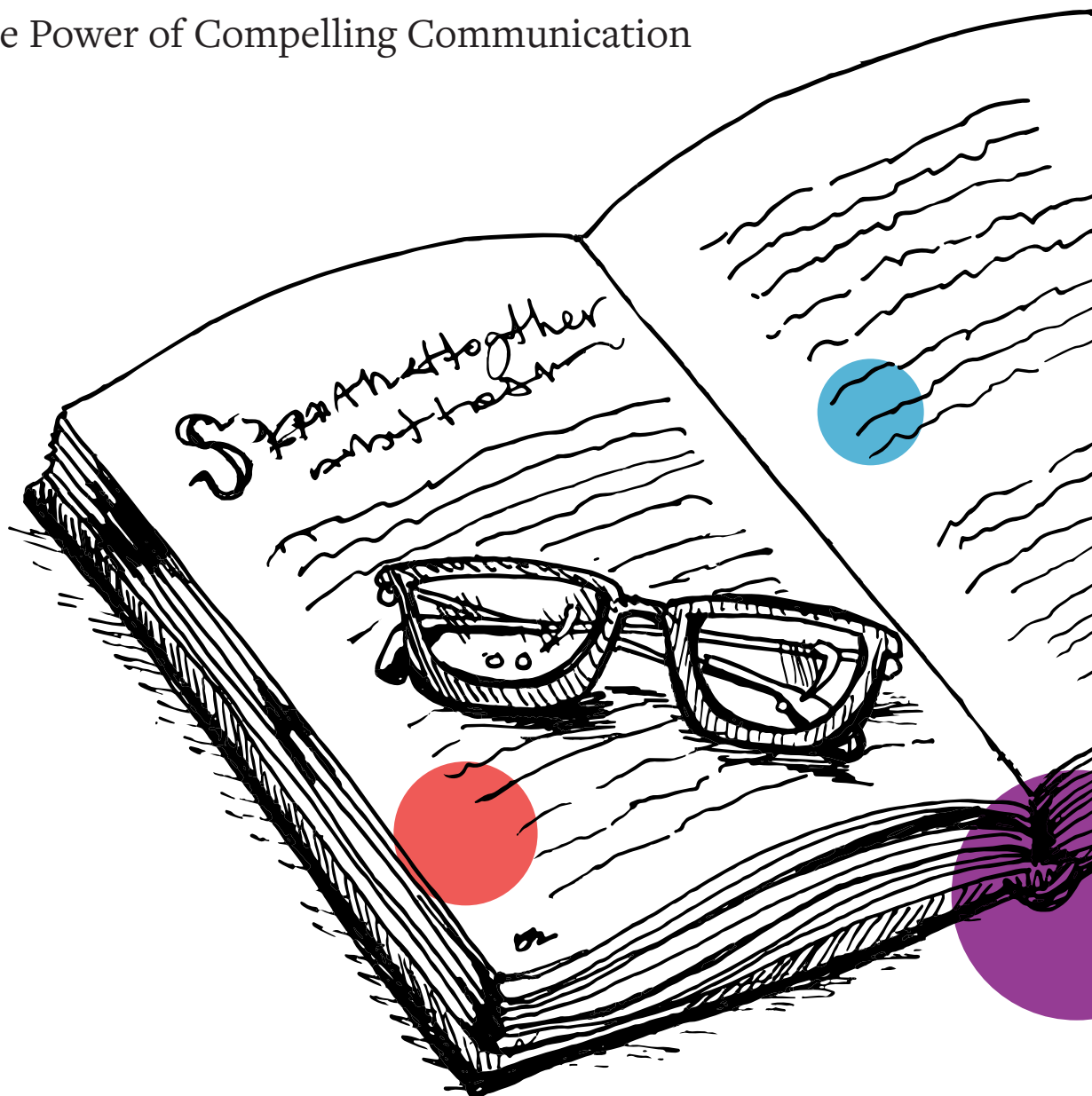
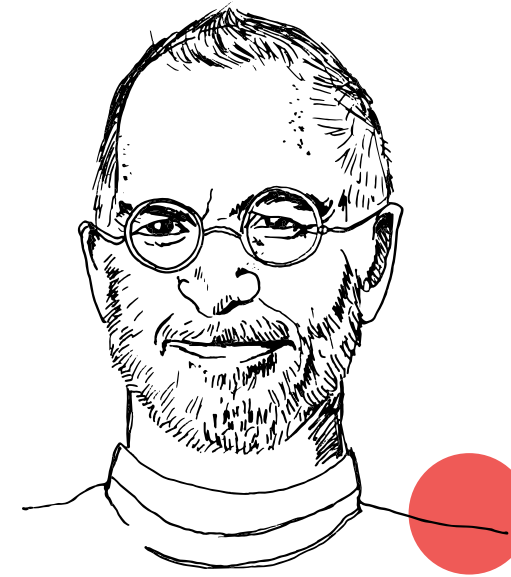


