The Story Factor
Annette Simmons

The Big Idea
If business maxims, linear sequences or step-by-step business models are beginning to sound stale, or are falling on deaf, unresponsive ears, maybe it is time to try out a different approach in doing business and managing people. In The Story Factor, Annette Simmons shows an alternative way to reach out and influence colleagues - the old art of storytelling.

Chapter 1 - The Six Stories You Need to Know How to Tell

- “Who I Am” stories

It is better to demonstrate who you are than to declare who you are. A good “Who I Am” story helps people see what you want them to see about you, without having to directly say what you are about. By telling them an interesting story about yourself, versus saying, “I am interesting,” your listeners determine for themselves that you are not out to bore them, so they will stick around and actually listen to what you have to say.

- “Why Am I Here” stories

If you do not provide a plausible explanation of your good intentions early on, people will tend to be suspicious of you. Be upfront about what you are gaining. It will make people trust you more.

Your reasons for wanting to influence may combine selfish desires for power, wealth or fame with selfless desires to benefit the organization or a particular group of people. Always remember that people don’t mind selfish goals as long as they aren’t exploitative. So be truthful; it makes you more credible.

- “The Vision” story

You have to take time to find a story of your vision in a way that connects to you listeners. You need a story that people can see. Of the six kinds of stories mentioned in this chapter, the vision story is the one most likely to sound corny on paper. For this reason, it is important for you to be authentic in your delivery. Remember that vision takes courage.

- “Teaching” stories

How often have you experienced being frustrated while trying to teach someone who just doesn’t get it? A story is a good way to solve this problem. Telling your new receptionist where the hold, transfer and extension buttons are on the console is not going to teach her how to be a great receptionist. But try telling her about the best receptionist you ever knew, Mrs. Ardi, who could simultaneously calm an angry customer, locate the CEO and smile warmly at the delivery guy. Your story will paint a much clearer picture of the skills you want her to display.
• “Values-in-Action” stories

A story lets you instill values in a way that allows people to continue thinking for themselves. Instead of saying “We value integrity,” try telling a story that shows how you, or another employee, displayed integrity. Personal stories are effective as they engage people on a personal level. You need an abundance of stories in your tool kit if you want to influence the values of others effectively enough to change their behavior. Remember, values said plainly are meaningless without stories to bring them to life.

• “I Know What You Are Thinking” stories

When you tell a story that makes people wonder if you are reading their minds, they love it. To do this, you must do your homework especially when talking to a new set of listeners. Find out what their business culture is like. Identify existing standpoints and possible objections. If you name their objections first, you are much closer to disarming them, and consequently, make them hear you out and be open to what else you have to say. Doing your homework builds trust.

Chapter 2 - What is a Story?

A story is a narrative account of an event or a series of events, whether factual or fictional. The difference between giving an example and telling a story is the addition of emotional content and sensory details. A story weaves detail, character and events into a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. A picture of people and a horse is an example. Picasso’s painting Guenica is a story.

Chapter 3 - What a Story Can Do that Facts Can’t

10 Situations Where Facts Are Inferior to a Story

• One-Dimensional to Three-Dimensional (adding depth and life to an otherwise boring person or presentation)
• Deflecting Bear-Trap Questions
• Tunnel Vision (influencing people to think “out-of-the-box”)
• Saying It Without Saying It (when saying something directly could be unwise)
• Stop Asking Me! (teaching people to think for themselves rather than depend on you all the time for answers)
• Giving a “Demo”
• Telling Your Superior He Is Wrong
• Don’t Tell Me What to Do (using a story to avoid a power struggle)
• “Reasons Why” Stories (whenever you need to say no to someone who wants to hear yes)
• Managing Bad Mood (your own or others)

Chapter 4 - How to Tell a Good Story

Checklist on Good Storytelling:
The best way to find out if you’re telling a good story is to take note of the following:

• Oral Language
• Gesture
• Facial Expressions
• Body Language
• Sounds, Smells and Tastes
• Irrelevant Detail
• Virtual Reality
• Timing and Pause
Chapter 5 - The Psychology of Story’s Influence

The psychological goal of influence is to connect your goals to your listeners’ self-interest. The power to influence is often associated with push strategy - the ability to make people do what you want them to do. Storytelling is a pull strategy on the other hand. Learning to influence through story, therefore, improves your chance of being heard and heeded. A good story is your bait. Remember, *if it doesn’t hook ‘em, you can’t reel ‘em.* It’s time for a better bait. It’s time for a better story.

