



Story Workbook

**Building Your Story Competency &
Mining Your Narrative Assets**

i.d.e.a.s.TM

Rick Stone
StoryAnalytics Master

**Designed For
Aligning Forces for Quality**

© 2012 IDEAS

Objectives

In this program guided by storytelling experts from IDEAS—The Innovation Studio, you and your alliance team will learn how to:

- **Articulate** and craft stories that can improve your alliance's ability to build advocacy and support from key funders and community partners
- **Identify** how to match stories to the interests and needs of these key audiences to better communicate your objectives and achievements
- **Construct** a library of these stories to ensure that you always have the right story for the right audience
- **Refine** your stories so that when you depart from the AF4Q National Meeting you will have developed first drafts of stories that can be finalized upon return to your community

The program will be highly interactive; be prepared to roll up your sleeves to create powerful stories that can improve your ability to communicate the mission, vision, and value of your work.

Program Guide

Story Basics: Rick Stone and Shirley Decker

Learning Story Basics: From Facts and Figures to Narratives that are Powerful Persuaders

Story Clinic Part 1

Creating a Good Story.....3

Story Clinic Part 2

Telling a Story.....10

Story Clinic Part 3

Understanding Your Audiences and How to Align Stories to Their Needs and Interests.....12

Story Presentations and Feedback.....15

Resources

A Guide to Developing Powerful Innovation Stories.....16

There will be breaks, time for questions, and surprises!

Story Clinic Part 1: Creating a Good Story

How to Create a Good Story

There are many things to consider when taking a raw experience and turning it into a powerful story that can be told and shared with others. First, decide how to transport your audience to a different world, with different values, in a different place. For example, “When I was a boy, my father and I set out on a trip across the country in our old Model T Ford” Or, “When I worked in the Sarasota office, there was another technician named Jeb Smith. I never met anyone more committed to getting the job done right. In fact, once he”

It’s also important to establish the place of the story and the personalities involved. And what’s the mood of the story, e.g., distant, intimate, humorous, wishful, fanciful, suspenseful, etc? Also, to turn good anecdotes into stories that can galvanize people to action and support requires that you convey events through conversations and actions rather than straight narration. Here are a few suggestions:

1. **Start with a dramatic opening** or an heroic deed. Few listeners can resist a story with a good beginning.
2. The best teaching stories are usually true. **Verify your facts.**
3. Expand on the anecdote and develop it into an extended story. But keep it succinct and short, something you could tell in two or three minutes.
4. Try to have your story **illustrate one theme or idea.**
5. Have your **story unfold according to events**, not explanations descriptions or summations.

STORY WORKBOOK

6. **Keep plot details simple and easy to remember.**
7. Remember that a **character is best revealed through his or her actions**. Also, use real names.
8. Remember that the story itself is the important thing—**let events speak for themselves**.
9. Give the anecdote **an ending that satisfies** the listener's sense of justice. Give it a **good title**.
10. **Project the image like a film in your imagination.**
11. **Share the story with a friend or colleague** and evaluate what worked and why. What didn't work? Why?
12. **Refine the story** based on these evaluations.

The Story's Predicament is the Material for a Good Story

A story has a precipitating event, a conflict, a resolution of conflict, and a point. But what precipitating event? Which conflict, and how to resolve it? And what is the point? Whatever form the story takes, it must be imbued with the life you or the story's contributors know, the life that has moved you or them to this point, or it most assuredly will not move the reader. You don't need to fabricate drama. Every life has drama; the gift you can bring to the story is to discern this drama and expand, accentuate, and articulate it in an edifying way.

Conflict: An Essential Ingredient

A story needs a through-line that's anchored in a central conflict or predicament. This conflict should build, as opposed to being random or episodic. Someone offered this formula for plot structure: Get a hero. Get the hero up a tree. Throw rocks at the hero. Throw bigger rocks at the hero. Get the hero out of the tree. The resolution of the conflict (hero comes out of tree) gives the story a climax.

STORY WORKBOOK

Without a through-line, a story wanders aimlessly, somewhere between the living and the dead. Without conflict that builds, the emotional impact is as flat as last year's seltzer. Come from somewhere. Go somewhere. Make a lot of trouble along the way.

At the Heart of Things: The Universal in the Particular

The art of developing or writing a story is a matter of vision—specifically, the ability to recognize the universal in the particular. Imagine being almost run over by an ambulance that came tearing down the country road. The ambulance could represent, in a sense, the double-edged sword of technology. How ironic it is that the very things that we depend on to save us may end up killing us. Can you see how this “point” goes even beyond the context of technology, to a farther reaching import. This is a good example of the universal in the particular.