Ariel

Connecting Through Storytelling:

Unleash the Power of Compelling Communication





“The most powerful person in the world is the storyteller.”

STEVE JOBS

After the birth of your twin girls, you decide to start putting money away for college tuition, but, unfortunately, you don't know a 529 plan from your elbow. After hours of online research leave you more confused than before, you call a financial advisor recommended by a friend. A mom of triplets, the financial advisor is able to speak from her own experience. She tells you how she navigated college plans, points out additional expenses to keep in mind, and helps you rework your budget to both save for your future and go on the occasional family vacation. You happily sign on with her even though you can technically access the same services online for less. Why?

Your organization has hired a consultant as a result of low employee engagement on your team. You'd noticed that your team had been low-energy lately and now fear that your job is on the line. On the consultant's first day, you have to swallow the fact that, despite her professional appearance and obvious intelligence, she looks fresh out of college. She observes your team and then comes to ask you about their performance and morale. Despite your frustration at her age, you're honest with her: they seem to be struggling and you're not sure what to do to fix it. You find yourself telling her detail after detail, concern after concern, and she doesn't interrupt you. When you finally stop, she looks you in the eye and assures you that your team's struggle and your concern is absolutely normal. She tells you about a similar client she worked with who took a specific leadership development course paired with a sustainability resource and had huge success improving engagement. You leave work confident

that your job isn't on the line; instead, you're feeling like your company is invested enough in you to hire a consultant and work on your development. Why?

You're finally settling down after a long day at the office followed by an hour of traffic and then making and cleaning up dinner. You sit down just in time to catch the latest episode of your new favorite show, but barely make it past the theme song when your cable cuts out for the second time in three days. You call your cable company fuming and ready to cancel—they'd promised you last time that it wouldn't happen again. The unlucky representative who answers your call allows you to vent. He apologizes and assures you that he'll find out the source of the problem. As he's restoring your cable, he shares with you that his water cut out three times last month, so he knows what it's like to feel let down by a service you rely on. Your favorite show flickers back to life, and you find that your anger at the representative—and your cable company—has dissipated. Why?

In all of these examples, people used stories to create connections, share experiences, and ultimately help everyone involved achieve a positive outcome.

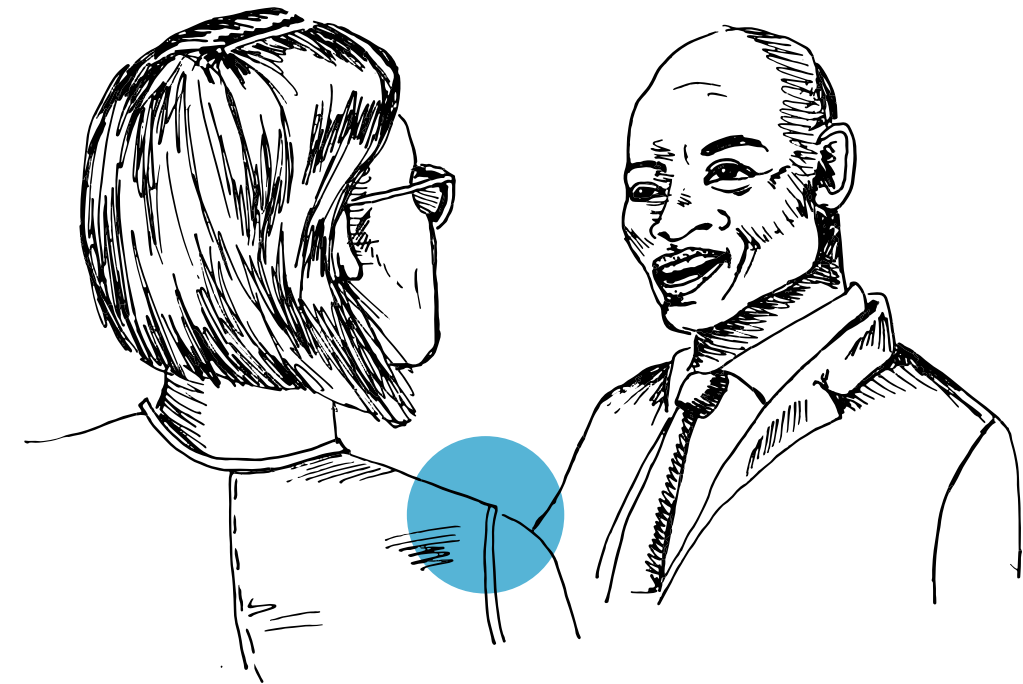
A powerful communication tool, stories can capture attention, build trust and credibility, and deliver messages and insights with impact. In this eBook, we take a look at the psychology behind storytelling and explore how to leverage it within your organization.

