, or who are peers. They foresee using the game on a



periodic basis to improve working relationships.

They also reported that they were affirmed by the storytelling process. Our society does not value the

professionals who care for people with developmental disabilities. Playing Storytelling Dice reminded them of their value and also contributed to reviving the dream of service each of them originally brought into their work. [see more about Storytelling Dice in Andrée's book, *Find Your Voice at Work: The Power of Storytelling in the Workplace* and its accompanying workbook downloadable from <http://find-your-voice.ca/resources.html>.]

### **Andrée Iffrig on the genesis of peer learning groups:**

Peer learning circles were in use more than a century ago in Sweden; you can learn a little more about their use by reading the introduction to a guide I co-write with Keith Seel, available online [<http://find-your-voice.ca/governanceguide.pdf>] (p.10). Here is an excerpt from that page:

- Peer Learning Circles (PLCs) are a vehicle for enhancing participatory learning
- They promote a culture of learning and discovery
- PLCs have been shown to overcome the inertia that many people experience when confronted by the need for change in organizations.
- Field testing with this learning methodology has shown that PLCs result in the kind of higher-level learning that positions participants to develop new perspectives and to jointly work out solutions to thorny problems.
- Unlike more process-oriented approaches or conventional training techniques, PLCs emphasize a combination of reflection, discussion and shared learning or discovery. This is experiential rather than didactic or practical learning, and is retained by participants long after the learning.
- Most of us recognize the difference between a lecture, classroom-based training, and exploring ideas in a small group. PLCs fall into the latter category. The participatory approach of PLCs means that group participants have greater control over what they need and want to learn. This in turn increases their capacity individually and collectively for critical thinking, problem solving and decision-making. The benefit to the organization is the creation of new learning and action plans for furthering its mandate.



## Chapter 12: Unexpected Applications of Storytelling

One of the delights of running the Q&A series on A Storied Career was discovering practitioners who were applying storytelling in ways with which I was not familiar and did not necessarily expect. These areas include procurement, software testing, user experience design, and finance:

**Jon Hansen on storytelling in procurement:** I have used storytelling as a means of illustrating critical points associated with the evolution of supply-chain practice.

In some instances these can involve the recounting of an actual event (a Dragnet type of story that is true, with only the names being changed to protect the innocent). Here is a link to one such example: <http://procureinsights.wordpress.com/2007/11/20/how-leadership-repeatedly-under-mines-their-most-valuable-procurement-asset>.

The other relates to humorous anecdotes such as my response to a question dealing with the complexity associated with quantifying employee confidence in new supply chain programs. Here is the question, as well as my corresponding answer:

Is confidence difficult to quantify due to its complex, intangible and long-term oriented nature? In his reminiscences about his college days, Bill Cosby talked about his girlfriend who happened to be a philosophy major. As a student of "athletics" nee sports, scholarship, he summed up the academic differences between the two courses when he referred to the philosophically motivated question "why is there air?"



His girlfriend's class spent countless hours and days attempting to "quantify" the meaning of air. Bill's athletically oriented class however answered the question within a matter of seconds with the simple observation that air exists to "fill basketballs, footballs, volleyballs etc."

Oversimplified, most definitely. True, without question.

I went on to say that confidence is reflected in usage.

**Karen N. Johnson on storytelling in software testing:** Software testers who truly love their work see everything as a testing possibility. If you analyze software all day, it's nearly impossible to stop being analytical about well nearly everything. Testers gain strong observation skills, the ability to focus deeply, and have developed a perpetual

sense of curiosity about how things function. How do you turn that mindset off when you've been working as a tester for years? The answer might easily be you don't. You might love what you do and can't imagine taking anything at face value without wanting to know more.

I have plenty of times in my work that I'm piled deep with reams of information and I have to find ways to sort, compile, discern and then deliver information. I spend time looking for patterns, looking for evidence, always on the prowl as it were to solve issues, and I find storytelling is a natural way for me to share my findings with other people. Storytelling has a strong appeal to me. I love to read and become immersed in a story, to lose sense of time and place. It seems to me, we all pause when someone tells a story. In a technical field such as software testing, perhaps story gives us a chance to put the analytics aside and think about the information in a more reflective way, to take the time to ponder and muse.

**Whitney Quesenbery on storytelling in user experience design:** Although user experience [UX] stories are built on insights from research, their purpose is to help create something new. Often, they explore how a new or updated product can change an unsatisfactory experience into a good one. They describe a possible future condition, and in doing so help it become a reality.

This is not all user experience stories, of course. Sometimes, we use stories to present a current or past situation. But the reason we spend time thinking about current experience is to be able to create new experiences — and move us into the future. ... Every UX project involves managing a lot of information. Even a small site involves balancing the business goals, user needs, and technical possibilities. When you are working on a large project it's hard to stay focused on the goal of creating an excellent user experience, because you are managing so many details and (sometimes) conflicting needs. The other difficulty is keeping the "user" in sight. Perhaps that sounds strange for work on the user experience, but typically the users are not part of the design and development team, so it's easy to ignore them.

With their ability to communicate so effectively, and on such a deep level, stories are one way to manage both challenges. They are a natural way to describe events, brainstorm ideas, engage the imagination, and build community around the new design.

**Stewart Marshall on financial storytelling and the need for businesses to be "far more honest about what we are doing:"** In business, both internally and externally, we want our audience to believe our story. Yet storytelling is frequently looked at as "not serious." Do we really need countless PowerPoint presentations, with countless numbers and diagrams with all manner of

confusing arrows and boxes, just so we can do our email under the desk and ignore who is speaking? Let's look at Canadian Banks. Throughout the economic turmoil Canadian Banks seemed to have fared better than in most other countries. More prudent, they took fewer risks and consequently shielded the Canadian economy from the worst of the crisis. As a customer though, I feel their prudence and limited risk taking has translated into less lending and poorer customer service. The banks' assets may be protected, but is this what the typical customer on the street cares about? These assets were once the customers' assets, and I've yet to see very much evidence that the Banks understand their role in encouraging economic stimulus.

Both businesses and their customers have a responsibility to each other. It needs to be transparent and honest. Making big assumptions about what customers want or what businesses can provide, especially without ever asking them, is dishonest on both sides!

## Chapter 13: Storytelling in Organizations

It was through the discipline of organizational storytelling that I first became immersed in the world of applied storytelling. Many of the practitioners in the Q&A series work with organizations and share their perspectives on this work:

**Sharon Benjamin on differences in the ways nonprofits and for-profit organizations use storytelling:** In the case of nonprofit organizations that have to raise money, I think there are fierce market forces that require [them] to be pretty good at telling stories that create a compelling vision of a better future ... if the organization can't tell these kinds of compelling stories it eventually runs into problems raising money, so I'd say that narrative competence is a basic prerequisite for organizational survival.

On the other hand, nonprofit organizations I've worked with seem to have more trouble remembering to use story in-house with boards and staff. Maybe our mindfulness isn't there, or maybe it's not as comfortable – story does require a level of vulnerability that may feel riskier with close-in colleagues, rather than telling stories about our work and organizations to funders, donors and the public.

Or maybe we just don't spend as much time working on our internal use of story as we do telling stories outside the organization.

Generally, compared to corporate or governmental organizations, I'd say many nonprofit organizations are advantaged when it comes to external storytelling but maybe a little behind in using story internally.

**Svend-Erik Engh on why he was attracted to work with organizations:** I was invited by a lot of people to do presentations, workshops etc. And slowly I realized it was great fun. Especially when I kept focus on my role as an artist, and didn't think I was a consultant.

It was so easy. I just did, what I have done for the past 10 years: Told people stories and taught them how to tell stories. I told my stories to show them how it could be done, to inspire. Then I gave them exercises like I had giving exercises to my students. Same exercises, same results: Stories gives energy, bring people together, and are great fun.

So now I am working for companies and as long I keep focus, it works for me. I inspire them to see their communication in another way – just the basic fact that I am telling a story without PowerPoint or other written material is fantastic for them.

**Gabrielle Dolan on helping to embed storytelling into an organization's culture:** We normally work with clients on two levels. Firstly we normally skill the leaders in organisational storytelling through workshops and then help them embed this skill. What we mean by that is finding ways that they can continually find and share stories and apply their new skill of not only storytelling but story listening.

This may be as simple as at the start of each team meeting asking everyone to share a good customer-service experience and then ensuring that the very good ones are communicated broader. Also, actively going out and listening to customers, their team and other stakeholders. We also work with clients to show them how they can start to use stories in their formal communications such as newsletters, websites, and annual reports. Turning case studies into stories is another example. Some have even developed a technical database that is used to collect and share stories. Sometimes it is working with them so that their next leadership forum or conference is all designed with the underpinning methodology of storytelling so more knowledge is shared. Working with the learning and development people to ensure training is more engaging via stories is another good example. Believe it or not, we have helped take compliance training from boring to brilliant.

How businesses are starting to use story is amazing and innovative, and we learn just as much from our clients as they do from us, which is the really exciting bit.

**John Caddell on probing the use of stories in companies for learning and assessment:** I spent my career living two lives. At work, I was on a typical managerial track – software development, moving to marketing, then leadership and finally senior management. At home I read lots of fiction, wrote short stories and even a lousy novel, and spent time in the writing community. After I left my senior-management job and went on my own, I



attended a storytelling breakout session at the 2006 *Fortune* Magazine Innovation Forum. It was a revelation. I could actually fuse my two lives together and do something of value with them. Then I blogged about the experience, and connected with Shawn Callahan [pictured] of

Anecdote as a result. I did some work with Shawn, started reading everything I could get my hands on, finally working with companies, and there you go.

**Thomas Clifford on why it's important for an organization to tell its story through video:** Video stories can:

- Strengthen your brand. "Who are you?"

- *Create emotional connections.* "Why should I care about your company?"
- *Share culture and values.* "Is what's important to me important to you?"
- *Change perceptions.* "Really? I didn't know that."
- *Inspire change.* "You mean I can make a difference?"

### **Susan Luke on the importance of corporate mythology and becoming a corporate mythologist:**

To my knowledge, I am the only "corporate mythologist" using that title. I coined the descriptor in trying to put some definition around who I am and what I do. Corporate mythology has two aspects — the stories of/about the organization (history, philosophy, values, vision) and the stories of the individuals who make up the organization. How they are being used and how much in alignment they are determines the everyday corporate culture.

Intuitively I have always known that stories are important. As my career evolved, I realized that what I believed and took for granted about stories and storytelling (based on my growing-up years) was not universally shared nor understood by many. As I began to work with businesses around the world I realized that stories were an ideal communication tool because their universality crosses cultural lines.

As our world grows smaller and more interdependent than ever before, sharing our stories is not only a basic way to develop alliances, but it provides a vehicle for understanding that is the power behind every bullet point in every report, proposal, etc. It was an epiphany of sorts to realize that what I loved about working and talking with people were the stories they shared. If I can continue to help them do that, both internally and externally, both corporately and individually, then perhaps being a corporate mythologist is not only my profession and business, it is also my calling.

