

How to Tell Your Story without Boring Your Audience to Tears

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Have you ever listened to someone tell a story, over coffee or at a conference, and been absolutely bored to *tears*? Or worse: the story was interesting, but there doesn't seem to be a point? Join the club.



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Maybe the meat of the story you heard was interesting, but for some reason you just couldn't stay engaged. Or perhaps you heard an anecdote that completely blew you away, but when you tried to retell it, it didn't have nearly the same impact. Why *was* that?

Chances are — whether you realized it or not — the person was using dynamic storytelling elements. We all have stories to tell. And even if a person isn't a professional author or speaker, we still need to learn to tell our stories well. Because in hearing other people's stories (and telling our own), we often find understanding and acceptance. Stories help us feel not quite so alone in this world.

So if you need some help, here are three simple steps to how to tell a more compelling story:

1. Use a hook

A “hook” is your opener. It’s the attention-getter, the question or quote that immediately hooks your listener or reader. The more off-the-wall or mysterious, the better. Dare your audience to get lost in the story.

2. Tell the story

A story has natural momentum to it. If you simply state what happened in chronological order (many people actually neglect doing this), you will captivate your audience.

Ira Glass calls this the “anecdote” — a story in its purest form — and likens it to a train on which you’ve invited others to join. Those riding along can feel that you’re headed towards a destination.

Glass also says you need “bait” to keep your audience engaged. As he defines it, *bait* is a series of implicit or explicit questions you, the storyteller, raise. Just remember: any question you raise, you’ll need to answer. Otherwise, you’ll leave the listener in perpetual suspense and anxiety. And who has time to be any more anxious?

3. Reflect

Many people seem to tell stories just to tell them. But when you start asking *why* people share (and listen to) stories, often there is an objective. A reason. It may be to encourage or inspire or cause you to think differently. But still there is purpose to the telling.

At the end of your story, take a moment to reflect on what you shared. Answer any questions you’ve raised:

- Why is this relevant?
- What’s the moral or point?
- Who is this message for?

Help us, the audience, understand what we’re supposed to get from the story. It doesn’t have to be cliché or cheesy. In fact, your reflection can even be subtle. Just make it count.

In the reflection, you must resolve any questions or conflicts that were raised. This is, essentially, your conclusion. Your resolution. This can be a great opportunity to revisit your hook. Wrap up with a mention of your attention-getter or a restatement of a quote, interesting fact, etc.

This is your chance to make sense of anything that seemed superfluous at the time. Bring it all home.

Your story is waiting...

I've helped lots of people tell their stories. And more often than not when a story is suffering, it's due to neglecting one of these practices.

The teller jumps straight to the reflection or doesn't take the time to grab the audience with a hook. Or he drones on and on anecdotally without explaining *why* he's telling you the story in the first place. The result is confusion and even frustration. Your stories deserve *better*.

So does your audience.

Want to tell better stories? Check out the books (these are affiliate links) *Save the Cat* and *STORY*. They will help you hone this craft of storytelling.

How do you make your storytelling more compelling and dynamic? Share in the comments.