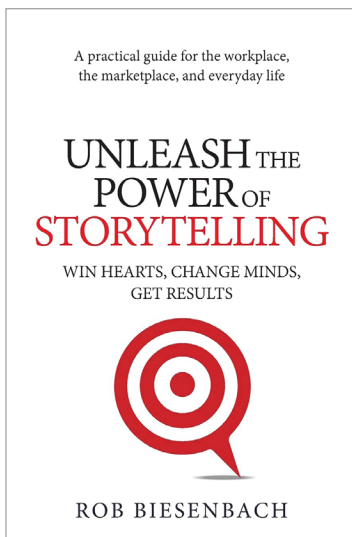


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Unleash the Power of Storytelling

THE SUMMARY

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Introduction: Why Storytelling is Essential to Success

In an age of information overload, stories rise above the noise and intensify the impact of your ideas.

Storytelling is arguably the most powerful form of communication at our disposal. More than facts and data and other bits of information, stories are fundamental to persuasion. A great story can help you:

Win hearts—captivate, inspire and motivate an audience.

Change minds—convince people to come around to your way of thinking.

Get results—persuade them to act in a way that helps you achieve your goals.

If you think you lack the skills or life experiences to tell a good story, let me assure you that storytelling is not as hard as you think. I believe that with the right structure and process, anyone can learn to tell a good story.

I believe every communication presents an opportunity—and an obligation—to perform. And if you apply the proven techniques that actors use to make the most of their performance, you're going to be a more successful communicator.

Unleash the Power of Storytelling

PART ONE: STORYTELLING ESSENTIALS

Chapter 1: What Makes Stories So Powerful?

The brain science behind storytelling and six essential ingredients that give stories their unparalleled power.

If you want to break down walls with people, truly connect with them, and make an impact, few things beat a well-crafted, well-told story.

Stories tap into emotion. The best stories trigger an emotional response, which is key to provoking empathy and unlocking decision-making, and carry far more weight and persistence in our memory than ordinary, neutral events.

Stories put a face on an issue. In the end, nobody cares about processes or programs; they care about people.

Stories connect us. They may not have that same experience, but good stories have elements they can relate to.

Stories humanize us. The stories we tell offer a glimpse into who we are and what we value. That's important for leaders—because people want to follow humans, not machines

They raise the stakes. Stories raise us up out of the everyday and the mundane, appealing instead to universal values that bring us all together.

Stories are about "show, don't tell." It's better to show us who you are and what you stand for than to just tell us about it. And that's one of the things stories do best.

Whether you're selling, interviewing, or just representing yourself in the marketplace, offer people something they can't refuse: a specific story that lends power to your words.

Chapter 2: What is a Story?

With the right tools, anyone can tell a story. A simple three-part story structure, plus five ways to bullet-proof your stories.

In its simplest form, a story is a **character** in pursuit of a **goal** in the face of some **challenge** or obstacle.

How the character tries to **resolve** that challenge drives the narrative.

But even with those elements, your story may come up short, failing to grip the audience in the way you intend. If your story feels flat and you can't identify the problem, give special attention to these five items:

1. Is the character real and relatable?
2. Is there sufficient conflict?
3. Are the stakes high enough?
4. Is there clear cause and effect?
5. Is there an emotional core?

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In the **beginning**, you set the scene and introduce the **character**.

There's an inciting incident (or **challenge**) that sets the story in motion.

The **middle** is where the character works to overcome the challenge, trying to restore balance to the world.

The **end** is where things come to a resolution. Not all stories have happy endings. Sometimes the resolution is not about getting what you want, but what you need.

Chapter 3: How to Create a Story

A five-step process for crafting your stories, and six ways to ensure they're relevant to your audience.

Just as there are many ways to define and structure a story, there are countless approaches to creating a story. This is not like building a house.

1. Determine who you are trying to reach (your **audience**) and find out as much as you can about them. Here are some questions to ask:
 - Who are they?
 - What do they want?
 - What do you have in common?
 - What are their doubts, fears, and misperceptions?
 - What do they know?
 - What is their mood, mindset, and culture?
2. Figure out what you want them to do—buy your product, work more efficiently, follow you into proverbial battle. That's the **goal**.
3. Think through the **challenges** that may get in the way of the goal—lack of budget, outdated technology, distrust.
4. Find a **character** who has overcome that challenge—by appealing to value over price, working around technology, discovering common ground.
5. Make sure there's a **resolution** to your story. If your story doesn't resolve in some way, look for a different story.

Chapter 4: Emotion Fuels Stories

Winning hearts is the key to changing minds. How to tap into your story's emotional core.