**Cynthia Kurtz on "approaches that don't respect the integrity of the raw story and end up ... injecting the biased interpretations of people outside the community:"** There are two positions embedded in that statement — raw stories and self-interpretation — and I can tell a story from my own experience describing how I came to my current understanding of each position. The first position is that raw stories of personal experience are far superior to crafted stories for the things I care about when working with stories. For the purposes of advertising products and services, delivering specific purposeful messages, and entertaining people, crafted stories are often (but not always) best. But for the purposes of helping people learn, think, make decisions, get new ideas, grow, and get along, I've found that there is nothing better than a raw story.

I started out in this field in the same way many people do — I got excited about all the advice on "how to tell a great story" and assumed that only the best, most compelling stories could "get things done," whatever it was you wanted to do. My second year at IBM Research was spent on a project researching how storytelling could improve

e-learning. Our group tried out different ways to help instructors write stories that would help people learn how to use software or do any number of things more quickly and easily. We had some little success with this, but things didn't really pick up until we started holding workshops where we asked people to talk about their experiences. Our original intention was to take the raw stories we collected and "make something out of them" while developing methods to help other people make similar resources; but we kept failing. The crafted stories were always less compelling, less memorable, and less educational than the raw stories, even though we were "improving" them using all the wonderful advice we could find. Somehow every time we improved the stories by crafting them, an essential spark was lost. One day we had this sort of metaphorical realization that we were trying to grow trees in a forest. Stories better than any we could come up with were all around us, and we were discounting them because we had a narrow idea of what a useful story was. We began to see that a raw story of personal experience is a priceless gem that cannot be taken apart and put back together without removing its powerful qualities. So we changed the project. Once we abandoned our original ideas about how writing "good" stories would improve e-learning and instead concentrated on figuring out the best ways of "getting the stories to where they needed to be," the e-learning resources we were creating, and our ability to help other people create such resources, improved tremendously.

The second part of that "respect the integrity of the raw story" statement is my position on expert interpretation. I believe that interpretation by outside experts jeopardizes the goals I care most about when working with stories, for two reasons: it cannot help getting essential things wrong (through not understanding subtle nuances of context which only insiders can know); and it is incapable of making useful insights fully resonate and changes really happen inside a community, because it is not "of us."

The dangers-of-expert-interpretation story took place soon after I started working with a group that was doing story projects with IBM clients. Now this group had started out just as I had, writing crafted stories to help clients achieve goals, and they had made a similar transition to collecting and valuing raw stories. However, at the time I joined the group, they still believed, as I did, that expert interpretation of stories was essential. The turning point came on a project in which we collected videotapes of something like a hundred retiring employees describing their long careers. In our enthusiasm we had allowed too many people to generate too many hours of videotape, and we realized that we could never get through them all in time. After a flurry of discussion and debate, we decided to hold a workshop and ask the employees themselves to watch the videotapes (distributing the videos so that everyone saw a few and every interview was seen by a few people), and have them interpret the results and come up with their own conclusions. We were worried that we would have a lot of work to do after these uninitiated non-experts had finished their exercise, but we decided

to go ahead anyway, thinking that at least our task would be reduced.

Imagine our astonishment when we found that the quality of the results exceeded our previous finely tuned expert interpretations, and that the results resonated better with the client as well. This was another awakening. As we had before been trying to grow stories in a forest of stories, we had been trying to grow interpretations in a forest of interpretations. In both cases the stories or interpretations surrounding us were of superior utility and authenticity — in the context in which we needed to work with them — than the stories or interpretations we were trying to build.

Those experiences, combined with some others that reinforced the same overall patterns, convinced us that these two principles — raw stories and self-interpretation — were key to effective story projects. In the dozens of projects I've worked on since then I've seen those lessons repeated many times. In fact I've come to realize that people who work with stories in organizations and communities (and here I am not talking about professional storytellers) seem to go through three phases, which roughly match the three aspects of stories I like to think about — story form, function and phenomenon. People seem to start out, as I did, infatuated with story form: they memorize McKee and try to turn every story into a "great" story. Once they get past that they start thinking about how they can "use" story function to change situations, inject learning, propel messages, and so on (all of which is fairly mechanical thinking). And finally they arrive at the phenomenon stage where they begin to see stories as elements in a complex ecology and start thinking about ways to tend stories, herd them, take care of them, and get them where they need to go. That final stage, in my opinion, is the best place to end up when you want to work with stories in communities and organizations.

#### **Michael Margolis on gaining new insight into an organizational challenge through a narrative lens:**

One of our clients is the leading membership association for women in Hawaii. Even with 100+ years of proven legacy, the organization was struggling to maintain its relevance. Now this is a common problem facing almost every membership organization today. The old storylines no longer hold up to the complex modern world we are all trying to reconcile. Our client decided to adopt a radical new business model that would require both change and innovation.

In order to identify the new Brand Story, we conducted a set of narrative-driven focus groups with women who represented the target "new member." We didn't ask questions about our client's services, but instead listened to these women and their life stories. We wanted to know how they integrated the various identities of work, family, community, and self into a cohesive whole. The insights that we gathered for our client gave them

the confidence to break out of the mold. Through continued consulting we helped our client reposition their flagship facility into a Downtown Women's Club, with a mission. The new Brand Story is opening up countless new opportunities and growth for the organization.

#### **Sean Buvala on the hardest aspect of corporate storytelling:**

The hardest thing is doing the work to master the skills. Corporate folks must take this storytelling skill seriously. To really be an effective corporate storyteller, you need to be devoted to being the best storyteller you can be. However, many people think of storytelling as an adjunct or soft skill in their repertoire of communication skills. We certainly saw the potentially career-ending and dangerous misuse of storytelling in the televised speech by [Louisiana] Governor Bobby Jindal [after President Obama's State of the Union address]. I imagined that he probably searched the Internet and found this interesting idea about storytelling and figured that anybody can do it. Well, he found out quickly that storytelling is a powerful tool that requires training in order to be used well at such a high level. I think that if I had to use a jackhammer for something, that I would want to be taught how to use it rather than relying on my previous experience of watching one be used as a punch line in an episode of "Sesame Street."



Storytelling is a "hard skill" and must be mastered in business. You cannot "sort of" use storytelling any more than your accountant can "sort of" know about money and taxes. I have been teaching for years that storytelling is an intentional process by using my "Interpret, Express, Integrate" method. There has to be a balance of theory and technique for corporate storytelling. Unfortunately, we have many of the business storytelling gurus wandering the countryside able to teach theory very well but not so good on technique. There is a danger in corporate America in that we take ourselves too seriously, hoping our statistics, buzzwords, and projected pie charts are a replacement for actual skills. You cannot fake authenticity and still be a good storyteller. In my experience, the most receptive audience these days to learning corporate storytelling is the entrepreneurs and small business owners. These leaders understand that they must master their Story; most often the only thing that separates them from their competition. They know that their image and theory will not help them pay the rent. Our story and knowing how to tell it is about the only thing that really sets us apart from one another. When a company loses touch with its story and how it is presented, we get the disasters we have seen recently in the auto and finance industries.



**Michael Margolis on organizational perceptions about the kind of stories being told about them:** Perception is King. Never confuse a story for the absolute Truth – although every great story offers a kernel of truth. For brands today, the perception that people hold about you is embedded in stories based on one's experience, assumptions, or judgments.

For too many organizations are afraid of facing the music – to make themselves vulnerable to actually knowing what people think about them, and why. Instead, it's easy to delude ourselves into comfort that "business as usual" is okay. But only through an intimate understanding of your customer or target audience can you succeed today.

At a process level, we work with the senior leadership of an organization or division to help them find alignment around their Brand Story. It begins with a cross-functional WorkGroup determining areas of consensus and open debate regarding the strategic story. This WorkGroup owns the process and represents key voices from across the organization.

We then conduct narrative-driven Focus Groups with key audience stakeholders to identify the perception gaps and opportunities related to the Brand Story. We have developed a Brand Story Audit methodology that helps to organize this conversation. We then go back to the WorkGroup and use our findings to help them focus and build consensus.

The client ultimately receives from us a Brand Story Blueprint, which serves as an organizational compass-point. It includes a combination of strategic positioning, messaging, audience profiling, and specific marketing strategies and tactics. This process takes 3-4 months, and we sometimes then support on the execution of the strategy.

**Stewart Marshall on storytelling in an economic crisis:** The current economic crisis came about because the relevant stories were at best ignored and at worst deliberately covered up. The complexities of the financial instruments that started this cycle, such as sub-prime mortgages, derivatives, etc., are beyond the knowledge of most people. Yet in many cases it is these same people, who have had to take a pay cut, or lost their jobs and in too many cases their homes. Do they not deserve an explanation? Not highbrow, not technical jargon but a clear honest story? In this context, financial storytelling has never been more critical.

More positively, I believe the way out of the financial crisis will come through entrepreneurs – people who through changing circumstances have been forced to innovate. Not only will they produce innovative products but the way they do business will also be innovative. This can be truly inspirational and we should attempt to share this story as much as we can. Financial Storytelling can help communicate this message and also build trust. Inspiration will lead to confidence, which ultimately is what we all need for the future.

**Lori Silverman on the extent to which organizational storytelling has evolved since her 2007 book, *Wake Me When the Data Is Over*, was published and the changes she'd like to make for the next edition:** I'm not certain the field of story work in organizations has evolved since the book was written. The piece that is still missing for me as a strategist is story as an organizational core competency. I've yet to find an organization that has systematically thought about how story could be used in all its work processes, both internal and external to the enterprise. It's my contention that until we change how we talk about this subject – and move from calling it "storytelling" which is a self-limiting term, to calling it "story work," this broader context for integrating story throughout an organization will be hard pressed to occur.

There are several things I'd do in the next edition:

- I'd reconnect with each interviewee and ask them to update me on their organization's progress with story. There hasn't been any longitudinal data on story use as far as I know.
- I'd add several chapters that time did not allow us to research fully. They'd include topics such as story use in a recessionary economy, sales, innovation, and mergers and acquisitions.
- I'd add the composite results across all 72 examples that are in the article, "The Five Sides of Story", [Go to <http://www.wakeupmycompany.com/biography.htm> and see downloadable articles in left-hand column.] to the book's content and update it with data from the new examples. In this article (which outlines the story use model presented at the end of the *Wake Me Up* book), it becomes evident that telling a story may not be as powerful as some other approaches such as evoking stories from others, listening to them in a specialized way, the symbolic embodiment of story, and finding ways to employ story triggers.



**WAKE ME UP  
WHEN THE  
DATA  
IS OVER**



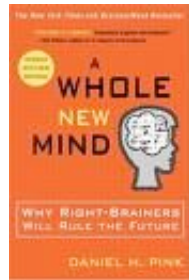
## Chapter 14: Getting Buy-in for Storytelling

Although the value of storytelling is becoming imbued in the culture, practitioners still sometimes meet resistance when using storytelling with groups. Participants discuss how they obtain buy-in:

### **Loren Niemi on getting buy-in from students:**

There is always some initial skepticism – for two reasons: because they do not have the language to name what they already have experienced as storytelling and because the storytelling “brand” as they identify it has been so often associated with librarians reading books to children instead of rappers and hip-hop artists rhyming or scriptwriters framing television or movie narratives. The class I teach operates on two levels of learning – one identifying the forms and functions of story in business, education, media, culture and our spiritual lives; and the other in having them tell both personal and folk/ethnic/cultural stories. No one leaves the class without understanding why and how stories shape our world.

