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Focus

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Storytelling

"A big part of a CEO's job is to motivate people to reach certain goals. To do that, he or she must engage their emotions, and the key to their hearts is story."

-- Robert McKee, Harvard Business Review, June 2003

"Leaders don't just make products and make decisions. Leaders make meaning."

– John Seely Brown

As a serious student of leadership, each year I gain a growing appreciation of the usefulness of stories for business communication. This year that growing awareness blossomed into full bloom.

It's important to understand that business storytelling is just giving an example, and is a powerful communication tool. A good example should be obvious and easy to understand and remember. Besides being clear, a good example is also concise, thereby saving time. Business storytelling is now emerging as a discipline that can be mastered through study and practice.

My final metamorphosis to a passionate believer in the power of business storytelling began innocently enough: I purchased *Beyond Bullet Points* by Cliff Atkinson (Microsoft Press, 2005) to get ideas for improving the communication effectiveness of PowerPoint presentations. Guess what? Cliff, a southern California lad, uses classic and modern storytelling techniques as the foundation for his book.

My interest now keen, I found another new book, *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling* by Stephen Denning (John Wiley, 2005) that, in the author's words, "Shows how to use storytelling to deal with the most difficult challenges faced by leadership today."

Denning lists eight types of stories based on the desired outcome (he calls these Narrative Patterns) as follows.

1. Motivating others to action

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6. Transmitting knowledge and understanding
7. Neutralizing gossip and rumor
8. Sharing your vision and leading people into the future

Finally, remember that storytelling is performance art, just like leadership. You are onstage when storytelling, so plan your story and rehearse your delivery. A good story teller knows the audience and clearly understands the purpose of the story.

Tom Wagner

We help clarify options so our clients
identify the Right Questions
and solve the Right Problems.

Call us at 800 422-1374 to learn more.

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