

# StorySelling Tips

## Where to Find Tales to Tell

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Looking for a tale to kick off a speech, enliven a meeting, or connect with a sales prospect? You can find stories in a variety of locations. Which type of story you pick depends on your personal style and what objective you're trying to achieve.

Here are the major types of stories and some sources for each:

### 1. Myths and folktales

These are usually better suited for a formal speech, where they can be used to establish a metaphor that you refer to repeatedly. Be sure you pick a tale that works for your telling style — for example, if you're uncomfortable doing character voices, don't pick a story that relies on that.

#### Some sources:

*Three Minute Tales* by Margaret Read MacDonald

*Nasrudin* by Idries Shah

*Favorite Folktales from Around the World*, edited by Jane Yolen

Tim Sheppard's Storytelling Resources for Storytellers (website):

<http://www.timsheppard.co.uk/story/tellinglinks.html#How%20to%20Tell%20Stories>

National Storytelling Network's Resources Page (website):

<http://www.storynet.org/Resources/LinksList/index.html>

### 2. OPS (Other People's Stories)

OPS are particularly effective in small groups, where they can be used to convey a point in a non-confrontational way. Keep your ears and eyes open, and you'll find these stories all around you – on the radio, in casual conversation, on-line, or in print. (The *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series is an excellent source for inspirational OPS.)

Aside from doing a Google search for “stories about integrity” or some such, you can also poll your friends and coworkers for anecdotes on your topic.

#### Ask them:

Do you remember a time when the issue of \_\_\_ came up?

Was there a time at work when you had to make a difficult choice?

Can you recall a time when you faced a challenge and prevailed?

Tell me about a breakthrough experience you've had?

What's the best customer service story you've ever heard?

### **3. Your life**

By far the richest source of anecdotes and stories for all occasions is your own life. Here's where you'll find the "Why Am I Here Today/Who Am I" story that's so effective for introducing yourself to a group. This is also an appropriate source for "Values" stories that convey a belief you're trying to communicate to the group.

For example, if I wanted to tell a story that touched on honesty, I might tell about the time I shoplifted some bubblegum, my dad caught me, and I had what they call a "learning experience."

You can mine the rich vein of your life's stories in a couple of ways:

- **Mind mapping:**

On a big sheet of paper, write the chief characteristic of the story you're trying to elicit, say "risk-taking." Circle it, and draw many lines radiating from the circle, like the rays of the sun. As fast as possible, write words or phrases along those lines – the first things that come to mind. Often, stories are connected with the words you free-associate.

- **Ask yourself questions:**

When in my life was I scared/happy/surprised/etc.? Often, good stories have a strong emotion attached to them.

When was I faced with a difficult choice, and what did I learn from that?

What peak or breakthrough experiences have I had in my life?

Also, you can create a timeline of your life, broken into 10-year chunks. For each period, see if you can recall a handful of peak experiences relating to different aspects of your life – family, work, play, spirituality, learning. Some of the stories may not have a point, but you may unearth a few gems.

### **Before you tell the story...**

Finally, no matter where you find potential stories, run them through the relevance test before you take the time to learn them. Ask yourself:

Does this story support the point I'm trying to make?

Does it have a strong emotion?

Does it have a clearly identifiable protagonist with a problem?

Is it appropriate for my audience?

**Bruce Hale** is a Master Storyteller and author. Find out more about how to develop your strategic storytelling from his website at:

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