

Impact techniques

VIDEO SCRIPT

Mark

They say if you can tell a good story, you can learn to give a good presentation. And it's certainly true that some of the best presenters are master storytellers. Stories are the ultimate pull-strategy. Whilst rhetorical techniques help you *push* your message out to the *audience*, stories *pull* the audience towards *you*. Stories will often achieve what cold facts and figures can't. They bring facts to life in a context everyone can grasp. Stories don't *tell*. Stories *demonstrate*.

So before you go filling another slide with a ton of supporting data, think about whether a good story could support you better. But what are the qualities of a good story? Watch a management consultant address a small group of family business owners ...

Presenter

Now, you don't need me to tell you that it's not easy running a family business. In fact, sometimes it's impossible to see where the family ends and the business begins. Has anyone here heard of Stew Leonard? ... Stew Leonard was the founder and CEO of a huge family-owned chain of dairy stores in the US. Apparently he liked his children to start work at the bottom of the company and work their way up. Well now, it seems that one day the supervisor of one of the stores reported that Stew's son wasn't doing a good job. 'I'm really sorry, Mr Leonard,' the supervisor says, 'but your boy's just not up to it.' Stew pauses for a moment and says 'I see. Thanks for letting me know. Don't worry, I'll sort this out.' He invites his son that evening for a beer, and as they relax in the enormous family Jacuzzi at the back of the house, Stew puts on a hat he calls his 'boss hat', turns to his son and says 'Leonard, you're fired!'

Now, as you can imagine, his son looks at him in disbelief, too shocked to even speak. Stew then puts on another hat, which he calls his 'father hat', and he says 'Son, I am really sorry to hear that you've lost your job. Now, is there anything I can do to help?'

Mark

Now, what made that story work? Well, first of all, it was relevant. It tapped into an experience many in the presenter's audience will share. Secondly, the speaker used a number of classic storytelling techniques. Did you notice that she switched from the past simple to the present simple mid-story? The present simple makes us feel almost like we've travelled back in time to watch the story as it happens.

She also used quite a bit of dialogue. This gives what's said an immediacy reported speech cannot capture. There was reference throughout to the audience and their own family businesses and the speaker used her voice and gestures to vividly recreate the scene.

The story was also true – or, at least, supposed to be! True stories hold an audience's attention better than fictional ones and, of course, the best are always your own. Watch this presenter relate a personal anecdote ...

Presenter

I thought I'd met just about every kind of teacher, from ex-athlete to ex-coal miner, until [a] couple of years ago I [have] met this very distinguished-looking Polish-American lady, who attended my seminars, so I asked her the usual question: 'How long have you been in teaching?' 'Oh,' she said, 'I've just started to teach. It was [a] lifelong ambition of mine.' 'Really?' I said. 'So what did you do before?' 'Well,' she said, 'for about twenty years I was a judge.' I said, 'My goodness! Like in the law courts?' She said, 'Well, yes – that's where the judges *are*.'

I said, 'What an amazing career! And now you're a teacher.' But I must have said it in the way that teaching was a step *down* from her previous success, because she said something I'll never forget. She said, 'Oh, Natalia, didn't you know that teaching is the *noblest* profession?' And this woman's true passion for teaching is what partly made me write this software I was talking about today. I don't know if teaching is the *noblest* profession. Probably medicine is. Doctors save lives. We don't. But we do *change* them. Thank you very much.

Mark

A great story there – both moving and amusing. And highly persuasive. Always remember, people may resist the most persuasive rhetoric; but no one can resist the power of a good story well told.