**Shawn Callahan:** Probably my biggest surprise [since I’ve been running my company, Anecdote] is the fact that we have convinced some of the largest corporations in Australia and the world to adopt narrative approaches to things like change management, leadership development, collaboration and learning. When we started we would often get cock-eyed grimaces when we mentioned stories, but today people seek us out for our business-narrative experience. It doesn’t hurt that popular management books like *A Whole New Mind*, *Made to Stick*, *Influencer*, and a myriad of others feature stories and storytelling as key capabilities for the future.



I would say we turned a corner and really felt we could make Anecdote a successful business when we started getting people finding us on the web and wanting to engage our services. We still have a long way to go because there are so many things we would like to do including running more of our workshops in the US and UK and helping more people understand that narrative work is much more than helping people tell better stories.

**Annette Simmons:** If I am giving a keynote I love to say, “I think we need more metrics, don’t you?” The room erupts in laughter. Reports steal so much time that *everyone* thinks we need fewer, not more metrics. Even the top guys – they will say, “We have to edit this pile of measurements down to the vital few.” The problem is that no one can decide which metrics to stop, and no one can get approval for something that doesn’t promise a measurable

return on investment. So new projects mean new measurements ... or at least continuation of the old ones. Stop a report, and somebody screams bloody murder. So ... they are not shocked; they are hungry to cut out metrics. But they can’t seem to decide what to unload from their 50-lb backpack of tools, so they trudge on.

Without a boss who is willing to risk mistakes ... everyone keeps measuring everything. To spend significant time on stories, is definitely a lead by example issue. When the CEO or chief of staff start using stories and reward acts that are not measurable, but in the spirit of the group’s mission – then everyone else follows suit.

Even in a mechanized organization a storytelling manager can thrive as long as he/she has the important numbers. Like Lincoln responding to complaints of Gen. Grant’s drinking problem – whatever he/she is drinking, send everyone a case of it – a high-performing storyteller gets to keep doing whatever he/she is doing. Nothing succeeds like success.

Anytime someone says, “they won’t let me tell a story – all they want are the facts,” I assume that is their anxiety talking. Few, if any stories in a business setting should last more than three minutes. People will happily sit still for a three-minute story and *no one* will complain that they wished you had added another PowerPoint slide rather than told your story.

### **Susan Luke on the importance of understanding the strategic value of the narratives in organizations:**

My experience is showing me that anything that helps others to accept change through challenging times, that doesn’t cost a lot of money, is a relatively easy sell. The challenge is to frame it in such a compelling way that people understand the power behind such a simple concept.

### **Karen N. Johnson on getting buy-in from software testers:**

Talking about storytelling in front of a technical audience of software testers is somewhat gutsy. I could run the risk of being seen as fluffy, someone who doesn’t have the technical chops that are necessary in our field. But I think I counter enough of my presentations on storytelling with technical articles, webcasts, and blogging. If they look, other software testers can see that I have those credentials as well. In fact, having those credentials may give me a better opportunity to discuss incorporating story as a possibility.

When the pairing of storytelling and software testing is considered, I think it becomes apparent to testers that there are opportunities. Intrigue and agreement have been the most common reactions. I find software testers nodding their heads. After the presentation, they come over and say that they feel they’ve been using elements of story in their work all along. They just never considered delving distinctly into stories and have not previously purposefully tried to use story in their work. The

pairing makes sense to them. I've had several people approach me in person and in email asking me if I could coach them on where to begin. I've found most of the software testers who talk to me about storytelling are test leads, managers, or directors. These are all people who are in roles where in addition to testing, they need to provide information to business owners or executives. I suspect they've found what I have: the need to deliver detailed information in such a way that the information doesn't get lost with the data. There is a need to deliver detailed technical product findings in a consumable, memorable way without being weighed down with too much information and I think elements of storytelling work.

## Chapter 15: Personal Storytelling, Lifewriting, and Memoir

Some participants in the Q&A series focus on personal narrative – helping individuals tell their stories. They share their thoughts on this work:

**Stephanie West Allen on stories as part of end-of-life planning:** I wrote the book, *Creating Your Own Funeral or Memorial Service: A Workbook*, after I saw a close friend try to figure out what his mother would have wanted for her memorial service. He was grieving and had to guess. I thought it would be a nice gift if people would leave behind their wishes. Back then in 1998, the concept of designing your own end-of-life event was odd. Now not a week goes by that I don't hear or read about people doing this creating. The boomers change any ritual they encounter from wedding to births to, now, the last ritual. There are no stories in the book, but there is a section on life storytelling and its importance to one's memorial service and legacy.

**Stephanie West Allen on telling the stories of pets:** I notice that these days people are holding memorial services for their pets. For a while, I have been thinking it would be fun to teach a course on writing your pet's life story just as I have taught life story writing in the past. Why not? Animals have stories, too, but can't tell them. I guess I think the stories of all things are important. Maybe I will write the stories of my plants; they have seen a lot. Now if my car could talk ... I will have to write its story, too. Fun ideas, hmmm? But springing from how deeply I honor and value story as part of a thing's or being's existence.

**Cathie Dodd on the aspects of personal video storytelling that her customers find most difficult:** When we create their personal stories on video, they are overwhelmed about which pictures to use and how to organize them. We talk to them about what they want to convey, what type of things to include and how to break the pictures up in categories. Then if they can't come up with it, we suggest titles for each section and songs they might use for the pictures they provide. We also give suggestions on interviews they might want to include on video, or film clips they could use. We help them shape the project into a story by asking questions and trying to find the type of story they picture in their minds. Most of our clients say the videos are much better than they could ever have imagined.

**Cathie Dodd on the kinds of personal stories that work best on video:** Stories about personal experiences and lessons you learned or triumphs you had from the experience work best. Don't share a story while you're still living the experience. Wait it out till you can share the conclusion. Nobody wants to hear the struggle without a solution.

**Sarah White on the field of personal history:** I discovered personal history — storytelling for individuals — through an introduction to a working professional, Anita Hecht [pictured]. As soon as I saw what she was doing, the lightbulb went on for me. I was tired of working in advertising/marketing; I sought something that was more about the heart, and less about the wallet. I certainly found that. I think personal history is growing as people discover that the legacy they leave to their families is incomplete without some sense of their lives — what they learned from what they lived through, what they valued, and why. Another factor contributing to the growth of life-story writing is new technology, such as short-run printing, DVDs, and collaborative websites that expand the possibilities for creating and distributing those memories. As a result, there is a growing business opportunity for professional services dedicated to preserving memories.



**Sarah White on why people should consider hiring a Personal Historian to assist them in telling their stories:** My work in oral history has shifted in the last few years from the interview model to writing instruction. The emphasis remains on the first-person experience of "ordinary" people, but the method is more efficient and more empowering to individuals. I believe that small groups offer an ideal format for exploring autobiographical writing. I lead 12+ writing groups a year around Dane County (Wisconsin). I'm expanding that to include online writing classes and a travel experience combining memoir and genealogy. Lots going on here!

Leaving a legacy for grandchildren and beyond is typically the reason that compels people to begin preserving their personal history. But once people get started writing, they get hooked on so many more aspects of the work. "I am surprised at the effect this writing class has on me. It makes my life seem more real and valuable," said one participant. "The class is filled with the most interesting people!" said another.

Writing down our life stories connects generations and communities. That's compelling. As to why hire a personal historian — procrastination is the single biggest factor preventing people from completing their life stories. Hiring an individual to help is a great way to keep the project on track, no matter what form the collaboration takes — and the forms are infinite.

**Sharon Lippincott on how she got into lifestory writing:** My professional career was in training and staff-development coaching. During that time I wrote a book about how to conduct more effective meetings and had dozens of articles

published. Writing was my favorite part of my career. When I retired, I began writing about my early life for my grandchildren and fell in love with lifestory writing. I began teaching workshops on the topic as a way to keep my own writing flowing and my skills growing.

I've learned most of what I know, whether it's about writing, using computers, or anything else, from reading, trying things out and hanging out with other people doing those things. In my mind, knowledge is like air, and should be as freely available as air. I teach because I love to teach, but also because I always learn more than my students each time I go to class.

Jerry Waxler and I founded the Life Writers Forum [<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/lifewritersforum/>] because we love the energy of group interaction and the only firmly established national organization for life writers adamantly refuses to admit male members. I find that the constant influx of new ideas and questions keeps me on my toes, continually advancing the boundaries of my own thinking, and pushing me to take further steps in developing my skills and broadening my interests. One of my mentors in my graduate course in counseling psychology constantly urged me to focus on writing, claiming I had a gift for it. He's the one who kindled my interest and got me started, though I suspected that part of the reason he encouraged my writing was his recognition that I was ill-suited for a career in the field I was training for. (That turned out to be true.) Since then, my writing mentors have resided between the covers of their books.



## Chapter 16: The Practice of Storytelling

What is a storytelling practice like? There are as many answers to that question as there are story practitioners:

**Molly Catron on story and a model of love and grace:** When [the body, mind, and spirit] unite, we are passionate, joyful and committed. ... Stories can take us there. I think a powerful story manages in the most magical way to work on our heart, mind, body and spirit in a beautifully choreographed dance. I have studied some brain topology and understand some of the mechanics of how story functions in our neural networks but I prefer to think of story as a wonderful return to a very basic way of balancing our human experience. Stories have always been with us but we forgot them. We stopped gathering around the fire, the quilt, the dinner table. We left to sit silently in front of some form of media. We let ourselves wither in the desert of our beloved technology.

**Lori Silverman on the five practices surrounding the use of stories that bring results:** [Note: The five practices in Lori's article "The Five Sides of Story", in *Communication World* magazine, January/February 2007, comprise:

- how to find stories
- how to dig into them to uncover hidden patterns and themes
- how to select those stories that need to be reinforced
- how to craft memorable stories
- how to embody stories to positively affect attitudes, thoughts and behaviors.]

I frequently reference these topics in presentations to audiences of several hundred people across a variety of industries and organizations. Prior to delivering these talks, I always interview a minimum of five attendees. Most do not understand the difference between an example, case study, anecdote, etc., and a story. What it tells me is that organizations that think they are using stories really are not doing so. Even when I look online at story examples that several organizations make public, most are descriptions of situations or profiles of people or companies. As a result, Karen Dietz and I have crafted a piece that speaks to the distinctions between story and other forms of narrative called Narrative Forms. [For the "5 Sides" article and more about Narrative Forms, go to <http://www.wakeupmycompany.com/biography.htm>



and see downloadable articles in left-hand column.].

The second thing that stands out for me in these interviews is that few, if any individuals are cued into applications of story beyond storytelling — both the crafting and the oral tradition of delivering a story. So, while some organizational story practitioners may be working with clients on other types of story practices, organizations as a whole and their leadership are not consistently practicing them. Even within the industry of story use in organizations, I am now of the opinion that most practitioners have not grown their own learning in these other areas.

As a result, I believe the real power of story has yet to be realized in organizational settings.

Overall, there is a significant different between implementing story as a "tool" or "technique" and seeing it as a core competence for running a business that can get it significant returns on investment, especially in a recessionary economy. In order to embrace these five practices, you need to embrace the latter mindset rather than the former. Unfortunately, articles and books continue to be written on it as a tool and technique. To see the bigger picture means educating leaders on the possibilities of what can be and a broader scope of business application.