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CHAPTER ONE:

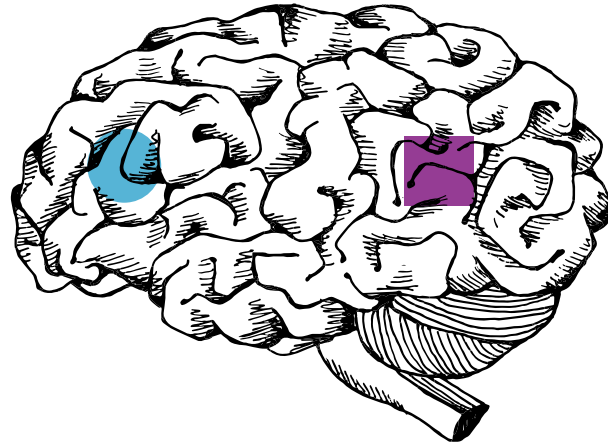
The Psychology and Research



How We Process Stories

Business discussions and presentations can easily fall into facts-and-figures conversations. But the truth is that stories present information in a format that makes it easier for the audience to receive, comprehend, and retain.

Your Brain Receiving Facts



- WERNICKE'S AREA: *Language Comprehension*
- BROCA'S AREA: *Language Processing*

Your Brain on Storytelling

Stories “light up” more of the brain than factual reporting.

Neuroscience imaging shows that facts and figures activate just two areas of the brain: those responsible for language comprehension and processing. But [stories activate up to eight areas of the brain](#): those having to do with touch, movement, scent, sound, color, and shape in addition to language comprehension and processing. This implies that the brain responds to the story events as if they were actually happening to the listener. If you're skeptical, think about why you cry while watching a movie, even though logic tells you that the story and characters are fictional.

Stories synchronize the listener's brain with the teller's brain.

Perhaps the most fascinating research is this [evidence of connectedness through mirror neurons](#). A study by Uri Hassen of Princeton University found that when a speaker is telling a story, the same areas of the both the speaker's and the listener's brains light up despite the fact that one is producing information and the other is receiving it. This creates coherence between a speaker's brain and the brains of his/her audience members—it ensures that you and your listener are on the same page.

Stories command attention.

The human brain has a strong tendency to lose focus. In fact, it is estimated to engage in up to 2,000 daydreams a day and spend up to half its waking time wandering. In the presence of a compelling story that creates tension, however, the brain [snaps to attention due to the release of a stress hormone known as cortisol](#).

Information presented through story is more easily remembered than plain statistics or facts.

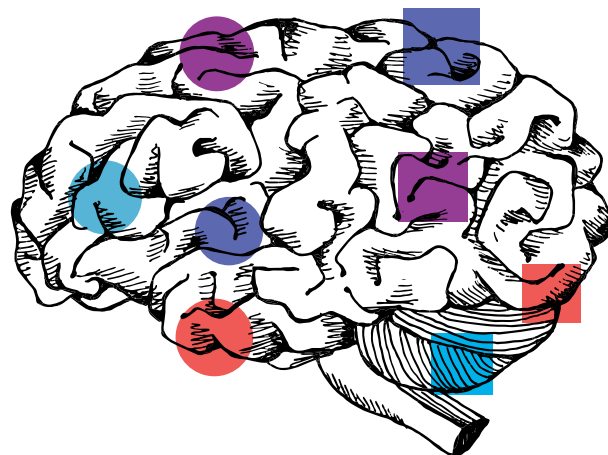
According to Stanford Graduate School of Business' research, [stories are 22 times more memorable](#) than facts alone. This is likely because [stories universally activate brain regions dealing with emotional processing and memory](#). The study by USC linked above found that “the regions implicated include:

- the medial prefrontal cortex: plays a role in decision making and memory recall.
- the posterior cingulate cortex: active in episodic memory recall.
- the inferior parietal lobe: plays an important role in understanding emotions and interpreting sensory data.
- the lateral temporal cortex: active in emotional association and visual memory.
- the hippocampal formation: where long term memories are processed.”

