

Motivate by Storytelling

By Aisha Zafar

A few years ago, a friend was diagnosed with an inflammatory disease. She decided to take the matter into her own hands and changed her lifestyle completely. She added many natural foods into her diet and removed processed food and sugar. In a year, her inflammation was completely gone. Doctors were amazed by the results.

**Have I caught your attention?
Are you motivated to read more stories?
Here is another one.**

This wasn't the first time I was tasked to redevelop a training course. Although I had employed various interactive teaching and learning methodologies such as gaming, debates and discussions to improve courses and programs, I knew this course needed something different. As I was in the midst of the research phase, I participated in an in-house training on team-building with **Mohawk College Enterprise**. The training mimicked a simulation that is usually done in medical settings. The classroom was designed to be a manufacturing facility and each of us were given a role to create a tangible product together. We collaborated, discussed and worked together to create a product that exceeded the client's expectations. The workshop was one of the best trainings I have participated in, in years; it was practical and creative. Then, I had an a-ha moment; I knew this creative learning methodology, a face-to-face simulation would be the best tool to incorporate in the training module I was assigned.

The stories although differ in their context, share the world of storytelling that has been a part of my work for the past couple of years. I have used such stories to make connections and motivate others to act whether it was to change their behaviour, try a training product or learn something new. It works every time! Let's explore this revolutionary pedagogy further.

What is Storytelling?

It is the art of telling contextual stories with a definitive purpose and perspective. Unlike the popular notion, storytelling is not about long, overwhelming information



with a beginning, middle and ending. Stories can be as short as a few sentences. Although there is no hard and fast rule, the majority of research is conclusive on the importance of identifying a conflict/problem and a sharing a resolution or a change in the story.

Why Should I Storytell?

Stories evoke emotions and build human connections. Retention rate through storytelling is much higher than other forms of communication. We remember things better when they are in the form of narratives.

If I started this article by saying ...

“If you are not feeling well, I would suggest you change your diet and add more herbs and fiber. It has helped someone I know and I am sure a change in lifestyle could work for you.”

“If you and your team are interested in building teamwork and collaboration skills, we have training that is built upon the concept of simulation. You work in a real life setting, creating a product in two rounds with lots of discussion and interaction with other team members.”

...would it have caught your eye? I am sure you did not feel the same reading these excerpts in a storyless form. You would also forget them easily.

So How Do You Storytell?

Let's do it together!

1. **Know your goal:** Write down the goal that you want to achieve. For example, in the first story, my goal was to motivate a friend to make a lifestyle change.
2. **Know your audience:** In my case, it was a friend who was diagnosed with the same inflammatory disease that the acquaintance in the story had gone through. She was taking a medication but needed to know more about the role of diet in the management of a disease.

3. Share your story!

We all have many stories to tell and that is really the main ingredient of storytelling. If you are able to align your story with the right audience and what you want that audience to do, you can tell a good story and compel people to act. However, make sure you have a touch point in your story that the listener can relate to. For example, my second story is for clients who are looking for a new training course on team



building, first touch-point, their concern is the practicality of the course and I have talked about a face-to-face simulation, second touch-point and so on. Once you have the first three steps in place, you are ready to tell a story by:

- Identifying a problem: You have to identify a problem in your story. For example, in my first story, I faced a challenge of re-designing a very unique module.
- Finding a solution: Make sure the story reaches a conclusion that has a resolution or a situation different from what the individual was facing, as clearly seen in my stories.

As long as human interactions are part of your profession, add stories to enrich your communication and motivate others to engage and act!

As a challenge, try converting your next communication into a story.



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