This is no different than what happened in the quality movement. In the mid-to-late-80's, everyone wanted to learn statistical process control (SPC; today it would be Six Sigma or lean manufacturing or root cause analysis). Only when failures happened did organizations recognize there might be fuller, richer approaches to the subject that meant shifting quality to the way you do business. The challenge we have is that story has not taken off with the same fervor as quality did two decades ago so its evolution as a field has been slower. My concern is that instead of evolving, the field of story work will disappear as so many other management approaches have over the years. Until organizations begin to implement these five practices as a holistic package, we will not have the data to truly detail best practices in these five areas. This assumes, however, that organizations are astute enough to put measurement systems in place to ascertain the value of story work usage.

**Svend-Erik Engh on his flair for seeing many possibilities/opportunities in a company within a few seconds when listening to its story:**

When I hear a story from a company I get much more information than the usual information overkill.

In 2008, I was working with Maersk Container Industry, a Danish container manufacturing company, and I had my camera with me as I looked for stories to be published on their web site.

One day one of the engineers showed me a prototype of a new floor in a container. He told me how this new floor made of steel and recycled plastic in the near future should be installed in all the company's containers. He was proud and delighted when he showed me that his work really mattered.

That vision, told with a lot of pride, told me more about the spirit of that company than the 20 pages of introductory material I received, a video bragging about the virtues of the company.

You can find the video here:  
<http://www.maerskbox.com/DNA.338.aspx>

**Jim Ballard on "the Story Mind ... that allows something that begins 'There once was ...' to bypass the left brain and go straight to the part that wants only to know what happens next:"** Over the years a frequent question I have asked people (even strangers such as wait-persons in restaurants and helpers in airports and hotels) is: "What's your dream?" I like seeing the reaction: the eyes go up and usually to their left, and they always tell. Asking people about their dream gets them to tell stories, and I am always careful to show respect and belief in the dream. This enables me to encourage them, and many have said that being able to tell makes their dream seem more real and more possible. I often share an idea or refer the dream-teller to a book, article, or person that might further their aspiration.

In my coaching business working with authors and creative people, I often coach them to put their ideas into a short story that encapsulates the main points; some have ended up publishing these. I also offer myself as a consultant/fable writer to companies and organizations, promising as an end product after my study of the company's DNA an engaging myth they can use with employees and customers to say, "This is us." In a time when so much is known through the intellect, there are three factors that contribute to a special need for stories: (a) we think that all our knowing comes through information; (b) we are desensitized by our overexposure to everything; (c) we lack the cultural stories that were common before we became a global village. Stories provide a way into the hungry heart.

**Melissa Wells on drawing inspiration from "explor[ing] remote areas to find unexpected stories about cool creatures:"** I spend a considerable amount of time in nature looking at things that most people never have the chance to observe or simply ignore. There are illuminating parallels between human behaviors and the actions of glaciers, leafcutter ants, howler monkeys, elephants. I am inspired when I stop and experience these creatures and environments, which can be powerful inspirations for people-totems, if you like. My job in the field, too, is to capture stories. I have video camera in hand and work with scientists to understand the unique behaviors of creatures. Then I craft a story on film.



Ultimately the stories that inspire me are unexpected. Did you know that a glacier is not, in fact, slow, but noisy and constantly in flux? How similar is that to the human experience of identity shift? Often I find humor in creatures. All of it serves to entertain, inspire and make clients know they are not alone.

The most important aspect of my transition from consultant to career coach and videographer is credibility. I spent more than 12 years as a management consultant. I experienced much of what my clients go through each day — long hours, lots of airports, managing difficult projects, politically complex situations, struggling for balance. Because I changed my life so dramatically, my clients look at me and gain confidence and hope. They see that the leap they want to make is less dramatic and that I have the experience to guide them in creating something new in their life, to pursue their own definition of success.

**David Vanadia on the interdisciplinary aspect of his story work:** Story ties all of my work together in the form of narrative. To me, narrative is everything. Every action I take makes up the story I tell and the story that gets told about me. My work is either crafting and creating an original story (for me or someone else) or living a story that will get told (by me or someone else.) The study and practice of storytelling is one side of the story cycle. Taking action and practicing conflict resolution (or conflict inspiration) is the other side of the story cycle. We are always in two constants — creating stories or telling them. It's two sides of the same coin. It's Yin and Yang. It's the Tao. It just is.

**Thomas Clifford on the importance of "responsible corporate video storytelling."** It's important simply because we have limited resources.

Wasting limiting resources like time and money on video stories that don't enlighten, inspire or simply help someone on their journey is not acting responsibly. Storytelling fits into this framework because we have a choice when it comes time to produce a video.

We can choose to produce a story that enlightens, uplifts, educates, inspires, and points to a deeper truth within each of us.

Or we can choose the opposite.

I believe a company's story is simply a reflection of each person's story. It's a collective story of individual stories. As such, these stories need to be handled with care, respect and integrity.

Irresponsible video storytelling is a disservice to everyone.

**Ron Donaldson on Knowledge Ecology and its relationship to storytelling:** I was constantly rebuked by proper ecologists while working at English Nature because I was abusing and misusing a term ("ecology") that meant so much to them. I graduated in geology and ecology, but that

mattered little to them. The term “knowledge ecologist” arose as a joke to attract interest at a knowledge-management conference to which I was invited whereby I would explain that “ideas, knowledge, and communities can be seeded, then their condition monitored, and where necessary they should be nurtured or pruned just like the wildlife interest on our Nature Reserves.”

“Knowledge ecologists” already existed as early as 1998 and can be found by Googling the term, and Dave Snowden himself was using “ecology” as an alternative to “management,” but as I read the books and literature on complexity theory they all kept repeating that the best way to understand a complex system is as an ecology.

More recently I discovered that Victor Shelford, the American zoologist and ecologist, defined “ecology” as “the science of communities,” which I think hits the nail on the head for my use of the term.

As for the storytelling connection, in the natural ecology of our pre-history, it is my belief that three things emerged in humans at a similar time. These were language, storytelling, and the ability of the brain to store and retrieve knowledge in the form of what we now term “a story.” Storytelling is therefore the “natural” way to share knowledge, it is the way our brains process our knowledge, not in the form of expert case studies, bullet-pointed presentations, or lists, but as stories.

**Sean Buvala on his site, Storyteller.net, a major resource for performance storytellers and others interested in storytelling:** It is not as much of a performance storytelling site as it is a clearinghouse for the many ways story can be expressed. When we began Storyteller.net a dozen years ago, there was nothing like it on the Internet. Actually, there was barely an Internet. We are older than Google. Our goal, back in 1995, was to expose people to storytelling in ways they might not have thought of before going to the site. It was unheard of that you could listen to stories online. We hoped that people might turn off their computers once they experienced recorded stories and book one of the storytellers in the directory to help them create storytelling in their schools, workplaces and other places in their communities.

We also wanted to create community online via such offerings as the articles, written and audio stories, events calendar and even, at one point, a “playground.” Back in our earliest days, the playground and the “storytelling coloring pictures” were the most used sections of the site. I still get hits for “coloring pictures” several times a month. We pulled the playground from the site as we thought we were just promoting the idea that storytelling was just for children.

We really were on the cutting edge of blogging, article marketing, directory listings, and podcasting before any of those words existed. The technology barely existed. Now, all the things we built and

systems we set in place are ubiquitous for everyone on the Internet. Back then, storytellers trembled in fear about putting their faces, stories, and contact information on the Web and we had a huge job in front of us trying to help folks see the future. I am tired just remembering all that work.

We are in need of a face-lift and few new “cool” features, with our last major revision back in 2002. We are privately funded, that is, my wife and I pay for the site, so we have to work out a new budget. However, even with our need to update, storytellers in the directory are always telling me that they get many bookings from Storyteller.net. The articles and stories, which we are always adding, get plenty of traffic. We have very high Google search-result rankings. So, we are very much alive and well at Storyteller.net. It is our gift to the community.

**Stephane Dangel on his bilingual storytelling blog and other storytelling initiatives:** What I wanted to do is to prove that even an under-developed country [France] (in the storytelling field), could contribute to the worldwide storytelling community. I’ve also launched the first Digg-like [site] dedicated to storytelling[, StoryBest: <http://storybest.corank.com/>]. I need to take care of it because after some good start, it has somewhat faded; I didn’t give enough time to it.

I’m working on a method to elicit stories within conflictual situations and contexts, which I’ve called “The I forgive...” method. I’ve already released a paper about it. I’m currently refining it, getting some advice, especially from Cynthia Kurtz [pictured]. I will release a completely new, expanded version as a chapter of a collective book to be released by mid-2010.



What I expect from these initiatives is a reverse, boomerang-like effect in France, in addition to the somewhat “frontal attack” I’m implementing. In addition, I’m working on some projects to organize training sessions in France, with trainers coming from the “expert countries,” that is to say the Anglo-Saxon ones — sessions conducted by renowned storytelling consultants are good tools to expand storytelling in the country.

**Cynthia Kurtz on satisfying aspects of her storytelling projects:** One satisfying aspect of the work has been helping clients get past their own barriers to success. At the start of story projects, a common obstacle is that clients want to find out about something but are hesitant to ask people to talk about it: it makes them or the storytellers look bad, or it’s just a very sensitive topic. Sometimes it is necessary to push clients a little bit out of their comfort zone in order to make the project succeed

for them. I've seen projects that had high ambitions but kept to the "safe" questions and ended up not finding out very much that was useful. Sometimes I help to carefully word questions so that they ask the things the client wants to know without revealing to the storytellers that the client wants to know about those things. For example, in one project the client had heard a rumor that some customers thought their attention to customer needs varied by socioeconomic group. The client was uncomfortable asking people about the rumor, but at the same time they did want to explore it. So we worked at the questions until we found a way to address the issue indirectly; and it turned out there was a pattern around the issue that gave the client something useful to think about.

The other aspect I've found rewarding is providing catalysis for story projects. I like to call what I do catalysis instead of analysis, because a catalyst speeds up chemical reactions and catabolic processes break up large molecules and release energy. I help people speed up sensemaking, break down previous solidifications of thought and belief, and release energy to consider new ideas. So I do this catalysis by looking at hundreds or thousands of collected stories (and self-interpretive answers to questions about them) and finding catalyzing patterns for the client to look at, play with, and react to. Because I come to the stories as a deliberately naïve outsider, I often find things people would have never thought to consider. Also for some reason (ecology background?) I seem to be comfortable finding these patterns and so have found a sort of niche where I fit well into the process.

To give an example of how the catalyzing patterns are used, I'll tell you what my colleagues Michael Cheveldave and Dave Snowden did with them in a recent client workshop. They first asked the workshop participants to seek patterns in the stories and answers that were collected without any intervention. Then after some time they showed them the patterns I had highlighted, with the graphical visualizations blown up to poster size so people could walk around and see several at once.