Storytelling connects listeners to the storyteller emotionally and motivates cooperative behavior.

In a [series of studies](#), neuroscientist Paul J. Zak tested the brain's response to engaging stories. When humans are presented with something that is familiar and deemed trustworthy, our bodies release a neurochemical called oxytocin that creates a feeling of connectedness. Furthermore, rising oxytocin levels trigger reactions. In one study where participants watched compelling public service announcements, Zak found that “when the PSA elicited an increase in both ACTH [a fast-acting arousal hormone that rises when one is paying attention] and oxytocin, donations were 261 percent higher than when one or both of these biomarkers did not rise.”

Your Brain Receiving Stories



- | | |
|--|---|
| ● SENSORY CORTEX: <i>Touch</i> | ■ MOTOR CORTEX: <i>Movement</i> |
| ● WERNICKE'S AREA: <i>Language Comprehension</i> | ■ BROCA'S AREA: <i>Language Processing</i> |
| ● AUDITORY CORTEX: <i>Sounds</i> | ■ VISUAL CORTEX: <i>Colors & Shapes</i> |
| ● OLFACTORY CORTEX: <i>Scents</i> | ■ CEREBELLUM: <i>Touch</i> |

CHAPTER TWO:

Using Storytelling in Business Interactions



The science tells us that storytelling helps connect with the thoughts and feelings of others in the moment, enhances memory, commands attention, builds trust, and influences behavior. But what are the best ways to leverage this powerful tool for business?

Strong teams have found that storytelling:

- **fosters trust and builds credibility**

Sharing personal stories at the initial stages of your relationship helps others connect with you emotionally—building the trust necessary to be successful as you continue to work together. Sharing stories about your background and experience can also build credibility.

- **helps new ideas resonate**

Because storytelling helps command attention and drive connection, it's a great vehicle to deliver insights and change perspective. Stories told using characters in like industries facing similar challenges can help contextualize the insights you'd like to share, making them resonate more impactfully.

- **creates deep connections to organizations, brands, and products**

New York Times columnist Rob Walker created a series of experiments that showed that useless thrift store finds [commanded a 2,700% increase in value when accompanied by an engaging narrative](#). Clearly, stories help listeners make deep connections to something that would otherwise have no value. You can help set the tone for a value-based conversation by telling a story that connects to your organization, brand, or product emotionally.

- **paints a clear picture of success—or failure**

Much of business involves problem solving, re-evaluating processes and ideas, and introducing new initiatives. Telling stories is a great way to help visualize what success looks like and create urgency to move toward a solution together.



“Stories cater to the part of the brain that decides to trust—the part that says, ‘I’m going to change.’”

BOSWORTH AND ZOLDAN
What Great Salespeople Do

CHAPTER THREE:

Master the Art: A Tale of Two Approaches



“Narratives that cause us to pay attention and also involve us emotionally are the stories that move us to action.”

PAUL J. ZAK
Ph.D.

When it comes to telling stories in a business situation, there are two main approaches that should be learned and mastered: agile (informal) storytelling and strategic (formal) storytelling.

