

Are You Telling Powerful Stories?

By Dena Reynolds, M.S.

A story can inspire, engage and motivate! We all love stories and grew up enthralled with fairy tales, sharing campfire stories and adoring Disney and Pixar movies. A story is your most important communication tool because it can move people to action. It's the secret weapon that can inspire a donor to give, engage a new volunteer, intrigue a journalist or motivate your staff to embrace a new initiative.

You only need three to five stories each year to help strengthen your nonprofit organization's communications work. Most organizations have dozens, if not hundreds, of stories waiting to be told – stories of clients who have a new lease on life, stories of volunteers who love your organization, and stories of passionate staff members who are improving your community.

It's important to identify your best stories – the most powerful ones – and to spend time writing the story. Before you can share your story, you need to write, edit and rewrite the story until it is compelling. Solicit feedback on drafts of your story and be sure to have people outside your organization offer constructive advice for your story. A well-written, powerful story will showcase your organization's impact. Your goal is for readers to remember your story and retell it many times.

Here are five tips to create a powerful story for your nonprofit organization:

1. Write your story about a person.

Your story needs to focus on a person, not on your organization. The public cares about the people your organization helps. Center your story around one main character, whether it's a client, volunteer, board member, donor or staff member.

2. Make me care.

Share the hardships and struggles of the main character. Show me what I have in common with the person. We are drawn into stories when we experience similarities between ourselves and others.

3. Use details to make it real.

Include as many details as you can. What was the person wearing? What is his personality? What city did we meet her in? What month is it? Does the person have children? What ages?

4. Start the story before your organization became involved.

You have to tell the back-story of the main character so we realize why your organization was needed. What was life like before your nonprofit organization entered the picture?

5. Create a journey.

All powerful stories have a plot. You need conflict and obstacles to keep your story interesting. Write about an inspiring experience or a difficult incident, describe the barriers and celebrate the accomplishment or lessons learned.

To learn more about writing and sharing stories, register for [Telling Your Nonprofit's Story](#). It will be held at the Academy for Nonprofit Excellence on April 26, 2018.