

# BUSINESS STORYTELLING FOR LEADERS

**A to Z of Engaging with Stakeholders**



DR. SUNDARARAMAN  
CHINTAMANI



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Stakeholders**

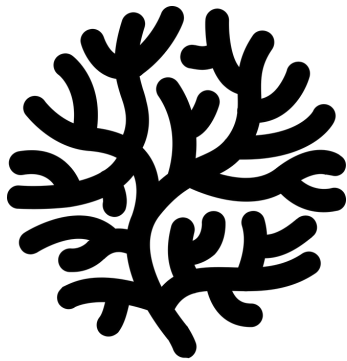
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**"Stories are the most powerful communication tool we have. They hold the ability to transport, transform and transcend, leaving an indelible mark on the human heart and mind."**

**- Carmine Gallo,**

## **Preface**

In today's fast-paced business world, leaders need to be able to communicate their ideas effectively and in a way that resonates with their audience. Business storytelling is a powerful tool that leaders can use to achieve this. By using stories to illustrate key concepts, leaders can capture the attention of their audience, convey complex ideas in a simple and memorable way, and inspire action.

This book is designed to help leaders develop and enhance their storytelling skills. It provides a practical guide to crafting compelling business stories, structuring them for maximum impact, and delivering them with confidence. Drawing on real-world examples from the world of business, the book offers a range of techniques and strategies that leaders can use to become more effective communicators.

Whether you are a CEO looking to inspire your team, a manager seeking to motivate your employees, or a salesperson trying to win over a client, the power of business storytelling can help you achieve your goals.

It's important to note that this mini ebook is an abridged version of my physical book, focusing on essential insights and practical advice to support your journey towards becoming a more effective communicator and leader.

## **Why Business Storytelling Today?**

During my tenure in the IT industry, I observed a marked inability on the part of leaders to forge meaningful connections with their team members, leading to delayed project completion and struggling sales. It appears that the industry's infatuation with quantitative measures like graphs and charts has overshadowed the importance of interpersonal relationships. Surprisingly, my former colleagues from the traditional oil and gas sector echoed similar sentiments, indicating that this is a widespread issue transcending industry boundaries.

Nowadays, many people have a hard time paying attention for very long. This can make it tough to get the attention of the people you need to work with. To connect with them, you need to take action and find ways to engage with them. I think that telling stories can be a great way to do this and build better relationships.

## **What Made You to Think That Business Storytelling is the Answer?**

Some of you may know that I have been a member of Toastmasters for the past 15 years. Every month, I am required to give a speech with specific goals and a different style. For example, it could be a technical presentation, an entertaining speech, a persuasive speech or an inspiring speech.

During every Toastmasters meeting 2-3 members give prepared speeches and at the end, the audience votes for the best speaker. I have realized that whenever I use storytelling in my speeches, I usually win the “best speaker ribbon.” This made me curious, so I decided to research more about storytelling. I attended some workshops on business storytelling, but I found it hard to understand and apply the lessons to my work. That’s why I looked deeper into the subject and discovered that there are different types of storytelling, like personal, motivational and business. After studying more, I was able to create a framework for using business storytelling effectively.

## **How is Business Storytelling Different From Other Genre?**

- Personal stories are meant to entertain, motivate and inspire. Business stories have a broader purpose of promoting the organization or its products and values.
- General stories can be made up or based on real events. Business stories must be true and original.
- Personal stories are centered around the speaker and their family and friends. Business stories focus on customers, team members and management.
- Personal stories are often shared in casual settings like parties and family gatherings, while business stories are shared in professional settings like sales meetings and product launches.

- Personal storytelling relies more on the way the story is told, such as body language and voice, while business storytelling places more emphasis on the content of the story.
- Personal storytelling evokes emotions, while business storytelling is based more on data and logic.

## **When, Where and Whom to Tell Business Stories?**

Let's start by understanding some basic things before we figure out how business storytelling can be used in the corporate world. Whenever someone speaks or presents in front of a group of people, they have a purpose in mind. This purpose can be to educate, entertain, motivate, inspire or persuade the audience. In the corporate world, most of the time the purpose is to educate or persuade. For example, a project manager may persuade their team members to complete certain tasks on time. Middle managers may make presentations to top management to allocate a budget for certain new initiatives. A solutions team may conduct a webinar to the sales team to explain the features of the new solution, hoping they will sell it. The sales team may give a presentation to potential customers to close a sale.



In all of these situations, the main goal is to convince or persuade people to do something. However, people can only be convinced if they are engaged and interested. In today's world where people have short attention spans, storytelling is a great way to grab their attention and persuade them. Business storytelling can be used in various scenarios such as team meetings, presentations, sales pitches and proposal defenses. The key is to tell the story in a way that doesn't make the audience feel like they are being sold something. Don't tell the audience that you are going to tell them a business story upfront, just make it subtle.

