



Make It Matter

how stories can change behaviour

Presented by Christine Hennebury
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About Me

Thanks for joining me for *Make It Matter: How Stories Can Change Behaviour*.

I'm Christine Hennebury, a storyteller, writer, and creativity coach from Mount Pearl, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada.

I've led well over a hundred workshops on writing, storytelling, and other creative practices in person and online over the past 30 years.

I am particularly interested in using the power of story to connect people, foster empathy, and bring about positive change.

I am the current President of Storytellers of Canada – Conteurs du Canada, a past President of Storytelling St. John's, and the founder and chair of the Association for the Arts in Mount Pearl.





Today's Discussion

In *Make It Matter* I'll be sharing a variety of information about stories and storytelling, but I'll be focusing on...

- 1) The connection between stories and behaviour
- 2) Key elements of effective storytelling
- 3) Using stories to promote good health practices



Stories & Behaviour

THE HUMAN SPECIES THINKS IN METAPHORS AND LEARNS THROUGH STORIES.”
– MARY CATHERINE BATESON

What is a story?

When defining story, most of us tend to default to describing a plot – a list of events that happen to a character - but the events aren't the story.

The story – the important, relatable, universal truth – is in how someone changes in response to their experiences.



Why tell stories?

Humans use stories to create meaning.

Stories are how we make sense of the world around us. When we listen/read/watch stories, we are essentially testing to see if the characters' actions makes sense, to see if we would behave the same way.

Stories are how we learn.

Stories make our experiences **MATTER**.



Stories Inform Our Actions

The stories that we share in our families, in our communities, and in our cultural contexts reflect what is important to us and the values that we hold.

The actions we take are often informed (consciously and unconsciously) by those stories.

We do things because we feel that we want to, because we feel we should, because we feel that they are the 'right' thing to do but...

Why do we want to do those things?
Why do we feel we should do them?
How do we know the right things to do?

Because we learned them through stories.

The Power of Stories

Stories allow us to:

- have a shared emotional experience that unites us around a common purpose
- relax and feel connected to our colleagues, clients, and patients
- understand other people's lives and perspectives
- provide understandable models of appropriate and beneficial behaviour in different contexts

Stories add emotional impact to important information, they put people at ease and, most importantly, they foster empathy in the listener.





Telling Effective Stories

*ONCE THE STORY CAPTURES MY SENSES, I AM NO LONGER CONSCIOUS OF THE ACT OF READING WORDS.
I AM IN THE STORY.
- AMY TAN*



3 elements of an effective story

- SENSORY LANGUAGE
- POINT OF VIEW
- FAMILIAR STORY ARC

Sensory Language

Sensory language puts us into the story.

The storyteller's choice of words helps us subconsciously recall previous experiences and shows us similarities between ourselves and the people in the story.

When we hear action words, sensory language, and emotional content our brains respond as if we are experiencing those things.

When we listen to a story, we connect to the teller because we essentially mirror the experiences in the story within our brains.

Point of View

*Every story is told from
someone's perspective
and the listener is invited
to share that person's
point of view or to
dispute it.*

Choosing a specific point of view is also helpful for the teller because it helps you to choose which details to include/focus on.

If your 'main character' is a child, they would know and interpret things very differently than an adult.

A dancer will notice different things than an engineer.

Someone working a night shift has a different experience of 5am than someone who is usually asleep then.

Familiar Story Arc

Humans (and, hence, human brains) are, to borrow Lisa Cron's book title, 'Wired for Story.'

A familiar narrative shape will help your listener to relax during the story and connect with its characters, theme, and messages.

On my next slide is an example of a story arc that will be familiar to many people and is often referred to as 'universal.'

However, there are many different ways to tell stories in different cultural groups throughout the world and it is much more important for you to use a story arc that will be familiar to your listeners than it is to adhere to anything allegedly universal.



The 'Universal' Story Arc

- We meet a relatable main character on an ordinary day
- Something changes and they must respond
- They face challenges, trials, and tribulations
- They reach a turning point and make important choices
- Resolution (not necessarily a happy ending!)



Using Stories to Promote Good Health Practices

STORY BECOMES THE GROUND THAT PATIENTS AND HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS TRAVEL TOGETHER

- JAY BARUCH M.D.

A young boy with brown hair, wearing a blue and grey sweater, is smiling broadly. A doctor's hands are visible, using a stethoscope to listen to his chest. The background shows a clinical setting with a green wall and a poster of a human figure.

When to tell stories

Given that the emotional impact of stories makes the information they contain very memorable, it only makes sense to add stories whenever you want to create deep understanding in your listener.

Stories make information **MATTER**
so why not use them to create positive change?



Where should we start?

Since we know that effective stories can encourage and support specific behaviours we need to figure out...

- 1) What do we need people to do?
- 2) How do we want them to do it?
- 3) What kinds of stories will support those actions?



Step by Step Story Development

1) Start at the Heart

What do you need your listener to know or understand or to do?

2) Seek a Story

What kind of story demonstrates that behaviour? Or its opposite?
Can you use an existing story or will you need to make one up?