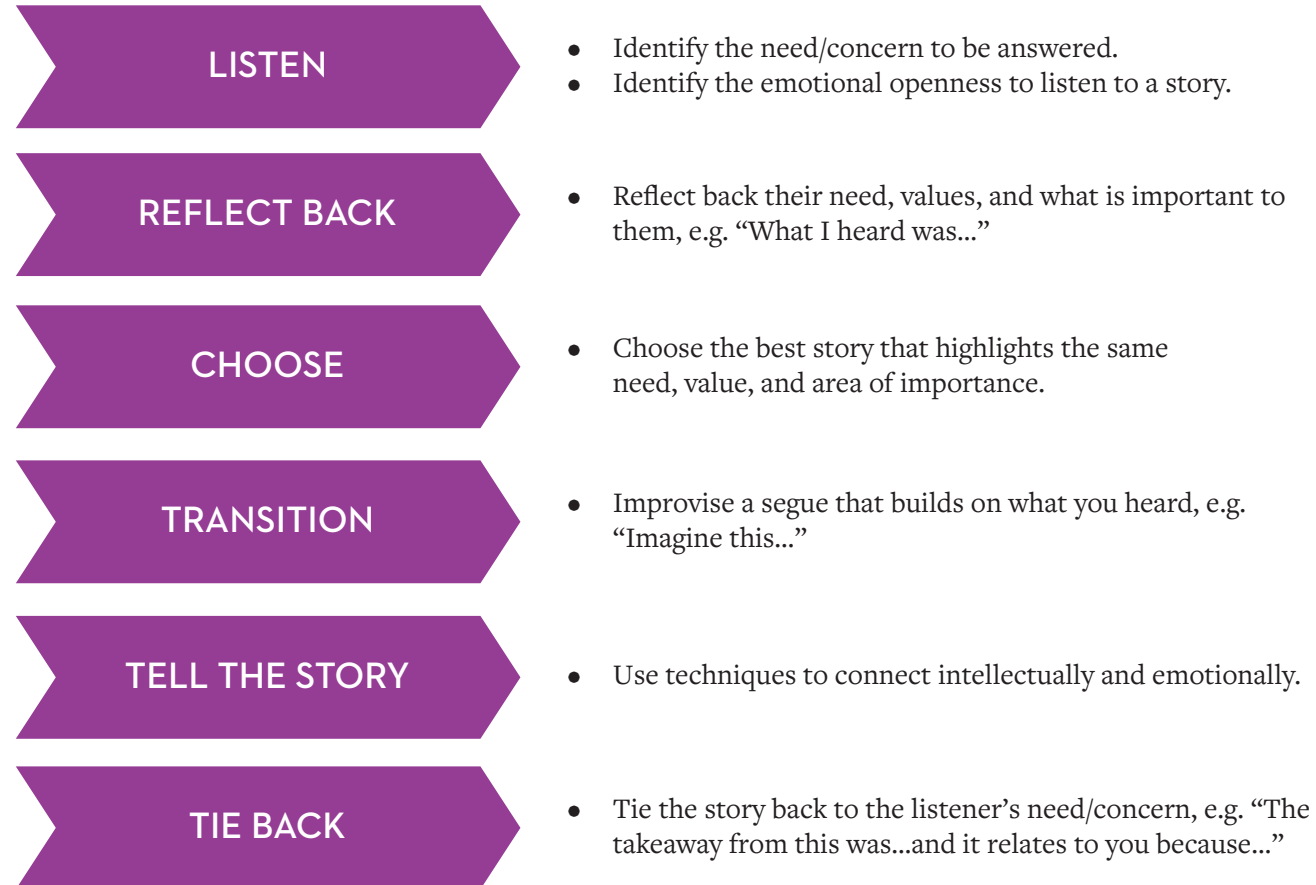
Agile Storytelling

Agile storytelling describes the ability to spontaneously select and insert small, informal stories or pieces of stories into conversation in reaction to what the other person has just said. Before you worry about this type of improvisation in the moment, realize that we already do this naturally as part of everyday discourse. Research by evolutionary biologist Robin Dunbar shows that [storytelling accounts for up to 65% of informal conversation](#).

When to use agile storytelling:

At the beginning of a relationship, agile storytelling is a powerful way to quickly develop trust and help your listener see that you understand their values and challenges. When you respond to a statement with a relevant story that moves the conversation forward, it continues to build trust and credibility because it shows you are actively listening.