## **How to do Business Storytelling?**

Telling stories is a skill that can be learned if you put in the effort and stay committed to it. There are many ways to learn this skill and I will share my approach with you. It may not be the best way, but I have developed a structure for it. First, let's look at the topics that are commonly discussed in business meetings and presentations. What are the main things people should remember after these meetings?

There are many themes that are commonly used in corporate meetings and presentations, such as success stories, problem solving, teamwork and innovation. You may have experienced or heard about incidents related to these themes in the past. Try to remember such incidents, even if you were not directly involved in them.

I have created a template in a spreadsheet that can help you organize your business stories. On the horizontal axis (X axis), you can list down incidents or stories that you have experienced or heard. On the vertical axis (Y axis), you can list down corporate values such as accountability, agility and creativity. For each story, mark a tick against the corresponding corporate value that it represents. Some stories may have more than one message. You can call this spreadsheet the story file or Business Storytelling Matrix and it can include not only your own stories but also popular corporate stories. This seems to be simple. Is that all? Or do we have more elements in the spreadsheet\* ?

You're right, we can add more details to the matrix and make it more valuable. For each incident, we can add information like the place, person and date to make the story more authentic. Keeping the story file updated is important because it helps to build a repository of business stories. One story can have multiple takeaways and vice versa. So, having multiple stories for a single message is beneficial. You can even elaborate on each story and create a document, which can be used as a reference when giving a speech. I hope this gives you an idea of how to approach business storytelling.

## **A to Z of Business Storytelling**

In this section, we explore 6 key aspects of business storytelling. For a comprehensive look at all 25 aspects, please refer to the physical copy or the Kindle version of the book.



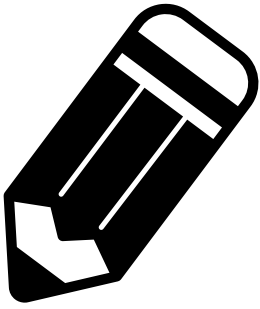
# **AUTHENTICITY**

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Most people understand the importance of storytelling and how it has been used to connect with others for a long time. However, business storytelling is different from general storytelling, like sharing folktales, fables or personal stories. Corporate audiences may not connect with these types of stories, as they might be fabricated or manipulated. They might even get irritated by overused motivational stories like “boy throwing starfish in the sea,” “donkey in the well,” or “little boy and the color balloons” because they have heard them many times before.. When it comes to business storytelling, the stories shared by the speaker should be real and based on actual events that took place in the corporate world. If the stories are made up, the audience may not relate to them and find it difficult to connect with their own work problems. Authenticity is important for effective business storytelling. The stories should revolve around incidents and experiences that happened in the enterprise world. The audience may even verify the story online to ensure its authenticity.. To make business stories authentic, leaders may find it challenging to come up with a story on the spot.

## Exercises

- **Corporate Story Collection:** Look for interesting stories from the corporate world, such as those from GE, Apple, Walmart, Google, Exxon, ONGC, BHEL, and Indian Railways.
- **Reflective Storytelling:** Reflect on your own corporate experiences and find interesting anecdotes to share.
- **Organized Story Bank:** Organize the stories based on different aspects of corporate traits, such as Customer Centricity, Team Building, Delegation, Decision Making, and Time Management. A single story may fit into multiple categories.
- **Story Selection for Meetings:** Before a business meeting, choose a story from your collection that fits the occasion.



## **BREVITY**

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If you tell a story in fewer words, it becomes more powerful and easier to remember. As a leader, if you want people to remember your message and act on it, always keep it brief. This is because being concise is very important and helps you get your point across effectively.

In organizations, a leader may come across different types of meetings with the stakeholders. Some of them are:

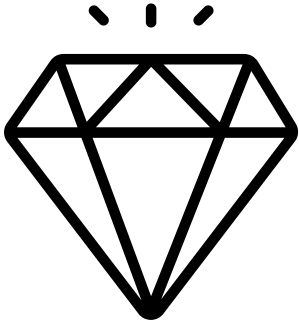
- Customer meetings
- Team meetings
- Review meetings
- Town-hall meetings

All these meetings have a plan and goals to achieve. The time for meetings is decided beforehand. Sometimes leaders might want to tell a story during the meeting, but they need to be careful about taking too much time. If they talk for too long, it might not achieve the purpose and might be bad for the meeting. So, all leaders, including CEOs, Heads of Department, Program Managers or Project Managers, should stick to the given time.

