

Telling the Library's Story: What Every Good Story Includes

Library stories should:

- Capture the Library's culture, values, mission, and goals in a powerful way.
- Make a connection with the audience's values, concerns, and ideas.
- Inform and enlighten.
- Be emotionally interactive—the audience must believe that you mean what you say.
- Display passion—and make the audience care as much as the storyteller does about what has been shared.

Good stories include most, but not necessarily all, of the following:

- A compelling **story idea** that connects with the audience's knowledge and understanding;
- An accessible **context**;
- **Energy** derived from emotion and the unexpected;
- A **main character** ("the hero") with whom we can empathize (feel *with* not for) and whose need or goal we understand;
- The **antagonist or roadblock** to success;
- The **understanding or awareness** that helps the main character ultimately prevail;
- The **transformation** in the main character and in the world that resulted from these events; and,
- "The Why" of the telling—sharing "And this is what this story means to me..." while allowing each audience member to also identify their own "why." In this way, a story can also become a call to action, a means of encouraging the audience's own creativity and fostering collaboration and cooperation.

More simply, the basic structure of story can be understood as being three-part in nature--the **Challenge**, the **Struggle**, and the **Resolution**.

Telling the Library Story: A Few Good Tips

- Collect stories—write down *a-ha* moments and other compelling events, large and small, for use later. In building your story collection, consider the people you work with, the space you work in, and the people you serve. In this way, you will always have a few engaging stories in your “pocket.”
- Listen actively to the stories of others to get to know your audience’s context before sharing your own.
- Consider: What do you want listeners to feel, remember, and believe?
- If your audience has a strong desire or goal, use a story to consider together “what if it were like that...”
- Among other story types and techniques, well-constructed metaphor is especially powerful. Familiar and emotionally-resonant narratives from books, movies, and shared history are also entry points for story.
- Repetition of powerful lines or phrases throughout your story can be effective. Consider also the use of dialogue.
- Storytelling is a hearing and seeing experience. Be aware of “micro-expressions,” both yours and that of the audience members. Here, be attentive to pauses, eye contact, body language, and gestures.
- Be aware of the “second listener,” that ever-present little voice in the head of the listener that is responding, and bringing personal perspective, to your narrative.
- Be ready to “drop your script” to be responsive to unanticipated circumstances.
- Stories should be short enough (5- 10 minutes) that others will remember them—and retell them (“legacy stories”).
- Be authentic, be yourself!

Selected Resources

Brown, John Seely, et al. Storytelling in Organizations: Why Storytelling is Transforming 21st Century Organizations and Management. Butterworth-Heinemann. 2004.

Guber, Peter. Tell To Win: Connect, Persuade, and Triumph with the Hidden Power of Story. Crown. 2011.

Marek, Kate. Organizational Storytelling for Librarians: Using Stories for Effective Leadership. ALA. 2011.

Maxwell, Richard and Dickman, Robert. The Elements of Persuasion: Use Storytelling to Pitch Better, Sell Faster, and Win More Business. Collins. 2007.

Smith, Paul. Lead with a Story: A Guide to Crafting Business Narratives that Captivate, Convince, and Inspire. American Management Association. 2012.

Want to chat more about storytelling? Share your stories for fun and/or feedback? Call or e-mail Barb (9082; bwhite@akronlibrary.org) or Bernadette (9008; bgerbetz@akronlibrary.org).