How to use agile storytelling in conversation:



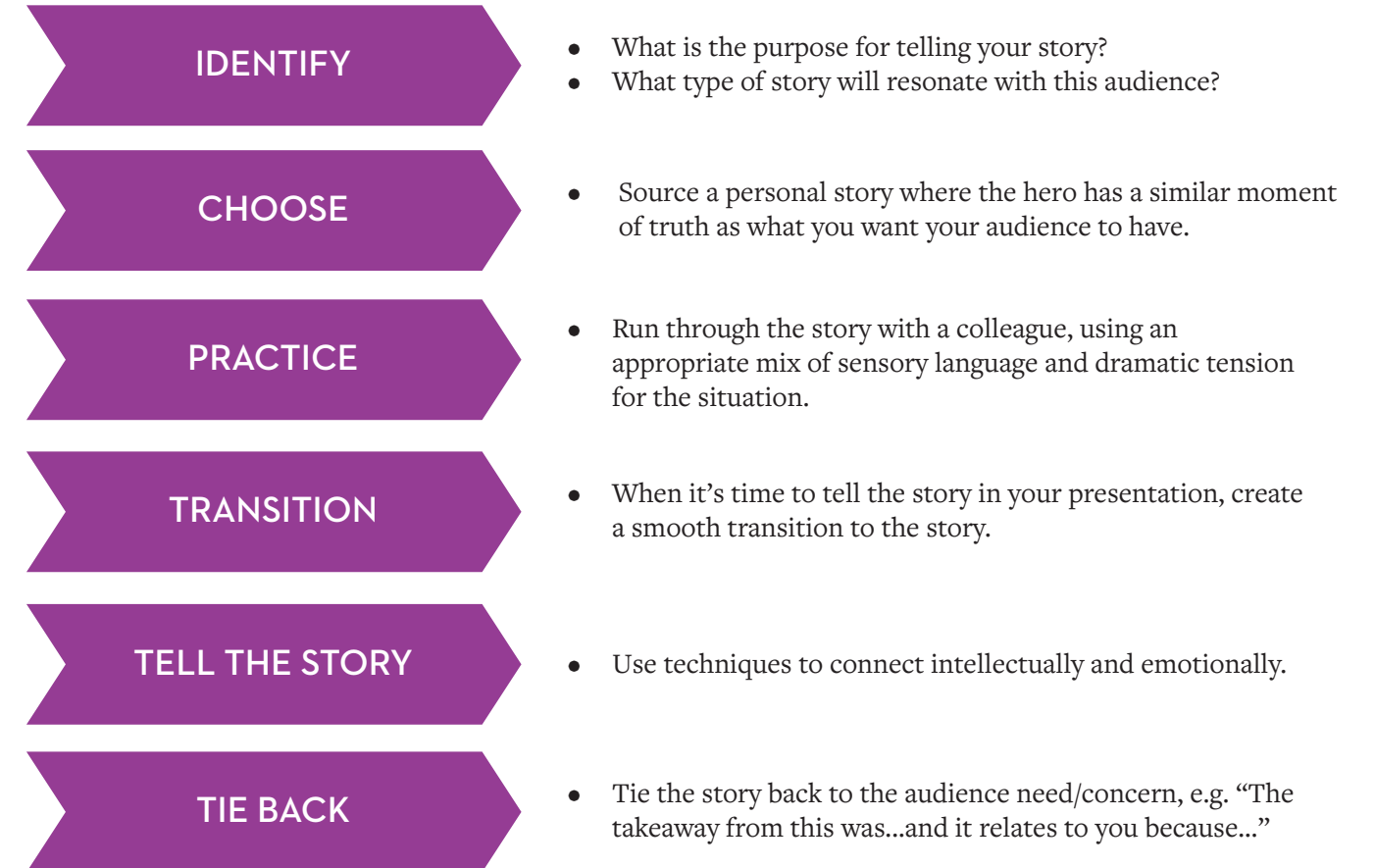
Strategic Storytelling

Strategic storytelling describes the ability to intentionally leverage a story to achieve a specific outcome. Strategic stories are usually crafted ahead of time with a specific purpose and situation in mind.

When to use strategic storytelling:

You can use strategic storytelling to deliver an insight that resonates, at the beginning of a formal presentation to connect with your audience and capture their attention, during a discussion to help others understand specifics about your plan or idea and the benefits associated, during conversations to keep the focus where you need it to be, or to move people to action.

How to use strategic storytelling for a conversation or presentation:



Elements of a Good Story

To achieve an emotional connection through story, you'll need to master storytelling techniques. Before we dive into how to hone your storytelling skills, it's important to understand the [fundamental elements](#) of every good story:



Structure

The best stories have a beginning, middle, and end, each serving a distinct purpose. Simply put, the introduction should hook your audience, the middle should build conflict and interest, and the climax should involve a change or turning point—a success or failure that serves as a learning moment.



Truth

No story is complete without the illumination of a universal truth. This is where the storyteller goes beyond the plot to uncover what the hero learned, gained, or can apply as a result of the experience.