The workshop participants used those patterns to stimulate new discussions and debates that led to the discovery of new patterns (reinforcing, contradicting, related, reacting, reminding). Finally the participants integrated all of their observations and interpretations into general insights (this is the analysis or solidifying part, which you will note was done by the client, not the "analyst" or "expert") based on the stories and interpretations collected. If I were to choose some patterns I've often seen repeated, speaking broadly, these are some that come to mind:

- Several times now I have seen people viewing their clients or customers or employees or constituents with contempt, for example equating weakness, confusion or ignorance with insignificance, low status/value/worth or even wrongdoing. This is a fascinating pattern — in most cases people are biting the hands that feed them — and I wonder what it says about our society, besides the obvious connection between familiarity and contempt.

- I've often seen an interesting mixture of wariness toward large institutions and authority figures and high expectations for the solutions they bring. These two patterns taken together seem to say that people are conflicted about the utility of power structures in society.
- I often see attitudes and beliefs changing as people age, often passing from inexperienced idealism to frustrated struggle to practical resignation and/or self-righteous entitlement. I've seen similar generational patterns in several projects now and in fact always recommend making sure a diversity of ages are included in storytelling because of it.
- I am constantly amazed at the human ability to hold and express complex and contradictory beliefs — about nearly everything!

Overall I think the projects I've been most proud of are those that had the biggest potential to bring out the voices of people who otherwise had little power to change their conditions. When I've had a hand in this I've been grateful to have the chance to contribute.

**Karen Gilliam on "Sankofa Symbolism" and using it in her story work:** If you stop to think about, for example, a coaching practice, performance consulting, leadership development, or a post-project review, certain steps, like first becoming self-aware, gathering the facts, or reflecting on what was learned, are recommended. Each on its own accord stresses the importance of examining the past and present in anticipation of a desired future. This is Sankofa. [See page 47 for more on Sankofa.]

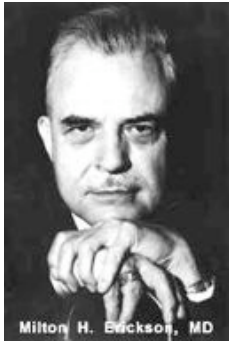
We don't always know what we don't know. We don't often think about our own thinking or how we come to know what we know. Consider the Ladder of Inference. In lightning speed we select from all the available data what we will focus on. We add meaning, that is create a story, through a lens of the world that reflects our beliefs, experiences and personal histories. The theme of Sankofa centers on the importance of going back — retracing our path — to the past in order to understand the present. As stated by Anais Nin "we don't see the world as it is. We see it as we are."

**Annie Hart on the relationship between performance storytelling and her work:** My main interest for using story is in the context of training and consulting. I love its power for effecting change quickly. I also enjoy performing for fun, and I use my storytelling around town to help promote local businesses and events. You can inspire people much more easily through carefully chosen stories and what is so much fun is that most of the time people don't even realize that they are changing. The stories are so entertaining that people are enjoying themselves. They think they're just having fun but something deeper is happening. It isn't until later that all of this change surfaces. I receive a lot of great feedback from individuals, groups and businesses describing the many amazing changes that have come about.



**Annie Hart on the relationship between neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) and storytelling:**

NLP has a lot of relationship to story. One of the most important connections is through Milton Erickson, MD. He is one of the main people from



whom they modeled NLP. Milton Erickson was a Master Hypnotherapist. He spoke in story to create change in the unconscious mind because the unconscious has a metaphorical orientation already. The stories made it easy for the solution to go right in and endure over time. There are many famous stories about Erickson; he was quite a character. One of my own NLP mentors studied with

him directly. He said that when they would go to see Milton he would just sit there and tell stories the whole time, and they would think that absolutely nothing was happening. Then three weeks later their lives would change!

Milton Erickson truly knew the therapeutic use of story, and since I am trained specifically in his work as well, I tend to use a similar structure for most of my stories. That way the message goes in really easily and people have a lot of fun while listening to my stories. One example of this is of an older woman was attended one of my storytellings. She called me the next day to tell me excitedly that she'd had a dream about love. This might not sound unusual but she was in her 80s, and apparently she hadn't thought about this in a long time. But through the story something wonderful woke up in her unconscious. I love using story in all my work with clients.

**John Caddell on probing the use of stories in companies and creating a story library of mistakes that people could consult when they underwent change:**

The idea [of creating a story library of mistakes that people could consult when they underwent some change] coalesced over a period of months. I wrote a couple of funny blog posts titled "Worst Practices in Customer Service," in which I recounted experiences where a big company did dumb things that made a customer (me) mad. Soon thereafter I read a blog post by Dave Snowden where he discussed the value of learning from avoiding worst practice (and the severe limitations of best practices). That was interesting to me. I mentioned this idea of learning from mistakes to my hairdresser, and she said, "Oh yeah, when I started this place the first thing I thought about was all the things my previous bosses had done that I didn't want to repeat." So there was something there. And of course I liked the surprising aspect of the idea. People told me, "Who is going to talk about their screw-ups in public?" And, lo and behold, some do! As far as side benefits, when someone (especially someone prominent) admits to a mistake, it has this neat

result of making him/her human to the rest of us. "Hey, she may be a world-renowned organizational-behavior expert, but she messes up just like the rest of us." I think that's beneficial to the workplace, and to society.





## Chapter 17: Storytelling in Marketing, Sales, and Branding

While some would argue that storytelling has always been central to marketing, branding, and sales, others see these story applications as an emerging trend. Practitioners share their thoughts:

**Ardath Albee on how she discovered that story-based marketing tools, such as B2B Website Stories and Email Story Campaigns were effective:** What I learned was that the better I knew my audience, the more relevant my stories were for them. I started seeing response rates climb and stay high. And I started seeing more people “raise their hands” to learn more. The best way to monitor online stories is with analytics and watching the ways your stories influence the behavior of your audience in relation to the outcome you wanted.

When I first started using stories for websites and emails, it was like pulling teeth to get companies to give up their staunch focus on products and “feeds and speeds.” (I do a lot of work with technology companies.) Then commoditization happened on a larger scale and companies started learning that their customers could buy a similar product from a number of vendors. They also found that exposing how they add value to their products became an important differentiator. That shift requires an entirely different story.

Companies will adopt stories a bit at a time. The best way I’ve found is to get them to try one campaign, prove the concept and then expand. “Story” is hard to sell because it conjures up memories of the Three Little Bears, *Wuthering Heights*, or a personal anecdote. The fiction writer in me can relate, but essentially story is really about engaging your audience, regardless of format.

**Casey Hibbard on the growth in customer stories:** The use of customer stories has grown considerably in the past 10 years. Technology companies are the original pioneers of customer stories because they were extra compelled to educate and validate potential customers about their complex and expensive products.

Now that has spread to all types of organizations for a few reasons: We’ve suffered from a credibility crisis. Surveys show that the public’s trust in companies is at its lowest ever. Along with that, trusted sources of information have changed as well. A company is now way down on the list of trusted sources compared to 10 years ago. Now “strangers with experience” is a close second behind someone a person already knows. You see that in how much we rely on Amazon and eBay reviews and feedback. We also no longer do business face-to-face as much. It’s much easier to establish trust and feel

confidence in what you’re buying if you can talk face-to-face with another human being. Finally, there’s more of a need to validate purchases. Companies have never been so pressed to make decisions that will bring a return on investment.

In the absence of trust and in-person connections, customer success stories and case studies help foster credibility and validate products and services. A potential customer can read a true account of another organization just like them that solved a problem successfully — increasing their confidence. If the story has measurable results, then it also provides the validation that buyers need.

**Casey Hibbard on the effectiveness of Success-Story Marketing (“the act of leveraging the stories of satisfied customers — in any form and any way—for promotional purposes”):** I had been writing and managing customer case studies for a year or so before I truly understood their power. As it turns out, I needed to hear stories about the effectiveness of these case studies for it to click for me! Such is the power of story.

After creating and managing a number of customer case studies for a client, a software company, word got back to me about a very specific success with one of the case studies in particular — featuring one branch of a nationwide mortgage company. The mortgage company was saving a significant amount of money by using the software, and improving customer service, and that was documented in the case study.

From there, the software company approached the national contacts for this mortgage company with the case study in hand. Sharing the success of a single branch led the national folks to recommend that branches adopt the software, leading to numerous new deals.

After 10 years in this field, I have now heard many anecdotes about how customer stories helped land media coverage, win an industry award, get people to sign up for a webinar, donate to a worthy cause, and so on. It’s an approach that just about any organization can leverage to communicate with their audiences.

**Carol Mon on the effectiveness of storytelling in sales:** I belong to a Toastmasters group, and at the time there were several sales people also in the group. Knowing that I was a storyteller, one of them casually mentioned that he uses stories all the time in his sales process but that he didn’t feel he got all he could from the delivery. That got me thinking that maybe I had learned



some techniques that sales people could benefit from. For one of the projects in the Toastmasters curriculum I put together a workshop for sales people. After receiving some good critique and glowing feedback for the presentation I developed it a bit more for the general sales population and started shopping it around.

I had one client who actually told stories fairly well but tended to go on too long and include far too much detail. After we spoke he trimmed the story to the essentials and noticed more people seemed to listen far more intently. We also talked about the need to listen to the customer's story first so that the sales story chosen fits the need. I don't have any figures of improved sales, but the sales person is far more confident when he tells his sales story.

### **Michael Wittenstein on the Storymining™**

**process:** Storyminers is a business strategy studio with a focus on customer-experience design. Storymining™ is the trademarked name for the proprietary process we use. The "secret" is this: We teach our customers that brands make promises that their businesses must keep. We show them why the best service brands use customer experience as a differentiator and as a way to achieve sustainable competitive advantage (the holy grail of marketing). Then, we take them through a process of finding the soul of their business — their story. Clients are often surprised to find out that it's not their story that becomes the focus of attention. Rather, it's the story a contented customer tells their friends and colleagues about the experience they just had. The retelling of customer experiences as stories is the genesis of word-of-mouth. By focusing the entire business on the stories customers tell their friends, the entire business becomes focused on the customer and the experience they provide to them. In my opinion, that's the beginning of a great brand!

The rest of the Storymining™ process involves change management, organizational alignment, process, training, people, and technology. Once we have the story, we can engineer the right kind of experience. With the detailed experience design in hand, we and the clients' teams can determine the operational requirements for the business to deliver on its promises. Once we know what the business has to do, we work with clients to help them figure out the best ways to do it. This may involve drawing pictures of who owes what to whom and creating other governance tools such as Governing Principles and a Reason For Being.

It's not uncommon to run across prospects, whose promises are unfocused and weak, or whose operations are sloppy — to the point that there is no good experience or good story to tell. If, through our due diligence, we find that the people in the organization aren't honest, don't care about their own employees, or don't want to listen to the voices of their customers, we simply won't engage. For those clients we do take on, if they decide not to do the hard work of changing the way they work to create better value and better outcomes for their customers, we also disengage. Working with those visionary, intrepid and people supporting leaders who are left is a great deal of fun and the work is quite easy. Generally, they are very excited about

having the tools they have been looking for to make their brands better. It's all about delivering a better customer experience, based on a great story that yields raving fans.

Interestingly, as Frederick Reichheld [pictured] proved in the mid-90s, treating your employees well leads to happy customers. And happy customers lead to happy shareholders. In



summary, a great story supported by a great experience, helps improve the bottom line. I think the world is ready for that message now and I'm excited to be a part of the community that is helping to make it available to mainline businesses.

