

# Strategic Storytelling

## *“Reframing the Narrative”*

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Kentucky Career Center  
412 Roy Campbell Drive  
Hazard, Kentucky 41701



# BIG STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

1. What is your school's/district's current culture of storytelling?
2. What is the current narrative about our work vs. the one we would like to be told?
3. Who are our target audiences and what would we like them to do?
4. What narratives and stories will move our target audiences to action?
5. Through what channels will we communicate these stories to our target audiences?

# A Brief History of Storytelling

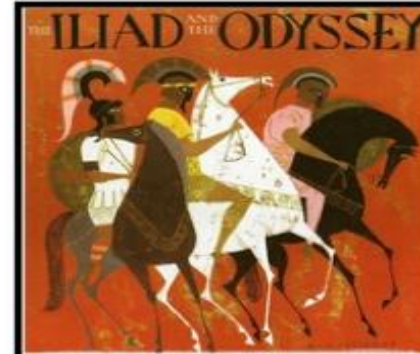
## THE SIX MILESTONES



**MILESTONE 1**  
VISUAL  
STORYTELLING



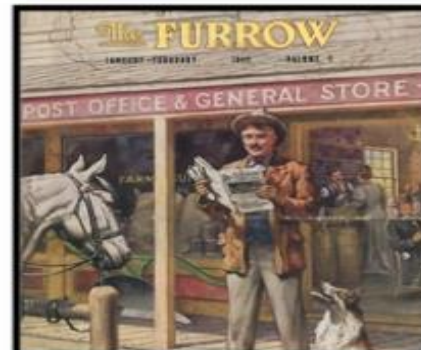
**MILESTONE 2**  
VERBAL  
STORYTELLING



**MILESTONE 3**  
PRINTED  
STORYTELLING



**MILESTONE 4**  
MULTI-CHANNEL  
STORYTELLING



**MILESTONE 5**  
BRANDED  
STORYTELLING



**MILESTONE 6**  
DEMOCRATIZED  
STORYTELLING

# How Storytelling Affects the Brain

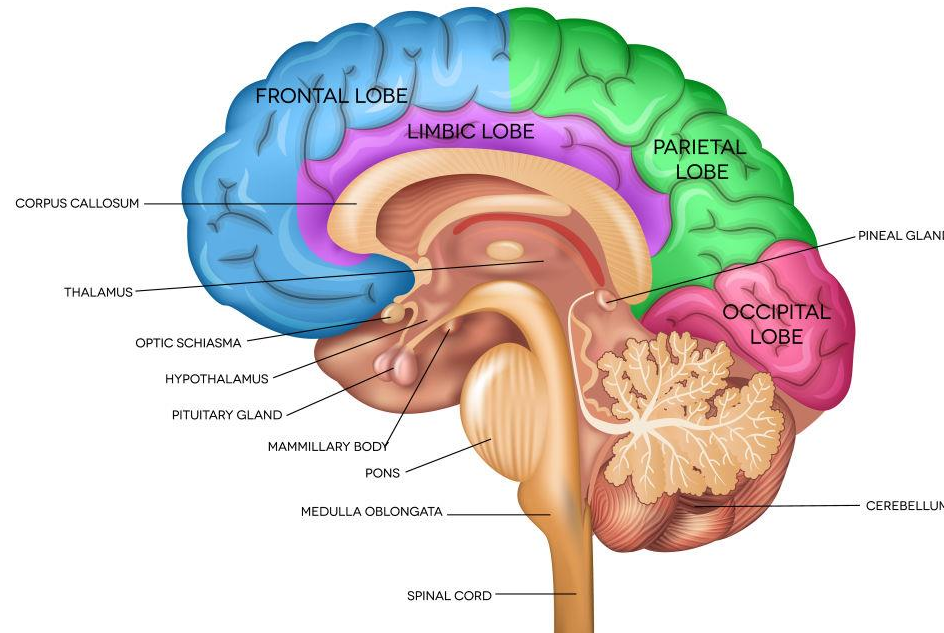
## Neural Coupling

A story activates parts in the brain that allows the listener to turn the story into their own ideas and experience thanks to a process called neural coupling.

## Mirroring

Listeners will not only experience the similar brain activity to each other, but also to the speaker.

ANATOMY OF THE BRAIN



## Dopamine

The brain releases dopamine into the system when it experiences an emotionally charged event, making it easier to remember and with greater accuracy.

## Cortex Activity

When processing facts, two areas of the brain are activated (Broca's and Wernicke's area). A well-told story can engage many additional areas, including the motor cortex, sensory cortex and frontal cortex.

# TRUTHS ABOUT STORIES – The FIVE Fundamentals

## 1. Humans are Creatures of Emotion, Not Logic

"We aren't robots. What makes us exceptional as humans is that we have the capacity to feel many emotions all at once." -Demi Lovato, Singer

## 2. Humans are Addicted to Stories

"We are, as a species, addicted to story. Even when the body goes to sleep, the mind stays up all night, telling itself stories." -John Gottschall, Author

## 3. It's About Connection, Not Perfection

"The fact of storytelling hints at the fundamental human unease, hints at human imperfection. Where there's perfection there's no story to tell." -Ben Okra, Poet

## 4. Humans Create Meaning Through Symbolism



"Because life is mysterious, we create symbols to sustain hope and faith. These intangibles then shape our thoughts, emotions, actions." -Lee Bolman, Scholar

## 5. Most Importantly, Be the Story You Want to Tell

"How many cares one loses when one decides not to be something but to be someone." -Coco Chanel, Designer




# Storytelling Culture Self-Assessment Tool

**USE THIS WORKSHEET TO IDENTIFY AND RATE KEY AREAS OF SUCCESS AS WELL AS THOSE THAT NEED IMPROVEMENT IN REGARDS TO YOUR ORGANIZATION'S STORYTELLING CULTURE AND READINESS.**

