

Storyteller to storyuser: moving along the SOAZ ladder



Background - why use stories?

There's quite a lot of research into the impact of stories. Basically, information presented in a story context is more memorable and more trusted: in one particular piece of research stories were found to be over 20 times more memorable than simple facts.

What's more, because stories make an emotional connection, your audiences are more likely to act on what you tell them as well.

Introduction - storytelling vs story using

Storytellers tell stories to tell stories. The act of telling the story is the point of telling the story. On the other hand, a story user tells a story with intent and for a reason.

For storyuser, the content not only has to be interesting - just like it is for storytellers - but it also has to be useful. The story has to support the point the storyuser is making in his or her presentation.

So how do you stop being a storyteller and move towards being a storyuser? We've developed a proprietary four step ladder called SOAZ - and it's to do with what kind of stories you tell.

There's more to it than this, but this is a great start. Even just using this part of story-using means you're delivery will be head and shoulders above other people.

Step one: Self stories

The first step in using stories is to start telling our own stories. Why? Because everyone is their own hero. Don't get me wrong, using yourself as an inspiration is a good start, because stories-beat-no-stories. The thing is that it's not enough to be a real story-user and it comes fraught with one *big* risk.

We know ourselves better than we know anyone else, and it's only natural that this is our starting point for telling stories. I can tell stories about what I've done more easily than about anyone else because I remember them most easily and most naturally.

But too many presenter-centric stories can alienate an audience. Just because you, the presenter, managed to survive being raised by alligators doesn't mean they, your audience can do the same. And telling people how you did it usually just makes you sound egocentric.

Even when you're telling stories about your own failures and mistakes these are still stories about you. Unless you tell them with enough humility for the audience to sense it, the effect is almost as bad.

So... self-stories are a good start but you need to move on.

Here's a checklist to make sure you're not telling stories for the sake of it:

- It makes you feel good
- You use the word "I" more than once. (Don't cheat!)
- It came to mind *immediately*
- You (easily) solve a problem that other people haven't managed to solve despite trying
- The story involves you doing something your granny couldn't do if she put her mind to it, with some practice and training ;)

Others

The solution is pretty simple and obvious.

Don't tell stories about yourself - tell them about other people... or other organisations. Think of how powerful a case study can be. Stories about others get the message across without being so self-aggrandising. It's obvious.

Examples could include:

- Case studies of other organisations in the same county that had a simple problem
- Different branches of the same organisation that had a similar issue
- Historical examples (these can be particularly helpful as they're less threatening but don't go for them as your starting point because they're sometimes a bit too abstract for people)
- Modified stories about yourself - think about (carefully!) telling a you-story as though it happened to someone else. Careful, or you'll be seen as disingenuous but it's an option...

Of course, nothing is ever that simple, so here's a check-list of things to consider when you use stories about other people:

- The audience all should know the other person (or organisation) - or at least be able to accept their existence

Worst case scenario

The most dangerous type of self-story of all is when you're telling it to exorcise it. You're using the audience as therapy.

Talking about things helps put them in context and it's good for you - but not for them.

Before you tell any story where you appear at all, ask yourself honestly "Does telling this story make me feel better in any way?"

If it does, don't use it.

- Your audience will accept that your subject is 'a hero'. Using Donald Trump won't cut it as a positive role model for many people
- Do you have the active, informed consent of the people or organisation you're about to talk about?
- Have you checked the voracity of the story? (Urban myths will undermine your credibility so fast you'll not have time to recover!) Can you cite your source? Have you checked your source's source?

Audience

If your audience trusts stories about other people and organisations more than they trust stories where you're the hero, how much more are they going to trust the stories they tell each other.

This is a bit more tricky to write a simple check-list for, mainly because how you do it is going to change with every audience. Sorry about that. Here are a few tips that might help though:

- Ask (leading) questions. Things like "How many of you have ever...?" can plant the right ideas in your audience's head
- Cheat - by checking in with your audience before-hand. Research them - and don't forget to get their permission to tell the stories!
- Think about pair-work where your audience talk to each other about a problem - they'll inevitably end up sharing their stories with each other
- Use survey tools to establish a 'demographic pattern' of your audience - or any other source of information - and look at the sort of issues that sort of demographic profile typically has
- Use independent research to establish a context. For example pie-chart showing typical issues of your audience and the question "which of these is your biggest...?"

Zen

This is the ultimate in using stories. Zen stories are so well told that no-one notices that they're being told.

How powerful is *that*?!

A second advantage is that Zen-stories can be told in as many seconds as it takes minutes in the traditional storytelling approach. That means you can move on to give more and more stories and data in support of your main point without boring anyone!

The trick is to use something called 'backstory' where you don't tell a story at all, but provide your audience just enough information to tell themselves the story to themselves.

All of that happens inside their own heads... and if they trust each other more than they trust you, think about how much more they're going to trust the stories they tell themselves!

How you do it will change for each audience of course, but here are some ideas to get you started:

- A simple, powerful - but not too literal - image on your screen can trigger memories, questions and thoughts amongst your audience

- ❑ Open-ended questions that get your audience thinking about their own experiences work well
- ❑ Analogies, including games or puzzles and quizzes where your audience take on each other's issues
- ❑ Three dimensional props that trigger basic responses are *remarkably* powerful. A doll is more powerful than the image of the same kind of person. Props on your audience's desks work brilliantly too.

Want to be better?

This is a simple tool - but don't be fooled by its simplicity!

The thing is, it's only one tool in a whole storage cupboard full of methods you can pull out and use when the time is right. If you want a few of the tools in that cupboard, get hold of the Reluctant Storyteller Starter Pack!

It's a no-brainer at only \$8.30 for the ebook, a series of video follow-ups and the occasional random goodie!

Want to chat?

Fancy a free coffee-length online chat to see if I can help a bit more. I promise not to try and sell you anything for the sake of it... or for the sake of my bank balance!

Check out <https://presentationgenius.info/clinic>

The booking form is about half day down.