Emotionally charged events stick with us, in much the same way stories do. In fact, emotion drives decision-making. We all like to think that we are rational beings, carefully weighing all the pros and cons and making decisions based strictly on evidence and reason. But deep down we are creatures of emotion. It's often said that people buy on emotion and justify with logic—facts and data are used to shore up and defend what we've already decided in our hearts.

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The bottom line? If you want your audience to *do* something, make them *feel* something.

Your job as a storyteller is to provoke an emotional reaction—to break down people’s defenses and leave them more open to influence. The best way to do that is to exhibit some emotion yourself, to play to people’s natural sense of empathy.

Here are a few ways to break down walls and create common ground with your audience:

Focus on the “why.”

Tap into loyalty.

Appeal to pride.

Celebrate your heroes.

Get personal. You can’t go wrong talking about the things and people you love. People crave a genuine connection with their leaders.

Chapter 5: Stories at Work

Real-life examples of different kinds of stories, told for different purposes, to different audiences.

It’s one thing to understand the essential elements of storytelling; it’s another to put them into action, depending upon your goals:

- Align a team with a strategy, or promote a brand.
- Establish common ground.
- Humanize yourself.
- Motivate changes in behavior.
- Inspire a team.
- Establish trust and credibility with a customer.

PART TWO: ADVANCED STORYTELLING

Chapter 6: How to Focus Your Story

Just as important as what goes *in* to a story is what you *leave out*. Seven ways to cut the clutter.

1. *Start with a goal.* For the most part, stories should have a point.
2. *Eliminate the bit players.* Focus on one main character.
3. *Avoid tangents: how storytelling is like a tree.* Move straight from trunk to top; branches can be tangents, distractions, or dead ends.

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4. *Stick to clear turning points.* Pick one, and make that your focus.
5. *Details, details; separating the good from the bad.* Too many details can weigh a story down.
 - Use (brief) details to set the scene.
 - Offer sensory details to bring a story to life.
 - Simplify dates—because the date rarely matters.
 - Make numbers more meaningful—rounded, converted, scaled.
 - Omit proper nouns. Name the known, omit the obscure.
6. *Cut the exposition.* Eliminate elaborate setups and jump right into the action. Once you've got their attention, you can go back in time and get them up to speed.
7. *It's okay to lie (sort of).* Simplifying a story and omitting the irrelevant is not altering its fundamental truth. Ask yourself if an eyewitness would recognize your version as fair and truthful.

Be ruthless in refining your stories. I would rather err toward skimping on the details than risk boring my audience.

Chapter 7: How to Preserve the Integrity of Your Stories

Storytelling is about making hard choices and trusting that your audience will “get it.” Advice on protecting the power of your stories.

Storytelling, like art, is about having the courage to make bold choices, and the conviction to stand by those choices. That's not easy. Especially in a world that discourages risk-taking and rewards fitting in.

In the improv world, there's a concept known as “playing to the top of your intelligence.” What that means is, you don't go for the dumb joke or the obvious choice. You play smart and trust that your audience will understand.

If you happen to work in an organization of any size, before you can share a story, you'll probably need to run that story by other people to get it approved.

And that is where great stories go to die. Your job is to defend your story from the outside forces that can suck the life out of it:

- *Prioritize what's important:* character, conflict, stakes, and emotion
- *Let go of the little things:* compromise on smaller things that may slow down your story but not stop it in its tracks.
- *Have a conversation:* Their reasoning may have some validity.
- *Cite evidence:* Support your choices.
- *Keep it positive:* Instead of focusing on what you *can't* do, make it about what you *can* do.

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Chapter 8: How and Where to Find Great Stories

Don't settle for telling other people's stories—great stories are all around us. Here are six ways to discover them.

The worst time to look for a story is when you really need one.

To be an effective communicator, you have to be a lifelong collector of stories, so when you really need one, it's right there for you, ready to be shared.

Use your goals and priorities as a filter. What is your filter? It's the handful of things that constitute your focus—for yourself or for your business.

Keep your antennae up. Once you've established your filter, be alert for situations in your everyday life that might make a good story.

Read and explore. Inspiration can come from the most surprising places.

Interview others. Some come to you; others you have to hunt for.

Draw on your personal experience. Some of the best stories are your own, but don't be self-indulgent or sound like a jerk.

Find a system for storing your stories. Free apps. Spread sheets. One thing I wouldn't rely on too heavily is your brain. Few things are worse than having a brilliant idea and forgetting what it was.

Chapter 9: Story's Cousins: Comparison, Analogy, and Metaphor

Sometimes mistaken for stories, these figures of speech fire our imagination in much the same way. Use them to boost audience understanding and retention.