In business storytelling, it's important to be brief. Brevity means keeping things short and to the point. This is more important in business storytelling than in personal or motivational storytelling. How can someone get better at being brief in business storytelling? Here are some tips:-

## **Exercises**

- **Story Selection:** Look through your collection of stories and choose the best one for the situation.
- **Drafting:** Write the story down in your own words, either on paper or a computer.
- **Editing for Brevity:** After completing the initial draft, edit the story by removing unnecessary paragraphs, sentences, words, descriptions and dialogues to make it shorter.
- **Practicing Precision:** Learning to condense and expand a story is a valuable skill. Those who were good at summarizing in school may find this easier, but anyone can improve by practicing précis writing.



## **CLARITY**

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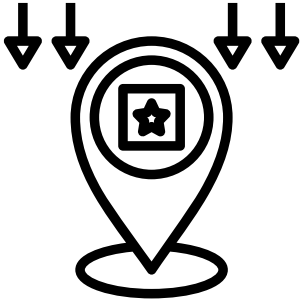
Clarity is the cornerstone of effective communication in business storytelling. Without clarity, even the most compelling story can become muddled and lose its impact. Using straightforward and unambiguous language ensures your message is conveyed accurately, preventing misunderstandings and keeping your audience engaged. A clear story maintains focus on a central theme, allowing your audience to easily follow along and grasp the key points. Organizing your story with a logical structure—a clear beginning, middle, and end—further enhances comprehension and retention.

Achieving clarity involves knowing your audience and tailoring your language and examples to their level of understanding. Outlining your story before you start helps maintain a logical flow and ensures no critical elements are overlooked. Visual aids, such as diagrams and charts, can simplify complex points and make your narrative more engaging. Brevity also contributes to clarity by removing unnecessary details that don't add value to your main message. Sharing your story with a small, trusted group for feedback can provide valuable insights for refinement. By focusing on these strategies, you can ensure your stories are clear, compelling, and impactful.



## Exercises

- **Clarity Check:** Write a short business story and then revise it to remove any ambiguous terms or unnecessary details.
- **Peer Review:** Pair up with a colleague to review each other's stories for clarity and provide constructive feedback on how to improve.
- **Visualization:** Create a visual aid for a complex part of your story to see how it helps in making the point clearer.



## **SPECIFICITY**

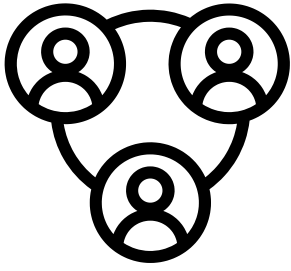
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In organizational settings, responses to questions or ideas often lack specificity, hindering effective action. Generic statements like “We need to increase productivity by any means necessary” or “We will finish this project phase as quickly as possible and provide a response once it’s complete” may sound agreeable but fail to provide clear direction, termed "motherhood statements." They do not offer the specific guidance needed for tangible progress. Leaders who grasp the power of specificity in storytelling can effectively engage their audience and inspire decisive action.

Consider the difference between a generic story and a detailed narrative about a punctual coworker. A generic story might mention a coworker who arrives early each day, whereas a detailed narrative includes specifics like the coworker’s name (Mathew), location (Kochi), and precise behaviors (arriving at work by 8:30 a.m. daily without fail). These details make the story relatable, allowing the audience to connect personally and ensuring clarity and memorability crucial in business settings where precise communication shapes decision-making and outcomes.

## Exercises

- **Detailed Story Development:** Choose a story relevant to your business context. Incorporate specific names, locations, dates, and actions to make the narrative vivid and relatable.
- **Character Visualization:** Describe characters with names, roles, habits, and unique traits to create a vivid and memorable image for your audience.
- **Contextual Integration:** Integrate specific details about settings, time periods and relevant background information to ground your stories in realistic scenarios.
- **Precision Practice:** Transform a generic story by adding specific details, then compare its impact on engagement and clarity with the original version. This exercise will demonstrate the effectiveness of specificity in enhancing the effectiveness of your storytelling.



# RELATABILITY

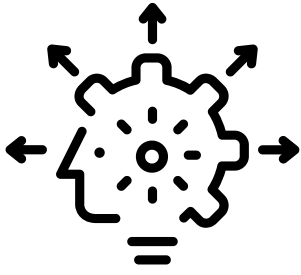
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Relatability is a cornerstone of effective business storytelling, enabling narratives to resonate deeply with audiences across diverse roles and backgrounds. When stories mirror the experiences, challenges and aspirations of listeners, they create a powerful connection that enhances engagement and understanding. This connection is achieved by incorporating elements such as common industry issues, personal growth journeys, or universal human emotions like perseverance and triumph. By making stories relatable, storytellers can effectively convey their messages and inspire action among their audience.

