

Getting Started With Storytelling

This week we are committed to accomplishing one thing and one thing only - we want to get YOU started telling interesting and engaging stories. Here's how we're going to do it:

Method Behind the Madness

By now you've probably noticed that we at SocialCharm are obsessed with storytelling. And hopefully you've read some of our articles explaining why we think storytelling is so darn important - the article titled "A Story to Save Our Planet" should give you a good idea.

If you're still not convinced that storytelling is one of the most important social skills you can, and SHOULD start developing immediately, well... keep reading. All we ask is that you get out there and TRY IT. Later on in this article we will give you a couple of stories that you can start telling immediately, and we hope you will at least give it a shot. You may be surprised at how much fun storytelling can be!

Now, before we go any further let us briefly explain exactly what we mean when we use the term "storytelling."

We're not talking about storytelling in the traditional sense - we're not exactly trying to make you better at telling ghost stories around the campfire, or at writing short stories like Edgar Allen Poe.

What we're talking about is storytelling in an everyday social context. Take two examples of our recent students who used storytelling as an everyday means for achieving their social goals...

- The Date - One of our students was out on a first date with a woman who was particularly shy. He found himself struggling to keep the conversation going, so he decided to tell her one of the same stories we are about to show you. From that point on the entire mood of the date changed. The story got the woman engaged in conversation, and the two wound up talking for hours, sharing stories and forming a strong social bond.

- The Promotion - Another student won a chance to have lunch with the CEO of his company (a firm with over 1000 employees) through a company raffle. The CEO took the student to a Japanese sushi house that had literally hundreds of choices on the menu. Without communicating to each other, both men wound up picking out the same exact soup, appetizer, and sushi-roll combination to order. The CEO chuckled at the coincidence, and the student capitalized on the opportunity to make himself stand out through storytelling. So he told one of his personal favorite stories about coincidences. A conversation ensued and the CEO left the lunch with a newfound respect for the student's intelligence and insight. While we can't claim that the story directly lead to a promotion, that student did get promoted faster than most of his peers within the company.

So, in essence "storytelling" means weaving the traditional art of crafting and telling stories into an everyday setting.

The Substance of a Great Story

When it comes to storytelling, one of the most common difficulties people face is actually coming up with interesting stories to tell. Perhaps you might have faced this obstacle if you completed the exercises in past newsletters.

From your point of view, that story about your cat may be the most fascinating tale in the world... but your dinner date might not share in your enthusiasm. There are various factors can influence whether or not your story is embraced by your audience. But in the end, it all boils down to one simple fact...

A story is only interesting if it creates a connection with its audience.

What do we mean by connection? A connection can only happen if the story incorporates some aspect of life, emotion, values, or beliefs that the audience shares in common and is truly interested in.

This is a pretty obvious point to most people, yet creating a connection with an audience is much easier said than done. Even the most experienced storytellers in the world continue to struggle connecting their stories to their audiences... just look at the number of movies that flop at the box office every year.

We at SocialCharm have spent countless hours trying to figure out the most effective ways of connecting stories to audiences. How can we maximize our chances that our audience will connect to our story, and will find it interesting?

The answer to this question lies in the underlying theme behind a story. Every story that has ever been told is linked to

some kind of theme. Some stories can be linked to only one or two underlying themes, whereas other stories are much more dynamic and can be linked to a multitude of underlying themes.

The trick is to understand which theme your audience is most likely to connect with. If you are talking to a kindergarten teacher, she is probably more likely to connect with the theme of "the funny things that kids do" than, say, a car mechanic. Instead, that car mechanic will probably be more interested in hearing about that one time you got to drive your uncle's Maserati than the story about your 5-year-old niece.

Now, this is a complete oversimplification, but you get the point. Tailoring stories to their appropriate audiences is a skill that great storytellers must possess. In order to master this skill, you must understand two things -

- First, which themes are my audience members most likely to connect to?
- Second, what stories do I know that illustrate those themes?

Let's tackle that first question now, and as you will see the answer to the second question will naturally follow. Which themes are going to be most appealing to your audience members? Sure, a kindergarten teacher probably connects to stories about children and a car mechanic probably connects to stories about cars. But what are some universal themes that perhaps both of these audiences might find interesting?

Luckily, we've done that research for you.

SocialCharm has compiled an extensive list of themes that have been tested and verified to appeal to a wide range of audiences. While we can't give you all of them at once, we can share one of the best of them with you right now.

One of the most popular themes that audiences worldwide can connect to is...

Themes of Moral Conflict:

There is not one person on earth who hasn't experienced a moral conflict at some point in their life. Stories of moral conflict establish this basic connection right off the bat. And because of this, people can put themselves in the story and imagine how they might handle the situation.

Stories of moral conflict create powerful connections because they put audiences in the driver's seat. These stories not only interest audiences, but also stimulate conversation. They create perfect opportunities for audience participation, encouraging them to share their opinions, or even to tell stories of their own. And this is exactly what a great story should do.

Furthermore, stories of moral conflict can be told in virtually any context. They can be told as a continuation of a theme in a conversation, or they can be told completely out of the blue. For example, if you're ever on a date, or out to lunch with a client or business partner, and you encounter a period of awkward silence, you might want to try bringing up a story of moral conflict. Watch how it captivates their attention, and opens them up to conversation in the end.

For example, let's suppose you are in a situation where there is a lull in conversation - like on a date. You could easily bring up a moral conflict story, such as the following, to strike up a conversation...