3) Increase the Tension

What challenges, obstacles, and victories could be present here?

4) Get Very Specific

What vivid details can you add?
How can you help your listener put themselves in the story? How can you make them ask 'What would I do in this situation?'

Where can you find stories?

- Your own experiences – personal & professional
- Stories from patients/clients/coworkers
- Popular cultural stories (only when allowed!)
- Popular stories from movies/TV
- Mythology and folktales
- Create your own – use analogies, comparisons or transferable ideas to help your listeners understand a situation

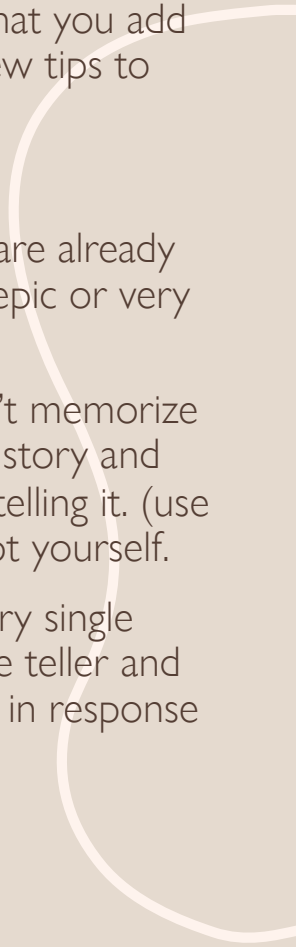




Working with Stories



Storytelling takes practice, just like anything new that you add to your personal or professional life. Here are a few tips to help you find some ease with stories:

- 1) Start by practicing short stories or ones you are already somewhat familiar with. No need to pick an epic or very complicated tale at first!
 - 2) Most storytellers learn their stories; they don't memorize them word for word. So, get the gist of your story and then practice until you get comfortable with telling it. (use an outline or words on index cards to prompt yourself.)
 - 3) Don't worry about getting every detail in every single time. Storytelling is a relationship between the teller and the listener and tellers often adjust their tales in response to their audiences.
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Harness the Power of Story For...



Conversations

Prepare and practice stories that provide models for desired patient behaviour.



Posters

Visual story elements/ references can add emotional impact to your promotional materials.



Flyers

Your printed information will be more engaging if they include stories, story elements, or references to familiar narratives.



Websites

Stories and story elements on your site will deepen your online engagement.

Finding Stories To Support Basic Infection Control Principles

I'm a storytelling expert not a medical professional so I'm obviously not going to be diving deep into Infection Control protocol, but I wanted to offer you some more specific questions to help you find stories that can be used to support desired behaviours.

The following examples are quite basic but hopefully they will give you ideas about how you can proceed to add stories to your professional toolbox.

Example 1: Choosing Stories to Support Handwashing

While most people understand the importance of proper handwashing in principle, they may not execute it properly in practice. Here are some questions to help you find stories to add emotional impact to the basic facts of hand hygiene.

- Who is your audience? Who do they admire? Who do they consider to be ‘someone like them’? Can you find a story in which someone like them or someone they admire made a difference because of their clean hands?
- Can you think of cultural/pop culture/literary references that support handwashing? (e.g. – a poster that says “Lady Macbeth could never get her hands clean enough to protect her but you can.”)
- Can you describe a time in which handwashing made an obvious and specific difference to a relatable person’s health or the health of their family?
- Can you describe a time in which someone’s lack of hygiene was obviously detrimental to their health or the health of their family?

Starting from these points and following the elements of effective stories can help you develop stories that will resonate with your listeners.



Example 2: Choosing Stories to Support PPE

While we generally understand the importance of PPE, for many laypeople it can feel restrictive or fussy and they may not think that they need it for a quick interaction. Here are some questions that can help you add emotional urgency to the need for PPE:

- Who is your audience? Who do they admire? Who do they consider to be 'someone like them'? Under what circumstances would someone like them wear PPE without question?
- Can you think of cultural/pop culture/literary references that are analogous to PPE? Warriors and armour, people in disguise, beekeepers, motorcyclists – any sort of analogy involving protection of this sort could help you make your point.
- Can you describe a time in which PPE was an obvious factor in someone's continued health or the health of their family? How can you show that that person was like your listener?
- Can you describe a time in which a lack of PPE was obviously detrimental to their health or the health of their family? How can you emphasize that your listener does not want to be like this person?



Starting from these points and following the elements of effective stories can help you develop stories that will resonate with your listeners.



Thank You!

I wish you ease with your storytelling!

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A Few Resources

8 Classic Storytelling Techniques for Engaging Presentations by Emily Bartlett

Wired for Story by Lisa Cron

Storytelling Basics by Lisa Evans

Excerpt from Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard by Chip Heath and Dan Heath

How I'd Learn Storytelling (If I Could Start Over) by Phillipp Humm

Storytelling and Social Change: A Strategy Guide by Narrative Arts

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With Prof. Charles Gerba, US

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With Prof. Keith Warriner, Canada
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With Prof. Helen Rickard and Prof. Elaine Cloutman-Green, UK

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