



July 2016

From Memorable to Repeatable:

The Power of the Storyline

If you've attended one of our presence workshops, you may remember the first exercise of the day where we ask participants to define the attributes of presence. What does it take to influence a group? For 30 years, the list has stayed fairly consistent. Listeners want confidence, passion, intention and authenticity. When listeners describe how they plan to use ideas from a communicator, they talk more about clear and concise rather than honest and believable. I believe all of these are attributes of presence, but I was reminded of our exercise at a recent conference where I heard Andy Stanley, founder of North Point Community Church, talk about leadership. His words resonated, **"We value integrity, but we follow clarity."**



It's so true! It's why leaders and managers with the best of intentions don't always get heard. And, it's why we focus on helping communicators craft a storyline that will be memorable and repeatable.

A compelling storyline holds a great message, a solid framework and the components needed to move a listener from one point to another. Too often, we get bogged down in a list of thoughts or a string of ideas that don't add up to a sum that is greater than the parts. For communication to stick, there has to be a sum or a bottom-line point.

A few years ago, I was called for jury duty. I respect civic duty, but two weeks away from the office can wreak havoc on a small business. Once I got over the hassle and lost revenue, I realized that I had a front row seat for a lesson on human behavior and messages.

This trial was a personal injury case. In short order, the jurors felt sorry for the plaintiff and disliked the defense attorney. And yet, the defense attorney did something very well. From the opening remarks, he positioned a message about intuitive steps and personal safety. He connected with all of us on what we instinctively do to test water temperature. He even used his hand to act it out, and it stuck.

He was smug throughout the trial and elicited some emotions that he should have been more aware of from the jury. But, each time we gathered in the jury room, someone brought the gesture up. It became a point of levity for the group because we all knew it and could mimic it. Relatively quickly, his storyline was memorable and repeatable.

And, here's the interesting part. When we reached deliberation, it became more than a mimic. We were inundated with facts and details. The plaintiff's attorney had taken us deep in the weeds and pointed out detail after detail. But, when we were challenged to remember those points, we were short on takeaways. Instead, what resonated was the defense storyline. We followed clarity as a jury, and I can still remember the storyline to this day.

So, how do you do that with business content?

You build a clear storyline, and you organize a message and framework underneath it. Most content organization tools are built from the communicator's perspective. They're designed to help you remember ideas and string thoughts together.

I've seen many visual techniques designed to help presenters organize their thoughts. Some communicators show me a bubble technique; others show me a story tree. And, some use trigger words to connect a list of ideas. But, all of these techniques are about linear connections and helping the communicator jump from one point to the next. In order for those thoughts to be memorable, the listener would have to write each point down and try and recreate your methodology. That's a lot of work!

Instead, the real value of communication is that all of those points rollup to a clear storyline. It's the one compelling idea that all of the points validate. A listener will never remember point after point. But, they will remember a storyline and the message that held it together.

Once the storyline is memorable, listeners tend to latch onto one or two repeatable points. Case in point. I've told the story about jury duty several times to groups. I rarely tell it the same way and based on a group or my memory, I use different points or anecdotes to bring the experience to life. But, the storyline about the defense attorney's message never wavers. So, I've held onto his storyline and I associate different details of the experience or his points every time I repeat it.

The same is true of your communication. Your goal can't be that people repeat details. But, you should be focused on making sure the storyline is memorable and repeatable. Every listener will validate how they bought into the storyline in a different way.

Business communication has come a long way through the years. Today, people are more focused on connecting with groups and using stories is a great way to do that. But, the development of the skills is a little confusing. Many training groups offer courses on storytelling. They're fun, but they don't work. And, the reason is that most programs reinforce the series of stories and the idea of linking one thought to the next. It lacks a structure and methodology that keeps the listener aligned and moving forward toward your clear takeaway.

Stories are memorable, but they're only one third of the formula for compelling communication. We believe it takes:

a clear storyline + memorable stories + a compelling storyteller

This year, we launched our [storylines program](#) that proves out the formula, and if you haven't considered it, I urge you to do so.

- We're developing storylines for sales teams to get the right message in front of clients.
- We're tailoring internal frameworks to help teams bring consistency to messages and projects.
- And, we're helping leaders deliver clarity in keynotes and quarterly town halls.

It's the better formula to develop content that is memorable and repeatable.

In fact, if we're right, you've gotten to the end of this newsletter with a clear takeaway in mind. The secret sauce is the [storyline](#). It can help you be memorable and repeatable.

Call us when you need us!

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