Human attention is an emerging scarce resource. These days, almost anyone you want to influence is operating under a deficit of human attention. People don’t need more information; they need to know what it means. They need a story to explain this.

3 Ways to Tap Into a Listener’s Psyche

1. Connect before you convince.
2. When you want to change a person’s mind, take psychological baby steps.
3. Use a memory device (something that will make people remember your story better).

Chapter 6 - Sound Bite or Epic?

In the information age, we seek the sound bite that moves the masses and yet fail to realize that it doesn’t exist. There are no sound bites, just epics. Epics are human stories that stretch out from generation to generation.

Influence occurs over time. If you look at your desire to influence within the context of a bigger story, you will find helpful links to a person’s epic.

There are a few archetypal characters that sum up many of our life stories, here are a few examples.

- Hero
- Magician
- Sage
- King
- Martyr
- Warrior

Although no one role can possibly explain a person’s life, these stories are incredibly useful in identifying behavior patterns. Past patterns predict future behavior better than anything else.

Chapter 7 - Influencing the Unwilling, Unconcerned, or Unmotivated

To have a chance at influencing those who refuse to be influenced, you must acknowledge their honorable aspects. Say, you propose a new deal and are faced with resistance. You must recognize the good of the existing protocol, and slowly segue into the benefits of what you are about to offer.

It may be easier to imagine your adversaries as dumb, lazy or stubborn; but it will be better for you to consider that they have a “good reason” for not cooperating with you. Your desire to influence is born of some belief that you know a better way; and you are susceptible to labeling other people as wrong. However, people are least likely to respond to someone who thinks they are “wrong.”
Points to Remember:

- **Heroes Vs. Villains**

Avoid narrating a tale where the people listening to you are depicted as the villains, while depicting yourself as the hero. While the good guy versus bad guy story sets up the promise of a heroic drama, it equally sets you up for failure.

- **Labeling Losers**

If your strategies to influence are push strategies (control, weapons or manipulation), you inspire resistance. Aim for a positive “win-win” story over a negative “war” story.

- **Lines and Sandcastles**

  Telling a story is like building a sandcastle in the sand instead of drawing a line on it. You invite curiosity, build interest and encourage participation. This creates so much enthusiasm that your listeners end up on your side without ever having to acknowledge that they’ve crossed a line.

**Chapter 8 - Storylistening as a Tool of Influence**

Listening to people helps them pour out a little of their current thinking so they can make room for new thinking. Sometimes, just listening does all the work. When you deeply listen to someone, they listen to themselves and sometimes that alone is enough to change their mind.

Genuine listening has a deep, transformative power. You yourself will remember a time when someone truly listened to you, and you felt your own mental defenses slowly crack open and fall away.

To listen is...

...to support the speaker in connecting to his own wisdom and creative intelligence so he can play with new responses, thoughts and behaviors.

...to bear witness and validate someone’s fear, sadness or anger at injustice in a way that allows the individual to move past these paralyzing emotions and regain their power and will to act anew.

...to invite a group or individual to reflect, to examine their thoughts and perceptions for incongruities or trouble spots.

...to be the “sounding board,” without being asked for the service.

**Chapter 9 - Storyteller Do's and Don'ts**

**Do's**

- Do intrigue and captivate
- Do connect at the level of humanity.
- Do leave listeners feeling hopeful.
Don’ts

- Don’t act superior.
- Don’t bore your listeners.
- Don’t scare people or make them feel guilty.

Chapter 10 - The Life of a Storyteller

Storytelling can break you free from limitations you didn’t even know restricted you. It opens the doors of your mind and lets you think new thoughts. Each meaningful story you discover is like finding a “Get out of Jail Free” card that you can use and pass on.

7 Techniques for Finding Stories

1. Look for Patterns - recurring themes, sequences and repeated instances; moments of glory in your life, how they tie together and what they mean to you.
2. Look for Consequences - recalling good or bad results; pros and cons from past actions.
4. Look for Utility - remember a story that changed you and weave your new story with the old one; ask others for a story that influenced them and ask permission to use it.
5. Look for Vulnerability - talk about your soft spot, an embarrassing moment, or a touching family story.
6. Look for Future Experience - develop daydreams of “how it could be” into a full story with real-life characters (people love it when you put them in the story). Look into potential consequences, how they will play out and who will be affected.
7. Look for Story Recollections - find a story that stuck with you and derive meaning from it. Then retell the story so others can see the meaning you see.