Struggle

A story without conflict will undoubtedly fall flat. Revealing the hero's struggle will make him or her a more dynamic character and create an opportunity for true resolution.



A Hero

Listeners tend to empathize with one strong character more than a group. This is why personal stories are often the most effective to change the hearts and minds of our listeners.



A Goal

Powerful stories include a central goal that your hero is trying to achieve. This points listeners to the potential for greatness or triumph.

Techniques for Making a Story Come Alive

Strategic stories used in formal presentations or discussions can benefit from a more dramatic delivery style than informal stories being used as part of a casual conversation. Depending on the situation and audience, select a mix of the techniques below to activate your story and connect with your listeners.

- **SENSORY LANGUAGE**

Recall that studies show that using language that describes touch, feel, smell, and emotion activate the corresponding area of the brain and help deepen the listener's connection to the storyteller.

- **BULLET PHRASES**

Keep your story concise and focused by distilling the story down into a few key points.

- **VOCAL VARIETY AND BODY LANGUAGE**

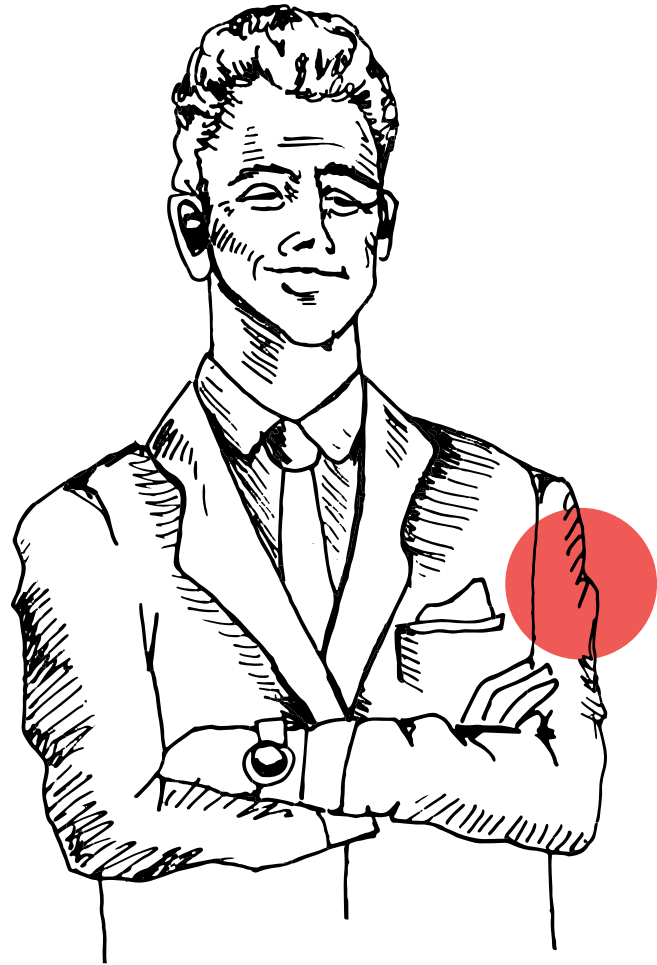
Ensure that your choice of non-verbal language and tone of voice are supportive of and congruent with your message.

- **HERO'S POINT OF VIEW**

If it's appropriate for your situation, tell your story in the present tense from the perspective of the hero. This pulls the audience in and helps them empathize with the dramatic tension.

Always Be Listening

How do you build your personal library of stories so that you can reach for them when the time comes? Always be listening. The best stories are happening all around you—in your personal life, with your clients and colleagues, and in their industries and organizations.



Storytelling is not just made for the movies or nights out with friends. It is an essential piece of an effective business process. Today all of us are bombarded by an influx of information every day through a multitude of channels. Being able to leverage storytelling in both formal and informal contexts will help you command attention, build trust and credibility, and differentiate yourself from the herd.

Ariel

Ariel develops powerful and authentic communication skills to drive better performance for leaders and teams. Our integrated suite of programs is delivered via classroom, virtual classroom, and a digital offering to provide flexibility in learning. Whether you need to develop your next generation of leaders, connect global teams, or keep your workforce engaged and motivated, we can tackle your most pressing business challenges to ensure that your teams write, speak, lead, and sell with impact and emotional intelligence.