

# Script-Storytelling

By Jim Mall

Telling a good story can be a powerful thing.

Most of us remember being read to as a child, that warm feeling of listening to our parents tell us about magic, imagined worlds. A great movie or novel can stick with you for days, and even a lifetime. In the business of sales, good stories can help your clients understand value, create urgency, and close the sale without pressure.

No doubt, for final expense sales people, great storytelling makes all the difference. While improving your creativity is all about discipline, the psychology of how your creative efforts are experienced is important to understand and apply to your day to day life. After all, it doesn't matter how much knowledge you have about what you are selling, if you aren't telling your story well, who is listening?

To start, lets take a look at what is going on inside our brains when we are told a story. The reason we feel so engaged when we hear a story, go to a movie or read a good book is quite simple. When we are being told a story, our brain treats it as if it was actually happening to us.

For years, we've known the centers for our brains were instrumental in understanding a story. What gives the story its deeper meaning is an explosion of additional brain activity, totally unassociated with language or logic. What happens, is all areas of your brain that would be activated if the event was actually happening to you, get activated when you are hearing the story. Your brain lives it like it was real.

Other studies have shown the story isn't just causing additional brain activity, but is one of the most powerful ways to actually influence your client's thoughts and behavior. Humans are not moved to action by long, data narratives, spread sheets or boring company brochures. We are moved by emotion. The best way to get at people emotionally, is to tell them a story or get them to tell you a story relating to the concerns your client has and the solution you want to sell them.

Psychological studies repeatedly show that our attitudes, fears, hopes and values are strongly influenced by stories. The more immersed you are in it, the more you turn to putty in the storyteller's hands. What is happening is the way you process information gets altered radically. Your defenses drop, and you even ignore things that you would notice in an otherwise less stimulating sales presentation.

This helps explain why long data presentations are so ineffective at inspiring change. Our brains simply aren't wired to casually accept a message when presented through data format. When we listen to long, boring presentations, we become skeptical, even to the point of doubting a lot of the information being presented. Over kill. Think back to the teachers you had in high school and college. We prime ourselves to do anything but buy into whatever they are selling. Our clients do the same thing. A good story makes those defenses drop. It is a way to get past the gatekeeper, be it their mindset or their checkbook.

It is great to know why stories affect us so deeply and what is going on inside our heads, but how can we become better at telling stories and use this to increase our success in selling?

There really is no formula for great story telling, there are some useful tips and concepts to keep in mind.

One of the biggest problems we create when telling stories, is the use of old, cliché language. Words have power to create emotion, but it has been shown that certain phrases and metaphors can actually lose their power to do so over time. Any sales person can agree to this. How many times can we “optimize” something, and “leverage value”. These phrases are tough to avoid in our business. I am guilty of it too. It is important to point out that by relying on these pre-fabricated thoughts, we are not just being lazy, we are losing all the emotional potency that speech contains.

Benefits of exceptional storytelling in sales are:

You capture the attention of your customer.

It will motivate your clients to take action, creates urgency without pressure.

You will build trust and rapport.

You can make all your data and facts personal to each client by becoming applicable, interesting, and relevant.

Storytelling has been proven to transform beliefs and change minds.

Imagine how much more effective your sales presentation becomes with storytelling! As a final expense sales person, you have many different company choices in your briefcase. Similarly, a variety of different stories can be told to convey your point. Using the correct story can help elicit the action, feeling, and emotions you want from your client.

There are several types of stories that we use, some sales interviews will use all types and some interviews will not need any, the client may provide all the stories you need.

The most common type of story you will use are vision stories. These are the stories that put your client's family across the desk from the funeral director. Since I grew up in a funeral home, I many times tell this very short but effective story. After I inform my client I grew up in the funeral business and my father was a funeral director I begin by stating I never wanted to be an insurance salesman until I came across this amazing opportunity to help others. The first person I contacted to see if this was a worthwhile business was my father. His statement to me was, "are you kidding, this is an great opportunity to help others. When I had anyone in my office, I was meeting with them on one of the very worst days of their lives. I would help them make over two hundred decisions in a few hours and inform them they will need to have the financial means to pay me five to ten thousand dollars within the next 30 days." This is what we do to our families on the day we die.