The point of storytelling is to bring more meaning to our words and greater impact to our ideas. But a full-fledged story isn't the only way to accomplish that.

Often a simple turn of phrase, an apt analogy, or the right metaphor is enough to "move the needle" (see what I did there?) on audience understanding, retention, and buy-in.

Choose words that stimulate the senses. Sharp, not sudden. Bright, not promising. Sour, not negative. Climb or soar over rise. Grab or seize over take. Hurl and toss over throw.

Use metaphor and analogy to clarify. Love is a battlefield. A shaky argument, a house of cards. A sensitive person, a delicate flower.

Make comparisons to simplify large numbers. JFK described the moon rocket "as tall as a 48-story structure, as wide as a city block, and as long as two lengths of this field." A charitable organization might say you can feed a child for the price of your morning cup of coffee.

Chapter 10: The Dark Side of Storytelling

The tyranny of the narrative, blurred reality, and the Brian Williams effect—how to successfully navigate these common hazards.

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Let's explore a few of the hazards surrounding storytelling and how to navigate around them.

Do stories make facts irrelevant? We've all been in pointless arguments where it seems no amount of evidence will convince the other side. In response to hard statistics (cool reason), they offer vague anecdotes (white-hot emotion). We remember things that accord with our worldview, and discount statements that contradict it.

A rule for storytellers: Do No Harm. Storytelling is full of gray areas. Separating fact from fiction can be difficult.

The tyranny of the narrative. When the story sounds too good—or bad—to be true, check the underlying facts.

Blurred lines: the Brian Williams effect. Every time we tell a story, it gets reshaped and scrambled. So fact-check your stories. And watch out that the details—especially your role in the events—don't morph.

Blurred lines II: experience vs. memory. What you remember vs the constantly retold story.

Proceed with caution. Be careful about exaggerating—and even inventing—your role in the events you're describing. And it's probably wise to add a dose of humility to a tale "too good to be true."

PART THREE: APPLIED STORYTELLING

Chapter 11: How to Tell Your Company's Origin Story

Every organization needs a story explaining how and why it was founded and communicating its purpose and values.

The origin story requires all the basic elements: character, goal, challenge, resolution, conflict, stakes, and emotional investment. Companies often populate their websites and headquarters hallways with lengthy timelines stuffed with events of varying degrees of significance—ground-breakings, acquisitions, expansions, reorganizations, sales milestones, awards, and the like.

But data points do not stick. Stories and characters do. The bottom line is, customers and the public don't care about these milestones nearly as much as the company does. (And honestly, few in the company care much either.)

In the end, it comes down to audience. Who are you trying to reach, what do they need and want to know, and what's the best way to accomplish that? If you choose not to tell your story in a certain way or through a certain medium, I hope you at least have sound reasoning behind the decision.

Chapter 12: How to Use Stories in a Presentation

Stories should be the centerpiece of any presentation. Guidelines for weaving them into your content, plus five tips for delivering your stories effectively.

You should begin with a story, end with story, and include stories throughout. Here are some guidelines on how to make the most of storytelling in front of a live audience.

Start with story. You give them a reason to care by opening with a story that appeals directly to their interests.

Intersperse stories throughout (but beware of story overload). Continue to weave stories throughout your presentation—but not too many. Audiences need variety. Stories need room to breathe. People may suspect your ideas lack substance and that you, as they say in Texas, are "all hat and no cattle".

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A loose guideline for incorporating stories: a presentation of five parts—intro, three sections, conclusion, might have five stories. *Might.* It depends. This is where instinct and the “art” comes in. If the content appears to be dragging, it might be time to add a story.

Close with story. To really make an impact, make your closing story an extension of your opening story.

Delivering your story in person involves some level of performance technique. Here are a few suggestions:

Practice, practice, practice.

Stay connected to your material and to your audience.

Bring the energy—giving extra volume to your voice, expression to your face, and movement to your body.

Vary your vocal expression,

Use your body—your face, your hands, mark the passing of time, conjure your co-stars.

Chapter 13: How to Tell Your Own Story

Don't get caught flat-footed when someone asks, “What's your story?” Constructing your career narrative for meetings and job interviews.

What if you could capture the events of your career and your life in a form that is unique and compelling, full of conflict and drama and human interest and all the other things that make stories so effective?

To create a personal narrative, I recommend a five-part structure:

1. *The beginning:* the “normal state” of things.
2. *Inciting incident:* something that disrupts the normal state.
3. *Turning point:* the path you took in response.
4. *Conflict:* challenges along the way.
5. *The end or resolution:* which brings it all full circle.

As with any other communication, your personal story needs to be finely tuned to your audience's interests and needs. Remember, the point is not to capture every twist and turn of your life or career. The goal is to give people a glimpse of who you are and pique their interest enough that they'll want to know more.

