



Tell Stories That Matter:

A Storytelling Cheat Sheet



Storytelling Cheat Sheet



1 Know your audience.

Who are you trying to engage and why? The needs of each stakeholder are very different. For instance, the public prefers entertaining stories that are dramatic, surprising and moving. Funders want stories that offer evidence of impact and return on investment.

This story or story series is for _____

They want to hear or read stories that will help them _____

2 Identify your purpose and plan.

When you're striving to engage and inspire others – the basis of stories – you must be clear on your purpose. As Simon Sinek has instructed us, start with your why. Even before you start working on your story, be clear on why your organization exists. All stories should support your why. Then you can start delving into the plan for your story.

What is your organizational why?

What is your story goal?

What is your main message?

How will you use this story?

How will you measure the success of your story?

What are you asking for with your story?

3 Identify a compelling character.

The most compelling stories have a single character: a client, donor, volunteer, founder, staff member, board director or other stakeholder affected by your organization.

The key is to select one to feature in any given story. Even with photography, humans tend to respond more positively to a portrait of one person than a group.

The organization is rarely the hero or main character.

The strongest characters share some common characteristics. Which ones does your character possess?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> He is flawed. | <input type="radio"/> She is forced into action. |
| <input type="radio"/> He is filled with doubt. | <input type="radio"/> He changes. |
| <input type="radio"/> She seeks a guide. | <input type="radio"/> She experiences pain. |

4

Ask the right questions.

Stories should speak to the heart and soul of transformation. When you're interviewing your character, dig deep to understand how he or she is feeling. Some questions to consider:

- What problem were you experiencing when you contacted us?
- How did this problem make you feel?
- Why did you trust us to solve your problem?
- How did our staff show that we understood your problem?
- Did you experience any issues along the way? If so, how did we resolve them?
- Is life better since you started working with us?

5

Incorporate universal themes.

What larger issue is your hero tackling? Members of your audience might have no experience with hunger or homelessness. But they've experienced universal needs and can understand the common struggles of others.

A universal theme is an idea that applies to anyone regardless of cultural differences or geographic location. Universal themes connect on topics such as coming of age, coping with tragedy, persevering against the odds and losing freedom.

What emotional or philosophical needs does your character face?

What universal theme could be woven into your story?

6 Detail the journey.

Stories should chronicle an experience, a journey or a transformation. Provide context at the beginning to help audience members relate the story to their perspectives and worldviews. Context often leads to connection as your audience understands common ground.

Briefly outline your story:

Beginning, provide enough context:

Middle, include internal and external conflict encountered:

End, describe resolution reached:

Main point you want to reiterate:

7 Clarify the call to action.

What do you want your audience to do after hearing your story?

- Share your story on social media
- Become a brand champion
- Donate money
- Volunteer time
- Attend an event
- Other: _____

8

Recycle and repeat.

Remember. Your brand is far more than just a name, a logo, or a tagline. It's the stories people share about you.

Sources of inspiration:

Shawn Callahan: "Putting Stories to Work: Mastering Business Storytelling"

Donald Miller: "Building a StoryBrand: Clarify Your Message So Customers Will Listen"

Simon Sinek: "Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action"