This creates a vision in our client's mind they don't really want to see, but know it is all very real.

Another type of story you need to have ready is "why am I here?"

This type of story will inform your client of your intentions up front and create trust.

This usually happens early in your sales interview, when you are asking why they mailed the card and what their concerns about their final expenses are.

If I can't get my client to give me the answers I am looking for or they won't engage at all I use this short story starter to help them understand, why I am here. I ask, "Mrs. Smith, had you died yesterday, who would be sitting in the funeral director's office making the two hundred decisions required to be made and where would the five to ten thousand dollars come from?" By using these stories, your clients will become more receptive as you tell them how you plan to help them.

And finally, you need to have company stories ready. Some clients want to know for sure you and your company will be there when their family needs you. You can talk about all the clients your company has helped, how many millions of dollars in claims they have paid. How long they have been in business. You should know your company's ratings and what they mean. If you have personally met any of your company's home office leadership people, drop some names. I know several company presidents and many vice presidents on a first name basis. Use this information to help build trust with your client.

In order for your story to be truly effective, you need to know when to use the story and you need to nail the timing. A misplaced story will seem awkward, forced and will fall flat. During your presentation, using stories at the right time will grab your client's attention, make the facts stick, make all your data and information relatable and understandable. Your stories will convey the true power of your solution. As you tell your stories, give your clients the opportunity to tell their stories. If you ask, you will find many have stories of death and debt you can use to close the sale with this client and many other clients.

You will find a Storytelling audio download on our website. These are true stories from many of my clients telling the stories of death and debt. All of the stories have actually happened to me through the process of the business, some are stories my client's have told me. I use these stories to move my clients and help them understand the huge problem they are going to create for their family and how our program is the perfect solution to their problem.

In order to tell a great story, you need to be familiar with an effective format. Just like your sales presentation, stories need certain elements to succeed. Think about the books you read and the movies you watch, they all contain these same elements. You must have a Hero - help your client see themselves as the hero to their family by taking action.

Stimulus – this part of your story will help you find you client's hot button. It will identify the problem, get your client to take action and buy into your solution.

Tension or Conflict – Where will the money come from when you die?

Crossroad – What if I don't buy this solution. Make it so good they say to themselves, I would be a total idiot not to buy this policy.

Moral of the Story – We are all going to die, how will my death affect my family financially?

By using these elements you create a thought process in your client's mind, helping them understand, they have a big problem. Without you, their family is going to take a difficult financial hit.

Have you had the experience where a good friend tells you a story and then sometime later, you mention the same story back to him, as if it were your story? This is totally normal and at the same time, one of the most powerful ways to get people on board with your thoughts and ideas. A story is the only way to activate parts of the brain so that a listener turns the story into their own idea and experience.

The next time you struggle with getting people to purchase your policies, simply tell them a story, where the outcome is, that doing what you had in mind is the best thing to do. Storytelling is the only way to plant ideas into other people's minds. Over the last several decades psychology has begun a serious study of how stories affects the human mind. Results repeatedly show that our attitudes, fears, hopes, and values are strongly influenced by stories. In fact, stories seem to be more effective at changing beliefs than articles that are specifically designed to persuade through argument and evidence.

There is an important message about the molding power of a story. When we read or listen to dry, factual information we read or listen with our guards up. We are critical and skeptical. But when we are absorbed in a story, we drop our intellectual guard. We are moved emotionally and this seems to leave us defenseless.

The client accepts the story because, for a human, a good story always seems like a gift. But the story is actually a delivery system for our agenda. A story is a vehicle for placing a message into the human mind. We are creatures of emotion more than logic.

We are creatures of stories, and the process of helping your clients understand that you are in their homes to help them, not hurt them, must begin with, “Let me tell you a story.”

So, keep listening and keep learning in all aspects of your business and your life.

Remember, our goal is to help you become, “Simply the Best!”

Thank you!