Chapter 14: How to Tell Your Personal Brand Story

Stories can help you communicate your value and stand out from the crowd. How to figure out your brand and capture it in a story.

Your personal brand can be a practical tool that helps set you apart in the workplace and the marketplace. It can help you land the right job, earn a raise or promotion, and get you the recognition you deserve. It can also make you a more credible and effective champion on behalf of your company, cause, or team.

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Capturing your brand in the form of a story allows you to promote yourself in a way that feels natural, comfortable, and not overly...well, promotional. Do it right and your brand can even help you manage your priorities better, adding a little more sanity to your life.

Your brand is essentially what you're known for—the unique combination of qualities you bring to the table that make people want to work or do business with you.

Since your brand isn't simply what *you* want it to be, it's important to turn your gaze inward. Think about the challenges you've faced in your career and your life. What specific skills and traits were instrumental to overcoming those challenges? Look at your past performance reviews. What themes emerge? What about awards, honors, and accolades? Are there any patterns there?

Just remember: *you* have to be the one steering the ship. If you don't take control of defining and articulating your brand, it will be defined for you!

Chapter 15: How to Use Story for a Toast, Tribute, or Eulogy

The toughest story you'll ever tell. A lesson from Paul McCartney, plus fifteen tips for composing your content—and yourself.

Paul McCartney is one of the great storytellers of all time. When Beatles producer George Martin died, McCartney penned a concise and evocative tribute that serves as an excellent model for how it's done.

There comes a time in everyone's life where we are asked to “say a few words” on a special occasion, give a toast to the happy couple, or deliver the eulogy for a loved one.

That's where story comes in. A story can help you frame and focus your thoughts. It may even be easier to deliver. And, of course, stories pack unparalleled power to move people.

When composing a tribute or eulogy, first and foremost, **speak from the heart**. Avoid the laundry list—**limit the qualities** you mention to three. **Pick one quality to focus on** (and make that your theme). **Compose a story**. A story can free you from having to lavish empty praise. Don't forget **small sensory details**, but don't let **extraneous details** weigh your story down. **Draw a lesson**. Use a meaningful **quote**. **Mind the clock**. A toast is generally shorter than a eulogy. **Tell the truth (to an extent)**. I think it's okay to be honest (if not brutally so), but if at all possible, a eulogy can be a time to practice a little forgiveness.

Conclusion: Stand Up, Stand Out

What Ricky Gervais can teach us about six critical storytelling principles.

I often wrap up my storytelling workshops with a story about comic actor and writer Ricky Gervais. I tell this story because it illustrates so many important lessons about the craft of storytelling.

Structure it tightly. The story follows a simple structure. Our character is Ricky Gervais, his goal was to get his show produced, and the challenge or obstacle he faces is that it's a radical concept for an industry that usually goes with the safe bet. Not every story has to follow my structure, but do make sure there's clear conflict and stakes and a character that people can relate to. Or in this case, since Gervais is not everyone's cup of tea, a problem or goal people can relate to, like the pursuit of a dream.

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Focus on the essentials. There's a lot more detail I could have added to this story. But I'd either have to explain or leave the audience wondering. Other details are funny, but not quite on point, and potentially distracting. Storytelling is about condensing and interpreting events in order to better ensure audience understanding.

Tailor your story for audience and goal. Stories should always be fine-tuned to the audience and consistent with our goals. If I were telling this story to an insider crowd, I might use details that would resonate with them, or perhaps industry jargon or shorthand. There are also multiple lessons that could be the focus of the story—it all depends on the message being communicated.

Always be looking for stories. How did I find this story? It wasn't through a Google search, or a clickbait-style article. I found it because I happened to be reading a *New York Times Magazine* feature on Gervais. Stories are everywhere, just waiting to be discovered.

Be original. An original story has two advantages: 1) you have the opportunity to make it your own; and 2) people haven't heard it before. And it sure beats being the 100 millionth person to tell the story about Winston Churchill telling off the lady who criticized his drinking.

Bring the passion. The Gervais story is about passion, and passion sells. It's essential to storytelling and it's part of what makes people like and want to do business with us. If you can find and tell stories that are meaningful to you, either because you experienced them personally or they speak to values you hold dear, you'll make a bigger impact and have greater influence on those around you.

Stand up, stand out. Storytelling isn't reserved for artists and poets and folksy cowboys huddled around the campfire. Don't hold back. Don't let fear override your desire to share. Be open and generous and allow your individuality to shine through. That is the key to creating authentic connections, strengthening your relationships, and getting more of what you want out of your work and your life.