"Just the other day I was reading a fascinating story in the newspaper, and wound up getting into a fight with myself. You have to tell me what you think of this situation.

Now, I'm usually a very law-abiding and pretty moral person - like I think stealing is wrong and should be punished. But as I was reading this story, I found myself genuinely hoping that this guy gets away... [Tell Story]"

In this example, you set yourself up for the perfect opportunity to tell a moral conflict story, one that will engage your audience and encourage them to participate at the end.

Ok, enough explaining. Now we want you to actually try it, see for yourself what we're talking about.

Storytelling Exercise:

Read the following story. After you are finished, answer the questions below.

The Craigslist Burglar

In an elaborate robbery scheme that's one part The Thomas Crowne Affair and one part Pineapple Express, a crook robbed an armored truck outside a Bank of America branch in Monroe, Wash., by hiring decoys through Craigslist to

deter authorities.

It gets better: He then escaped in a creek headed for the Skykomish River in an inner tube, and the cops are still looking for him. "A great amount of money" was taken, Monroe police said, but did not provide a dollar value.

It appears to have unfolded this way, according to a Seattle-based NBC affiliate: around 11:00 a.m. PDT on Tuesday, the robber, wearing a yellow vest, safety goggles, a blue shirt, and a respirator mask went over to a guard who was overseeing the unloading of cash to the bank from the truck. He sprayed the guard with pepper spray, grabbed his bag of money, and fled the scene.

But here's the hilarious twist. The robber had previously put out a Craigslist ad for road maintenance workers, promising wages of \$28.50 per hour. Recruits were asked to wait near the Bank of America right around the time of the robbery--wearing yellow vests, safety goggles, a respirator mask, and preferably a blue shirt. At least a dozen of them showed up after responding to the Craigslist ad.

"I came across the ad that was for a prevailing wage job for \$28.50 an hour," one of the unwitting decoys, named Mike, said to the NBC station. As it turns out, they were simply placed there to confuse cops who were looking for a guy wearing a virtually identical outfit.

Authorities eventually found the getaway inner tube (a getaway inner tube!) and suspect that accomplices may have picked up the robber in a boat. According to the NBC affiliate, police hope to track him down by figuring out who posted the Craigslist ad in the first place.

Craigslist founder Craig Newmark was not immediately available for comment.

Questions:

- Whose side are you on, the cops or the robbers?
- Do you think the robber in this story is smart? Why or why not?
- At any point in that story did you find yourself rooting for the robber to get away? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Based on your answer to the previous question, what does this tell you about your moral outlook? On one hand, you may feel that anyone who steals money should be punished unconditionally. Yet on the other hand, you may feel that this guy was so clever that he actually deserved to get away. Even if you felt the slightest bit of admiration towards the robber, you may be going against your moral philosophy. So what does this story tell you about your moral philosophy?
- Now, how could you position this story in an interesting way? For example, if you did find yourself rooting for the bad guy, you could position the story as an inner battle you've been having between your moral philosophy and your gut instinct. After telling the story, you could ask your audience what they thought of the situation, and if they too shared the belief that the robber at least deserves some credit. So how are you going to position this story?

Ok, now it's time to read one more story. Again, read the story from the link below, and after you are done answer the following questions.

God's Blessing or Curse?

BLOOMSBURG, Pa. - A Pennsylvania man said he considered it divine providence when a bank error put more than \$175,000 in his and his wife's account. Fifty-year-old Randy Pratt and 36-year-old Melissa Pratt face trial in Columbia County Court on felony theft and conspiracy charges. They waived a preliminary hearing Wednesday. The trouble started when a \$1,772.50 deposit to the Pratts' FNB Bank account showed up as \$177,250 last summer. Police say that instead of telling the bank, they withdrew the money, quit their jobs and moved to Florida. They were buying a house in the Orlando area when the mistake was traced. Randy Pratt told the Bloomsburg Press Enterprise he did attempt to ask the bank what happened, but was ignored. He said he considered the money "a gift from God." The couple gave away thousands of dollars, including \$25,000 to a Florida church shelter for the homeless, he said. Randy Pratt remained in county prison. A judge denied a request to lower his \$100,000 bail. Melissa Pratt, who told the court she was estranged from her husband, was free on unsecured bail.

Questions:

- Whose side are you on, the couple's or the bank's side?
- What would you have done in that situation?
- What would you do if you were the judge in the case? What if this man literally believes that the bank mistake was an act of God?
- If you're the bank, do you go ask the church to give back the \$25,000 donation?

- Now again, think about how you can position this story in an interesting way, and encourage audience input. What's your segue into the story, and what question do you pose to the audience afterwards?

Congratulations! By completing the above exercises, you've just thought your way through two great stories that you can now tell in a wide variety of situations.

Now, your task is to actually TELL the stories. Before you receive our next newsletter letter, please make a concerted effort to tell at least one of these stories to an audience of your choice. Take note of how it goes, whether the audience seems interested, and whether or not it starts up a conversation at the end.

Finally, we want you to tell us how it goes. Send us an email describing your experience. What went well, and what didn't go well? Within 48 hours, one of our experienced social trainers will get back to you with some suggestions on how to improve your storytelling skills. This is a great opportunity to utilize our expertise, absolutely FREE.

Please send all feedback to ken@socialcharm.net

Until Next Time.

The Social Charm Team