Personally, I've found it quite interesting to witness the transformation as hard-nosed, bottom-line-oriented leaders make the transition from believing that their businesses make money (only the US mint can really make money) to realizing that their operations must deliver highly engaging experiences to win the attention — and loyalty — of their customers.

### **Chris Benevich on components of a compelling branded story:**

Remember that stories are meant to engage, to involve, to literally get into someone's head. So, say I'm networking at a local chamber of commerce meeting and get a lot of flat "hmm, that's interesting" comments. I know that I'm not connecting. Anytime you, a business owner, talk with someone, think of it as instant market research! Listen, pay attention; what is this other human being needing that I, or someone in my network, can help with? Have different questions and replies swirling in your head that you can try out on the spot.

Now, let's talk about how to adapt those replies in three quick ways. One, be specific, concrete. Don't just give your title; tie yourself into an anecdote that will resonate and, ultimately, be memorable. Two, give clear benefits. Doesn't every business owner want to help clients save time and money? Try explaining how you do this differently from your competitors. Three, be honest. Marketing and sales sometimes gets tagged as just bloating and sugarcoating your offerings, but people see right through this.

### **Jon Buscall on storytelling in branding in**

**Sweden:** Swedish companies (like IKEA) are good at using stories to make their brands familiar. ICA, the supermarket chain, has been running a TV ad which is like a soap opera about the staff in an ICA store for years. Stig and the rest of his crew have become familiar features of Swedish daily life. This is an incredibly subtle way of using a story to engage the audience in a brand. The ads are humorous and frequently updated and as each new "episode" emerges, the ongoing story brings ICA and its audience closer.

Several companies have tried to follow this technique, notably Findus who produce ready-

made-meals, but ICA have been the most successful.

Sweden is very web-orientated, and we have led the world in terms of Internet access and mobile phone adoption rates for years. However, it's only recently that businesses have started to grasp the idea of storytelling being related to business. It's coming, but slowly.





## Chapter 18: Storytelling and Career

This storytelling application is of special interest to me because, as the topic of my doctoral dissertation and a popular press book I authored, it marked my entry point into the world of applied storytelling. I was delighted to find kindred spirits to talk on this topic:

**Melissa Wells on the concept of “It’s your career, write your own story:”** The heart of my work is helping people clearly articulate what they want and why. I chose “Your Career, Your Story” as a way to inspire and encourage clients to choose their work. In short, if you cannot articulate what you want, why, and how you are different from others in your field, then finding a satisfying job or anything else in life, becomes less likely.

Clients find I make the process fun by letting them express what brings them happiness and what experiences make their skin crawl, and building from there. When someone is enthusiastic, or shares their worst experiences, I get a vivid picture of who they are and the role of work in their life. Once I’ve established trust, I’m able to guide them to craft a narrative they can use to persuade, influence or soothe.

**Carol Mon on coaching individuals in story-based communication skills:** Recently my business has grown significantly in the one-on-one coaching piece. I find working with individuals very rewarding because it is much easier to target one’s specific needs. In workshops some participants are good at delivery but struggle to find meaning, others are good at finding meaning but cannot easily find stories. Working one-on-one, the help I give is focused and feels more like co-creating. Workshops can feel a bit more one-sided, too much lecture.

My work with individuals has included working with speakers on stories for their keynotes, small business owners and their elevator speeches for networking, unemployed for interview stories and small business owners who are developing stories for brochures, or web content. It has been a wide variety of work, which is fascinating and rewarding in the sense that I get to hear a lot of great stories.

**Rob Sullivan on the effectiveness of storytelling in job-hunting:** I learned the effectiveness of storytelling by experiencing the pain that comes from not telling my story.

When I graduated from college, the job I wanted most was to work in account management at Chicago-based advertising giant Leo Burnett. Like hundreds of my classmates, I applied for one of the coveted on-campus interviews. Despite an objectively terrible interview, the recruiter saw enough of a spark that he invited me to fly to Chicago for a full day of interviews. Two weeks

later, Burnett rejected me. Over the next 12 months, I had 80 advertising interviews in Chicago, New York, and Minneapolis. The following year, I reapplied to Burnett and was hired after my 23rd interview with the company. However, I was not a different person than I had been the year before. The only difference was that I had learned to tell my story.

As it turned out, there wasn’t a single moment or resource that opened my eyes to the value of storytelling. Instead, I gradually realized that the best interviews were the ones in which my story came across more clearly. At first, that made me think that my success was directly related to the skill of the interviewer. Only later did I realize the power and responsibility that I, as a candidate, had to make sure my story came across — regardless of the interviewer’s approach. Simply put, you can’t count on interviewers to ask effective questions. You have to have a strategy and a compelling collection of stories to help people make the right decision.

After spending countless hours helping job hunters from a variety of industries, I realized that the inability to share our stories is widespread - mostly because our society isn’t clear on the distinction between bragging and factual self-promotion. For this reason, I decided to write *Getting Your Foot in the Door When You Don’t Have a Leg To Stand On* (McGraw-Hill). It’s the book that would have saved me from the ego-battering experience job hunters know only too well.



Recognizing that the challenge of marketing yourself effectively does not stop when you get a job, I recently finished a new eBook called *RIFProofing Your Career: How to Protect and Keep Your Job in Any Economy*. For more information, visit its companion site, RIFProofing [<http://www.rifproofing.com/>].

**Rob Sullivan on telling compelling-experience stories on resumes:** Aldous Huxley, the philosopher, once said, “Human beings have an unlimited capacity for taking things for granted.” I would take that one step further:

Human beings have an unlimited capacity for taking themselves for granted.

One of my favorite examples came from an event planner named Andrea who had a résumé loaded with the usual laundry list of responsibilities. However, telling people what you are responsible for is not storytelling. There is no magic in responsibilities. If you want your story to be special, you have to find and include a few unforgettable details.

Andrea had the details, but they were buried. After much probing, I finally got Andrea to admit that in eight years at the company she had never gone over budget and had never missed a deadline. That was the beginning of a good story, but we need more. So I asked her to create a list of all the events she had planned along with key facts like:

How many people attended each event

- How many people she supervised
- How much time she had to plan the event
- Her budget
- What she actually spent
- How much she saved

Of all the facts we uncovered, two were most surprising:

1. The largest event she planned was for 20,000 people.
2. She had saved her company a million dollars over eight years by coming in at or under budget on all of those events.

That turned out to be a great story because the average annual savings of \$125,000 per year was \$50,000 more than she was paid. In other words, she was an investment, not an expense.

Andrea's story is particularly impressive when you consider how she originally discounted her performance saying, "I just did the job I was paid to do."

## Chapter 19: Storytelling and Writing and Communications

For some practitioners, the practice of storytelling goes hand-in-hand with the practice of writing. Others emphasize the utility of storytelling as a communication tool:

**Jon Buscall on storytelling in business English communication:** One of the things I try to do is get Swedish businesses to use storytelling as a way of reaching out to new audiences. I recently did a lot of work for Stockholm University [pictured] in building its international profile. This involved writing 30 or so profiles of key researchers and international students. The aim was to give international visitors to the website a better flavour of what is going on in Stockholm and encourage students to study there and academics to make links with the university.



Although we used journalistic articles to “promote” leading research at the university I was very cognizant that each article was part of an ongoing story: that Stockholm University is an innovative, forward-thinking, internationally minded university. So I wasn’t just reporting on research initiatives, I was helping academic departments redefine and tell their story in a public setting. Of course, being a former academic myself, I know how cautious you have to be with the press. So I did a lot of work talking to professors, helping them get a story across that would benefit them as well as the university. For example, several people I interviewed wanted to increase their international network and collaborate with more people. I made sure that the articles I wrote on them reflected this. I think companies need to realise that old-school press releases just don’t work anymore. You have to tell your story in an engaging narrative that will hold an audience. One of the knock-on effects of the Net has been that people graze text on the web. They read incredibly fleetingly. So it’s important that web writing holds the reader’s attention. Through stories and narrative techniques that hold an audience, you can help businesses get their message across.

Convincing managers is the difficult part, though. I find that often people in positions of power underestimate the power of the web and storytelling. I recently tried to convince a CEO that he needed to change the way he communicated in writing email to employees. Each time he wrote anything, it was telling a story of how authoritative and unfriendly he was — although he was, in person, actually very amenable.

This came about because his emails were so archaic and blunt. He continually addressed people as “Mr” or “Ms” in emails and the whole tone of them was like some archaic Dickensian missive. This resulted in him effectively coming across as cold and authoritative. Archaic, even. Middle-managers in the company, many of them Swedish, adopted the same rhetorical strategies, following his lead in English, and this led to a lot of bad feeling behind the scenes, simply because people copied the CEO’s style.

I tried to get him to understand that each email told the story of how people should communicate with each other. It also said a lot about their relationships.

The whole concept of “show, don’t tell”, which I used a lot when teaching creative writing, was very useful here in getting him to change the way he wrote.

It doesn’t matter how much you tell someone that you are friendly if you show them that you are cold and arrogant with the way you write.

So in this instance I helped him develop strategies to show, through his writing and emails, that he was friendly and pleasant. This in turn led middle-managers to change their own tone and things in the company improved. You have to be careful in Sweden because many Swedes copy the English strategies they see native-speakers (or senior staff) using. This can lead to no end of problems. The same thing can be applied to web copy.

Translations of Swedish copy often don’t have the same cultural nuances as the source text. It’s better, often, to write the text from scratch in English. A lot of businesses haven’t grasped how important this is yet. Unfortunately, there are a lot of businesses out there in Sweden that think that because international customers haven’t complained about their English, they must be doing okay. I try and tell them that, well, those customers probably aren’t their customers anymore.

So it’s a bit of an undertaking to persuade some Swedes that if you’re going to tell your story in public in English, it should be done so in a manner that really nails the brief. Unfortunately, there’s a lot of corporate waffle out there that goes for copywriting simply because managers have underestimated how important it is to tell your story effectively in the target language.

**Thaler Pekar on cognitive linguistics, brain imaging, persuasive communications, and storytelling:** I prefer story sharing, not storytelling. Leaders must share their stories so as to evoke stories in their listener’s minds and guide them toward personal understanding of the issue and need for action. It’s a two-way, 2.0, conversation.

Sharing a personal story helps establish trust with your listener, and evoking a story in your listener's mind helps make your information personally relevant. These are the steps through which any persuasive communicator must move in order to entice their listener to take action.

By evoking a personal story, your listener is also able to recognize their part in the solution you are proposing. Once your listener is personally engaged, they are more likely to hear and process your message, and to take the action you wish them to take.

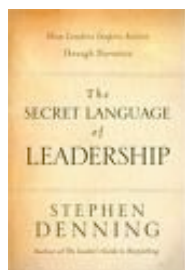
My easy-to-remember and even easier-to-apply approach to persuasive communications is called Heart, Head & Hand™.

Heart, Head, & Hand can be used by leaders to establish trust with their audience. First, I recommend that speakers share a story that their listeners are likely to find emotionally relevant, often by sharing a personal anecdote. In this way, leaders connect with their listener's heart.

Only then can reasons, data, and a rationale for the leader's message be provided. Only after

connecting with the listener's heart should leaders seek to connect to the listener's head. [Stephen Denning has profound things to say about "Reinforcing with Reasons" in *The Secret Language of Leadership*.]