Crafting relatable business stories involves understanding the demographics, roles and interests of your audience. By identifying shared themes or challenges, storytellers can create narratives that resonate on a personal level. This approach not only captures attention but also builds trust and credibility as audiences see their own experiences reflected in the stories presented. Effective use of relatability in business storytelling can align stakeholders, foster collaboration and drive positive outcomes within organizations.

## Exercises

- **Audience Persona Creation:** Develop detailed personas representing different segments of your audience, including demographics, job roles, challenges and aspirations.
- **Empathy Mapping:** Create empathy maps to visualize and understand the emotions, needs and experiences of your audience segments. This helps in identifying common ground and points of empathy in your storytelling.
- **Story Framing:** Frame narratives around common industry challenges, personal growth journeys, or universal human emotions such as resilience and achievement. Use real-life examples and anecdotes that resonate with your audience's experiences.
- **Feedback and Iteration:** Gather feedback from your audience on the relatability of your stories. Use this input to refine and adjust narratives to better align with audience expectations and perspectives.
- **Collaborative Storytelling Workshops:** Conduct workshops where team members share their own stories and experiences related to business challenges. Encourage participants to find commonalities and craft narratives that reflect shared experiences.



## **VERSATILITY**

Versatility is a key attribute of effective business storytelling, enabling narratives to adapt to various audiences, contexts and objectives. A versatile storyteller can tailor their approach based on the specific needs of stakeholders, whether they are executives making strategic decisions, team members seeking inspiration or customers engaging with a brand. This flexibility allows stories to resonate across different platforms and mediums, from boardroom presentations to social media campaigns, ensuring consistent and compelling messaging that aligns with organizational goals.

In practice, versatile storytelling involves mastering different narrative techniques and formats. Adaptable storytelling includes concise elevator pitches that quickly capture attention. It also incorporates detailed case studies that provide thorough analysis and evidence, effectively meeting diverse communication needs. Versatility also extends to adapting stories to different cultural contexts and industry-specific nuances, ensuring relevance and resonance with global audiences. By embracing versatility, businesses can effectively navigate change, respond to challenges, and seize opportunities through impactful storytelling strategies.

## Exercises

- **Contextual Story Adaption:** Practice adapting the same story for different business contexts such as crisis management, change management and market expansion, highlighting the specific aspects relevant to each scenario.
- **Medium-Specific Storytelling:** Develop skills to tailor your storytelling for different platforms. Create narratives suitable for boardroom presentations, social media posts and detailed blog articles, ensuring the core message remains consistent but appropriately formatted for each medium.
- **Cultural Sensitivity Training:** Engage in exercises that involve writing and sharing stories adapted for diverse cultural audiences. This includes understanding cultural values and nuances to make the story resonate globally.
- **Narrative Technique Variety:** Experiment with various storytelling techniques by creating elevator pitches, detailed case studies and personal customer testimonials from the same core business narrative to suit different audience needs and communication goals.

## About the Author

Dr. Sundararaman Chintamani is a techno-domain consultant with over 40 years of experience across diverse industries. He has expertise in the petroleum refinery sector and the knowledge industry, offering training on oil and gas, digital transformation, business storytelling, design thinking, mind mapping, creativity, presentation skills, and public speaking. As a Toastmaster for 15 years, he excels in public speaking and differentiates business storytelling from other genres.

Dr. Sundar has held leadership roles in non-profit organizations such as Toastmasters, the Indian Institution of Plant Engineers, and the Professional Speakers Association of India, where he introduced systematic and innovative approaches. A design thinking evangelist and mind mapping practitioner, he brings clarity and customer-focused perspectives to his work. Passionate about unleashing creativity, he continuously inspires others through his expertise and innovative ideas. Learn more about him at [sundarspeaks.com](http://sundarspeaks.com) or contact him at [sundar@sundarspeaks.com](mailto:sundar@sundarspeaks.com).



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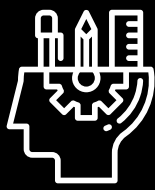
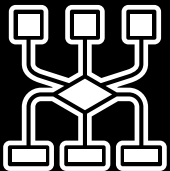
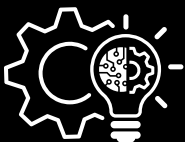
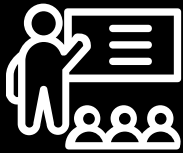

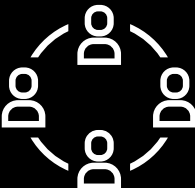


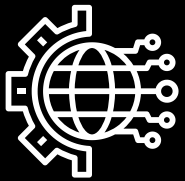

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