<b>CAPACITY</b>			
			
Staff meets at regular intervals (weekly, monthly) to share and discuss stories.			
Storytelling is incorporated into at least one staff member's core job duties.			
The staff member(s) tasked with storytelling possess necessary skills in writing, editing, production and/or visuals and video (if applicable).			
Staff storytellers seek out professional development opportunities to expand their skills when necessary.			
There is a dedicated amount within the annual communications budget for producing stories (including upkeep of software/hardware or retaining external support).			
There is an organized system for storing collected assets and completed stories in a way that allows staff to easily access them.			
If collection and production are handled by different departments/staff there is an organized system for transferring this information from one to the other.			
Effort is made to track the impact of storytelling, as a way to enable more sustainable investment.			
<b>TOTALS</b>			

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<b>MINDSET/APPRECIATION</b>			
			
Belief in the value of storytelling and support for its use is uniform throughout the organization, from top to bottom.			
Staff are encouraged to share stories internally and externally.			
Staff feel confident in their abilities to share stories that illustrate the organization's mission.			
Stories are in alignment with the mission and collectively create a cohesive picture of the organization.			
Stories are regularly incorporated into a majority of organizational communications, whether spoken, in print or digitally.			
When stories are successful in leading to increased awareness, funds, etc., these successes are shared internally with staff.			
Staff are regularly encouraged to develop their storytelling skills through professional development and/or adoption of new technology.			
Planning to collect and share stories is incorporated into organization and communication/development goals.			
<b>TOTALS</b>			

# **CURRENT SCHOOL/DISTRICT NARRATIVE**

What is the current narrative about your school or district?

Create a headline that describes the current narrative...

# **DESIRED SCHOOL/DISTRICT NARRATIVE**

What is the desired narrative about your school/district?

Create a headline that describes the desired narrative...



# What Makes a Good Story?

## *Five Essential Building Blocks of an Effective Story*

### CHARACTER



Stories should contain a single, compelling main character who is relatable to the target audience and who can be "brought to life" by relaying specific details, memories, experiences.

### TRAJECTORY



Stories should chronicle something that happens – an experience, journey, transformation, discovery – but it doesn't need to be a linear, sequential recounting every time.

### AUTHENTICITY



Stories should show – rather than tell – the audience about the character's transformation, using rich details and featuring the character's own voice as much as possible, devoid of jargon.

### ACTION-ORIENTED EMOTIONS



Stories should strategically select and convey emotions that align with the stories purpose that move people to act, and marry these with clear, easy-to-find pathways in the form of a call-to-action

### HOOK



Stories should capture the audience's attention as quickly as possible, giving them a sense of whose story it is and what's at stake to ultimately persuade them to read or watch more.

# Strategic Story Cycle

Planning, Production, Distribution, Evaluation



# PURPOSEFUL STORYTELLING “*The A and the B*”

*before creation, spend time defining a story's purpose*

## A. PASSION PROMPT

STEP 1: BRAINSTORM: Quickly jot down a few key priority project, programs or initiatives your organization or team has prioritized this year. - - - - - When done, circle one that you'd like to create a story about.

## B. STORY STRATEGY + PLAN OF ACTION

STEP 2: DETERMINE: What action do you want to drive for that priority project determined in the previous step?

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STEP 3: STRATEGIZE: Who's the target audience(s) that you want to take that desired action?

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STEP 4: CONSIDER: What emotion(s) is going to lead that audience to that particular action?

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STEP 5: CHOOSE: Which channel(s) should this story be told on to reach the targeted audience?

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STEP 6: EVALUATE: What does attainable success look like for your story?

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# PURPOSEFUL STORYTELLING “*The C*”

## C. STORY PURPOSE STATEMENT - PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

We plan to create a story about \_\_\_\_\_ . The purpose of this story is to \_\_\_\_\_ among \_\_\_\_\_ , through viewing/reading/hearing a story on \_\_\_\_\_ . The story will be considered successful if \_\_\_\_\_ .

**#1 – select a story about a priority project/program**

**#2 - identify and plan action**

**#3 – choose a target audience**

**#4 – determine the best channel(s)**

**#5 – set an evaluation method - remember, what's realistic for one story to do**

# The Future of Storytelling: Five Change Spaces

## DISRUPTIVE CHARACTERS



In the future, character selection and creation within social impact stories will become increasingly creative - and disruptive - as the understanding of how important a good character is to breakthrough the clutter is fully realized.

## STORY STORES



In the future, stores will tell stories of the products sold, especially their social benefit in order to increase profit and purpose. To activate the experience, companies will enter into nonprofit story partnerships and employees will be trained as storytellers.

## VIRTUAL & AUGMENTED REALITY



In the future, virtual and augmented reality - with its ability to leapfrog empathy creation - will surround a person's life and arguably become the most effective channel in which to tell stories and drive people to action on behalf of social issues.

## CITIZEN STORYTELLING PROGRAMS



In the future, social impact organizations will realize that their supporters also provide non-monetary support, and focus on activating their currency of influence. Citizen storyteller programs will be created that are duly strategic for the organization while also producing authentic stories.

## RISE OF STORY LEADERS



In the future, social impact organizations will restructure to break down silos and activate all employees as part of the storytelling process. Chief Storytellers will assume cross-functional leadership roles and professional storytellers will be taught the hybrid skillsets needed to tell stories.

# NEXT STEPS: THE ROAD FROM HERE

*How will we improve Strategic Storytelling at our school/district?*

## 1. ORGANIZATIONAL PLANNING

What steps will we take to improve our culture of storytelling?

## 2. PERSONAL PLANNING

What is my personal strategic storytelling action promise going forward?