Then, true leaders give the audience something to do — they put something in their hand and invite them to be part of the solution.



Both "Storytelling is Only Half the Story," and "Heart, Head & Hand: The Science of Communication" can be found on the Tools page of my web site. [<http://thalerpekar.com/tools.php>]

**Corey Blake on the future of narrative nonfiction/business novels:** I just finished *Excalibur Reclaims Her King*, a medieval fantasy, with Angelica Harris. I'm in love with this book! As far as narrative nonfiction, I just finished the book and the proposal for *The Family Business* with Dr. Kay Vogt and Jarret Rosenblatt. It is a non-fiction narrative look into the work Kay does with business families — like the ones we watch in the news but rarely get to see behind the curtain. Kay provides guidance to these people and assists them in navigating this incredible world where the family often takes a back seat to the business. It's a world steeped in power, buckets of money, and quite a few unhappy people. Wonderful stuff for a manuscript that uses a real-life narrative to get across some phenomenal new ways of looking at business and family dynamics.

I'm also working on *The Corporate Madonna* with Heather Leah Smith and Eva Silva Travers. Heather is a director at Trinity Health, and she has a brilliant approach to business that combines the masculine and feminine in the workplace. Groundbreaking stuff, in my opinion. We use story throughout the

book, though it is not a total narrative like *EDGE!* or *The Family Business*.

Other than that, we put out *Duckey and the Ocean Protectors* recently — a book for middle-schoolers about a band of adventurous sea creatures that save the planet, teaching about the oceans and the environment along the way.

I'm also in the middle of working with a man named Daniel Cardwell, who is probably the most intelligent man I have ever worked with, and I'm desperately trying to get my head around his life story. Dan is a dark-skinned German man, a product of WWII, with a German woman for a mother and a dark-skinned American soldier for a father. He grew up unwanted by Germany or the US, unwanted by whites or blacks. His life is a brilliant study of racism from the perspective of total outcast. The story spans nearly every continent as he traveled around the globe working to save African Americans with cancer by bringing radiation technology to underdeveloped nations. We're not sure of a title for that one yet, but here's his Web site: [<http://www.grammerchildren.com>]

**Sharon Lippincott on the importance on writing in storytelling and the aspects of the writing process that are most personally satisfying for telling her life story:** I love reading eloquent narrative. Occasionally I find a phrase so stunningly vivid that I have to stop and linger over it, feeling the words run through my mind with the fluid grace of warm summer rivulets. I can't do that when I'm listening to an oral narrative. I'm drawn to the printed page, and though I know eBooks will play an increasingly large role in the future, they will never replace the sensuous feel of paper between my fingers. But it's more than that. Writing endures and remains stable. Oral stories are soon forgotten, and even the fragments that persist are morphed over time and countless tellings. I find it richly satisfying to know that I've told my story, my way, and nobody can mess with it. In that same vein, I can write a whole story without interruption. When I tell a story, I may be interrupted and sidetracked with questions or comments. Then others are sure to tell one after mine, overwriting listeners' memory space with new material. Story telling often evolves into a game of one-upsmanship. This is less likely to happen with written stories.

In the final analysis, people must follow their own gifts and inclinations. My father is a master storyteller, and nobody tries to follow his stories. I do better in writing. That's what I'm called to do, and where my passion lies.

**Jim Ballard on why he wrote some of his books as stories or fables:** I'll focus on *No Ordinary Move; Relocating Your Aging Parents — A Guide for Boomers*, the book my wife Barbara and I have published in both paperback and audio-book form. In operating her senior move manager business for 14 years, Barbara has amassed a host of stories from the many



moves she's helped clients make. When it came to our putting the strategies and wisdom she's accumulated into a book targeted at adult children facing this issue, it was plain that the usual how-to approach (omniscient voice saying, "Do this, do that," laced with case studies) would not work for us. We wanted to convey the emotional issues for both the adult children and the aging parents. We wanted to treat the inter-generational points in a way that would help readers understand "the other side." Storytelling was the answer; in this particular case, it was the way to round in so many of the stories Barbara had heard and been a part of. Seniors and family members, when given the chance, become natural storytellers during the process of a move. Storytelling can produce deep understanding and healing in families.

We created a fictitious family who are facing this issue, and followed their inner and outer journeys through the eight stages of a move. We included all the frustration and consternation people feel with their older parents, the resistance and fears that the parents feel, and the sense of overwhelm both groups experience when they face a major move. We also inserted a wisdom voice in the character of Moving Mentor, the professional move facilitator. The depths of wisdom Barbara has gleaned through her work are revealed in Moving Mentor's journal entries. This particular instance of storytelling has already given countless people insights into how to help their parents relocate. It also teaches senior move managers to be aware of the opportunities for storytelling inherent in the work they do.

**Karen N. Johnson on the extent to which her background in technical writing predisposed her to incorporating storytelling into software testing:**

I have a couple of influences in the art of investigation in my background. I was a journalism major in college, and I worked as a reporter for a couple of years. So the tenacity of tracking people down and asking questions and quickly sensing whether someone is a person that I need to gently coax answers and information from versus someone who I need to stand up taller, louder and stronger in order to get information from has become an innate skill. And writing and telling is part of the reporting process.

After working as a reporter, I worked as a tech writer for years on a variety of different types of software. While the image of a tech writer is someone buried in an office cube, I didn't work the job that way. I spent time talking to the developers, learning the less obvious information about the inner constructs of the applications I was working with. I began to learn that many developers will talk in detail and with pride about what they've built. You just have to ask questions in the right way at the right time.

There is a thrill for me in being able to get at least temporarily into the mind of someone else. I like trying to see things the way they do and then take that information and either test software, deliver

training, or explain information. I like being the glue on a project by being able to bridge communication between the technical and the business audience. The use of story fits this need. When I work as an independent software test consultant, I frequently report to senior executives on the current state of a product. I've found stories allow me to deliver information in a way that has a better chance of being listened to and consumed than other formats. One thing that I've learned from storytellers is that not all stories have to be long tales; a lot of information can be shared in even a one-minute or three-minute story.





## Chapter 20: The Future of Storytelling

What's next for storytelling? The Q&A practitioners offer their prognostications:

**Annie Hart:** I foresee an explosion of the use of story for marketing purposes. It has already begun. Years ago you couldn't find much written on the use of story in business, just a few books. But a few weeks ago I was at the bookstore and I found at least four popular books on marketing that mentioned storytelling. Storytelling is finally becoming known for the force that it is, and I am thrilled about that.

**Karen Dietz:** I think there are multiple events on the horizon for the discipline: a greater focus on ethics and quality, an improved skill base, and more knowledge sharing among story professionals. I also see organizational story work moving into becoming a core competence for organizations. Today it is seen too often as a mere tool, which is severely limiting and does not recognize storytelling as fundamental to an organization's success. I would like to think that organizations are starting to realize that mastering stories and storytelling is a core competence to their business growth and operations. Personally, my passion is training leaders to become compelling storytellers as an essential leadership and influence skill. Coaching — workshops — I love it!

**Chris Benevich:** As we see more people get comfortable with online tools, we'll see more multimedia expressions of storytelling and more collaboration. Instead of one griot per community, we'll have teams of them, from all different cultures, all piping in from around the globe. Personally, I'm fascinated by the nonlinear story and by stories that change based on the reader's choices. I think multimedia platforms are perfect for this art form.

**Cathie Dodd:** I can see more and more online video stories and interactive stories online. I also see more people creating their family histories on video.

**Sharon Lippincott:** Until recently, most of the impetus I'm aware of was focused on writing. But the desire to leave a legacy of life stories is often most urgent in people who are unable for one reason or another to write. The growing availability of digital recording equipment and camcorders is opening the option of audio/visual legacies, instead of writing, or as a supplement to writing. This form of "story catching" is becoming especially prevalent in nursing homes, hospices, and other late-life facilities. I am eager to continue exploring these multi-media avenues as an adjunct to writing.

**Mike Wittenstein:** I honestly believe that story will become a synonym for strategy. Alan Kay said, "The best way to predict the future is to invent it."

Story is one way to do that. Simply writing a story about a business's ideal future state helps socialize the idea internally and align various departments toward it. And, story is much easier to understand than a PowerPoint presentation. At Storyminers, we use storyboards to portray a visual representation of a client's strategy and to capture all of the clues that make their signature experience compelling. After that, we write the actual story, using words.

**Corey Blake:** With so much information accessible, I am a true believer that what has lasting impact is information delivered through some kind of story/performance. Otherwise, it is just content, and content without form is nothing more than information that goes in one ear and out the other. But form married with content is inspiring, and that inspiration is a springboard for learning, for remembering, for processing and ultimately for growth. I'm seeing more businesses turn to storytelling, and that tells me a ton about where we're headed. Businesses often come to our company and show us the "information" they have been sharing with potential clients. We help them turn that into story that emotionally engages people and attracts new business. People nowadays want to be included in an experience. Good storytelling considers the audience as a player in the story. So while I believe that the publishing industry is falling apart, I also believe that storytelling itself is on the rise.

**Michael Margolis:** The future of storytelling resides in Generation Y, otherwise known as Millennials. This important demographic, aged 18-29 and numbering over 60 million in the United States and 120 million in Europe, represent what I call the "Story Generation." (Keep in mind, the numbers and age boundaries are still being debated, but these are simply conservative estimates). In our youth-obsessed culture, this generation has assumed the role of trend-setter and taste-maker, far eclipsing the reach of Generation X and even challenging the uber-dominance of Baby Boomers on our collective culture.

For these children of the Internet Age, storytelling is a multi-layered, choose-your-own adventure, narrative cornucopia, where one's identity is ever morphing and adaptable to the presiding context. Not to mention, almost everyone in this generation is a budding designer, artist, writer, technologist, and entrepreneur. In my opinion, you've got the makings of a cultural and creative renaissance, assuming we don't get lost down the rabbit hole of the storytelling metaverse.

**Ron Donaldson:** Up until recently I thought the most powerful use of story was that of sharing knowledge and building community. I just couldn't get excited about systems that hold and allow analysis of stories. In the last few months however I have been working with SenseMaker which developed out of Dave Snowden's original concept of a narrative database.



The SenseMaker approach is a revolution in the making. The system is initially populated with narrative fragments in the form of stories, blog entries, papers, video, podcasts — whatever. The context and intended meaning of

each is captured by person creating the item (“signified”) so that these fragments can be patterned according to theme, archetypal character, intended audience or numerous other filters.

Original narrative, unbiased by the interpretation of “experts,” which can then be sifted for patterns so that anyone can derive their own meaning from the original stories will revolutionise the importance and our approach to story-work.

The possibilities of using such a system for monitoring and making sense of self-signified current narrative material ranges from scenario planning, customer satisfaction, and all forms of “management, leadership and change.” It also seriously questions whether we currently make appropriate use of our experts when they would be much better used “signifying” original source material than writing biased, quickly out of date reports.

I think we are on the brink of a phase change in our understanding of the importance of story and storytelling and the implications of the emerging realisation that we live in an uncertain world, the sheer complexity of the numbers of people, communities, and economies now interconnected means that old approaches are becoming just that, old and outdated.

