

The Biggest Secret Behind a Speaker's Success



Storytelling is a crucial ingredient for a speaker and a vital component in their speaker's toolbox, and yes sometimes that story may need to be a personal one. The story may be about that person's business struggles, their failures, and how they turned something from disaster into something amazing. It might be about their big WHY, perhaps having come through some personal trauma or being motivated by having a partner suddenly totally dependent on them financially. It might be about huge and painful personal loss and grief, illness or debt. The massive risks they might have taken to realise their business dreams. There are so many possibilities and every story is totally different and unique to each speaker. Sometimes it takes a little digging to unearth. It can take time and the invocation of the wordsmith inside of us to form it into a coherent and effective whole worth delivering. The result will be well worth the effort, blood, sweat and tears involved.

So why is storytelling so effective?

Story telling is universal in every language; we have grown up listening to stories.

We connect emotionally with a speaker who tells a story.

We start to care about the outcome.

We love some drama, some tension and some resolution.

We enjoy going on the journey with the speaker.

Why we need at least one story in every talk we give

Storytelling has a magical effect upon an audience. The magic is based in science; in biology & physiology in fact. If a speaker delivers a talk containing only data and statistics, only two parts of the listener's brain will engage. This is the reason why we often feel bored when listening to speakers talking about finance or law for example. Facts are dry and unemotive. Our brain finds it difficult to retain information and facts with no story attached. The facts and data drift past our ears like leaves blowing in the wind. Facts and data only engage two parts of the brain, the parts responsible for language and understanding.

If the same speaker were to use stories to illustrate the facts it would engage the listener in a totally different way. Storytelling actually activates seven different parts of the listener's brain. The brain physically lights up in all seven of these areas. The listener starts to 'see' and 'feel' the story. It becomes a sensory journey, involving emotions, sense of smell, taste, movement, touch and imagination. They start to place themselves in the speaker's shoes, see what they are seeing, feel what they are feeling and also start to apply the emotional effects of the story to their own lives and situations.

The important thing to remember is that whatever story you choose to tell, it needs to relate to the points you are trying to make. It is there not just to entertain but to illustrate a point, to convey depth and meaning.

Why storytelling works

Once we understand the power of storytelling it opens a whole new area for making our talks more persuasive and effective. Why it works is important to understand. It really is simple; the fact is human beings are wired to receive and absorb information this way. Whenever we hear a story, it naturally follows we will try to relate that story to one of our own personal existing experiences. That is why as speakers we can use metaphors so well. We listen and we start to search for a similar experience in our brain, to identify with the story. There is a part of our brain called *insula* which starts to activate. The insula in our brain helps us to connect with that same experience of love, pain, fear, joy or disgust. Who knew all of this could be going on? It happens automatically. As I said earlier, storytelling weaves a magic. It syncs both the brain of the speaker with each and every brain of each member of the audience. You will often notice the hush and stillness fall over an entire audience as they become more and more engrossed in a speaker's story.

The art of storytelling for a speaker lies in crafting the story and delivering it with integrity, authenticity and by allowing themselves to be vulnerable. A speaker who emotively and skilfully uses storytelling will always be remembered long after their talk is over.

Never give a talk without telling a story!