It is often quoted that storytelling emerged as a means of making sense of our relationship between ourselves and the environment. There is already a great disconnect between youngsters and their environment; my hope is that stories about nature and our relationship with the land can somehow reconnect and inspire a new generation of naturalists, environmental workers and, who knows, maybe some knowledge ecologists.

**Madelyn Blair:** I don’t think that I can anticipate how others will use story. As more and more people, learn about story, they will begin to use story in ways that meet their needs using processes that fit the situation. That said, I hope to use story to help people discover ways in which they can keep their knowledge current. We live in a world where information and knowledge comes at us at a pace that can’t be absorbed. Moreover, we are able to go after specific knowledge with an ease that has never before been offered. Yet, how to manage this barrage? Through the use of story, I hope to show that there are many, many ways in which individuals, teams, even organizations can keep themselves appropriately current. (My book on the subject is about to be published.) [Editor’s note:

The working title of Madelyn’s book is *Riding the Current: How to keep your knowledge up to date without drowning*, and she notes, “it is a book filled with the stories of people who have figured out how to do this along with a process for the reader to create what works best for them.”]

**Svend-Erik Engh:** Interplay is a key word here. So the basic of the oral storytelling, interplay, can be transferred into various aspects of life.

**Jon Hansen:** As the world becomes more complex and disparate through globalization and social networking (in the latter, a great deal of my ongoing research and development resources have involved the evolution of the Web 4.0 platform), the importance of effective storytelling will play a critical role in establishing points of commonality that will lead to a greater mutual or “collective” understanding.

This is due in large part to an effective storyteller’s ability to provide a real-world point of reference that is universally recognized for its practical application. And it does not matter whether or not the story is presented within the illustrated or written framework of an Aesop’s fable, or a recounting of an actual event that the storyteller has himself (or herself) experienced, or witnessed first hand. The essential element is that it translates the complex into the everyday, thereby widening the funnel of impact.

In the end, effective storytelling is both the filter and translator through which a greater understanding of the complexities that define our world today can reach out to the broadest number of people. It is therefore the lynchpin of effective communication.

**Terrence Gargiulo:** All the incredible research in neuroscience, cognitive science, and learning are unearthing some wonderful possibilities for our nascent field. People are hungry how to be present in the here in a way that simultaneously enables them to feel part of an interconnected fabric and while realizing their boundaries and limitations of self that animate in our lives.

I believe we need to build a strong interdisciplinary bridge between practitioners and researchers. I would like to see a research agenda collaboratively defined and pursued by academics and professionals. I’d love to see a world-class international event with a dynamic format to jump-start these inter-disciplinary conversations and which culminate in the articulation of a research agenda.

## Directory: Storytelling Practitioners

Here, in reverse alphabetical order, are all 43 participants in this book, with photos, bio information, and contact data.

### Mike Wittenstein



**Mini-bio:** Mike Wittenstein is a fresh voice on the speaking circuit with a lot to say about customer experience. Through Storyminers, his strategy studio, Mike translates leaders' most important stories into experiences customers rave about. More here:

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### Sarah White



**Mini-bio:** Sarah White provides writing services for individuals, families, businesses, and communities from her home base in Madison, WI. Typical projects include books, articles, online content, and life histories. She leads reminiscence writing workshops, and producing group publishing projects and public story performances.

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### Melissa Wells



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### David Vanadia



**Mini-bio:** David Vanadia, who calls himself "A Sugar-Free Tai Chi Storytalking Artist," has been a professional storyteller since 1994, and his original stories have been heard in the United States and abroad in festivals, conferences, schools, bars, nightclubs, parks, sidewalks, theaters, and on the radio. After experiencing 9-11, he left the rat race and moved from New York City to a simpler life in Portland, OR.

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### Katie Snapp



**Mini-bio:** Katie Snapp left the engineering world 21 years ago to become a Leadership Performance Coach and a nationwide speaker. She authored *Skirt Strategies: 249 Success Tips for Women in Leadership* and founded Better-Leadership.com, an online resource for what she refers to as the "Everyday Leader."

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**Annette Simmons**

**Mini-bio:** Annette Simmons is a successful keynote speaker, consultant and author of four books: *The Story Factor*, named as one of The 100 Best Business Books of All Time, followed by *Whoever Tells the Best Story Wins*; *A Safe Place for Dangerous Truth*; and *Territorial Games: Understanding and Ending Turf Wars at Work*.  
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**Carol Mon**

**Mini-bio:** Carol spent 13 years in human resources and payroll and another five in radio and TV before finding her passion for storytelling. She draws on these experiences to help others create and tell the right story. Since beginning her career as a professional storyteller/speaker in January 2000 she has told a wide variety of stories to a wide variety of audiences and has delivered dozens of workshops on the power of story in communications.  
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#### Stewart Marshall



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#### Michael Margolis



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#### Susan Luke



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#### Sharon Lippincott



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#### Cynthia Kurtz



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**Annie Hart**

**Mini-bio:** Annie Hart brings energy and enthusiasm to everything she does. She has spent her lifetime travelling around the world, gathering great stories, studying with the masters and ignoring as many rules as she possibly can. Annie's personal business ethic is to embody the principles of human kindness, generosity, and collaboration. Her certifications include NLP Trainer, Expressive Arts, Non-violent communication and Dilts Leadership Training. She has brought her work to the business, education, healthcare, nonprofit, youth-at-risk, and community organization fields.  
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**Karen Gilliam**

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**Svend-Erik Engh**



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**Ron Donaldson**



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**Karen Dietz**



**Mini-bio:** Karen Dietz, PhD, owner of Polaris Associates Consulting, Inc., works with leaders and executive teams who want to assemble and cultivate their most compelling stories. Her background in the diverse fields of folklore, creativity, strategy, organizational development, high performance teams, and interpersonal communication allow her to develop targeted approaches to executive storytelling and organizational narratives. More here: <http://tinyurl.com/p5dplu>

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**Stephane Dangel**

**Mini-bio:** Stephane Dangel defines himself as a "storytelling activist," since organizational storytelling is still an emergent discipline in his country, France. He has created the blog Storytelling, which includes posts both in French and in English. Stephane teaches storytelling in business schools and is a keynote speaker in storytelling. More here: <http://tinyurl.com/la8rtc>

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**Thomas Clifford**

**Mini-bio:** For 23 years, Tom has been helping companies tell their story by producing award-winning documentary videos. He finds out what matters most to organizations — what they want their market and the world to know about them. Companies from Fortune 500's to non-profits use his films for marketing, recruiting and retention, sharing corporate values and more. More here: <http://tinyurl.com/5kdjz3>

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**Molly Catron**

**Mini-bio:** Molly Catron is a storyteller with 20 years experience in Corporate America. As a manager and organizational-development consultant, she studied various aspects of organizational behavior. She has used story for leadership development, change management, corporate strategy development, root cause analysis, market research and other areas to help organizations be effective in the Information Age. More here: <http://tinyurl.com/n5clyt>

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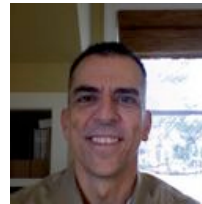
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**Shawn Callahan**

**Mini-bio:** Shawn Callahan, founder of Anecdote, has been a consultant and researcher for more than 15 years and has undertaken a wide variety of projects — including community-of-practice development, knowledge-mapping, knowledge strategy, and using narrative techniques to tackle seemingly intractable issues. More here: <http://tinyurl.com/mb3m7q>

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**John Caddell**

**Mini-bio:** John Caddell left a 20+-year career in the high tech industry to consult. He works with wireless carriers, software and managed service providers and media companies on projects involving strategy, alliances and marketing. He also probes the use of stories in companies for learning and assessment and founded the Ning group, The Mistake Bank. More here: <http://tinyurl.com/lz6rsn>

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**Sean Buvala**

**Mini-bio:** Sean describes the collection of stories in his head as "life and legend" representing the mix of stories from his experiences, myth and legend from many cultures, sacred stories and observations of shared life events. Sean has been presenting and storytelling "on the road" since 1985. He is the founder of Storyteller.net, the largest online resource for storytelling and storytellers. More here: <http://tinyurl.com/ngnnfn>

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## Jon Buscall



**Mini-bio:** Jon Buscall quit his job as a university lecturer in 2004 and now juggles copywriting, journalism, translation, and creative writing from his base in Stockholm, Sweden. He also provides a variety of text services for Swedish and Norwegian companies selling to English-speaking markets.  
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## Corey Blake



**Mini-bio:** Corey Blake is a writer, author, and keynote speaker. He is the co-author of *EDGE! A Leadership Story* (finalist, National Best Books 2008 Awards) with Bea Fields and Eva Silva Travers, *From the Barrio to the Board Room* with Robert Renteria, *Excalibur Reclaims Her King* with Angelica Harris and *The Family Business* with Dr. Kay Vogt. He is also chairman of the dream of Writers of the Round Table Inc.  
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## Madelyn Blair



**Mini-bio:** Madelyn Blair, PhD, is the founder of Pelerei (a consulting firm that provide innovative management solutions to help organizations transform themselves) and has been its president since its inception in 1988. She is an expert in organizational development, knowledge management, instructional design, and research technique. She is an early advocate and practitioner of Appreciative Inquiry.  
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## Sharon Benjamin



**Mini-bio:** Sharon Benjamin is the principal of Alchemy, a consulting practice built on the foundation of her deep experience leading and working for nonprofits as both a staff person and volunteer. She has raised more than \$75 million for nonprofits since 1980.  
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## Chris Benevich



**Mini-bio:** After 17 years of experience in communications, Chris Benevich founded Panache Writing, Inc. Her company connects clients with the people they desire to attract using Compelling Storytelling<sup>SM</sup>. Panache Writing, Inc. excels in creating brand awareness, strengthening existing relationships, fixing broken operations, and winning new accounts. She invites readers to contact her for a free consultation.  
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## Jim Ballard



**Mini-bio:** Life coach and author Jim Ballard has coauthored books with Ken Blanchard, including *Managing By Values*, *Everyone's A Coach*, *Mission Possible*, *Customer Mania*, and *Whale Done!* On his own Jim has published *What's the Rush?*, *Mind Like Water*, and *Little Wave and Old Swell: A Parable of Life and Its Passing*. The primary writer of *Whale Done!* and *Whale Done Parenting*, he has compiled his coauthors' stories and suggestions and worked them into a parable.  
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**Stephanie**

**Mini-bio:** Stephanie West Allen, JD, practiced law in California for several years and has been a mediator for more than two and one-half decades. She is the author of *Creating Your Own Funeral or Memorial Service: A Workbook* and many articles on workplace and professional issues.

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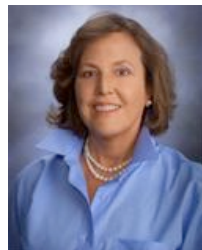
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**Ardath Albee**

**Mini-bio:** Ardath Albee is a B2B marketing strategist and the CEO of her firm, Marketing Interactions, Inc. She applies more than 20 years of business management and marketing experience to help companies with complex sales use eMarketing and content strategies to generate more and better sales opportunities. Her book, *eMarketing Strategies for the Complex Sale*, will be out in the fall of 2009 from McGraw-Hill.

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