A good story beats with its own life; it has heart, rhythm. You find this rhythm by looking honestly and willingly at the here and now, and reporting what you see with as little judgment or censorship as possible. Forget all the lofty and “important” ideas and words. In this sense, all good writing is journalism, even if it takes the form of poetry, fiction, an essay, a screenplay, or a children's book. The life you or someone else really lives moves through what you write or tell, which is why it can move your readers, leaving them glad that they read what you wrote. Listen for this heartbeat while you're writing, and keep true to its simple rhythm, always moving forward, on to the next beat.

STORY WORKBOOK

The Story is Contained in the Details

Forget about grand ideas. Don't give me profound; give me valuable detail.

Focus on the nervous tapping of father's fingers of the registration desk. Or the way a patient grimaced at you when you conveyed news a certain way. Or the fear of waiting for test results from the lab and being put on hold for three minutes. Once you're on track with the details, the particulars of experience, see if you can arrange them to capture something universal.

The framing of the valuable particulars so as to convey the universal is the art of writing. Valuable detail is the key, as distinct from meaningless trivialities that don't contribute to the general sense of direction and purpose of the piece.

The Story's Structure

Every story has a premise. A good story also has a beginning, a middle, and an end.

The Beginning: or the Precipitating Event: Something happens to launch the series of events that unfold in the forward motion of the story (plot). This event should be identified early in the piece. In a short story, usually the first few paragraphs establish the precipitating event or situation, sometimes the first few lines. It can be subtle, a precipitating psychological shift, or more obvious, triggering some external change. This is called the "beginning."

The Middle: or Character Arc: The Precipitating Event sets into motion a chain of causes and effects that carry the protagonist seamlessly through some significant change or changes. This is called the "middle." In this sense, the main character is a living map of the plot, the medium in which the story is humanly

STORY WORKBOOK

impressed. If a character does not “arc,” does not go through some important change, the story is likely to leave the reader flat.

The End: or Resolution: Resolution does not mean that everything gets wrapped up neatly in a forced conclusion that leaves the reader without questions or wonder. For AF4Q a “resolution” is often an outcome or an impact. Resolution does mean that the vision being presented, the premise, the theme, the point, have been presented fully. Resolution will rarely be philosophically or morally conclusive, but will instead offer a dramatic conclusion. This is an important difference. While dramatic resolution brings the conflict to completion, it also may raise questions for the reader that remain unanswered by the piece. When the writer does this skillfully, she has come upon the part of the story called the “end.” It is important to recognize this and not write past it.

Plot

Don't let plot bury your story.

What Plot is Not:

- a series of essentially unrelated episodes or scenes
- fragments that create mood or stir the senses but lack focus and direction
- arbitrary conflicts—with or without resolutions—that don't serve a larger context of conflict and resolution.

STORY WORKBOOK

What Plot is:

- through line
- the story's sense of its own identity
- confident, decisive forward motion, the thread that strings the dramatic beads of the story together
- a meaning-arc that gives the reader a sense of closure and completion
- the soul of the story (words are the body)

Capturing the Reader's Attention

If it's a written story, it is essential to bring the reader into the story right away, to create a world with an emotional atmosphere and gravity that puts the reader's feet on the earth of what you have to say. Without this, he or she won't care a whit about your characters or their dilemmas. Detail, to lay a claim on the reader, has to be honest.

The story has to point somewhere and stay true to itself. This "somewhere" is a compass heading you never abandon.

Some Pointers:

Good writing is built on the power and beauty of economy. As Churchill said, "Use the shortest word that will do the job." Don't WRITE, just write. No purple prose, no neon twilights. Simplify. Experiment with underwriting. As the saying goes, "Less is more." Believe it.

Identify in a single sentence, the theme or point to your story. If you can't state it clearly in a sentence, you're not ready to start writing. The idea may change, evolve during the writing. Often your characters will redirect you. Still, have a good idea of where you want to go before pulling out of the driveway.

STORY WORKBOOK

Language is music, which means that good writing doesn't just "say," it "plays." Short, staccato sentences convey suspense. Long, winding sentences carry the reader along and draw him in gently and gradually. Experiment with the rhythms and cadences of your native tongue. Mix up sentence length. Feel the emphasis, the punctuation, the rim-shots and violin passages of a phrase. Play with this, and keep it all simple.

Story Clinic Part 2: Telling a Story

How to Learn and Tell a Story

1. **Learn the plot first.** Fix in your mind the major sequence of events.
Visualize the events, the scenes, the characters.
2. If it helps, **write out the story first, in outline or finished form.** This workbook provides all the information you need to map out the story in preparation for telling.
3. Some people find it helpful to create a storyboard of the main action in order to better learn the sequence of events. We call this “comic strip memory.”
Take two 8½ X 11 sheets of paper and using both the front and back divide each side into four squares. You’ll have sixteen total squares. In each block draw small stick figure sketches of the major scenes. In this way you will be able to see the story from beginning to end in just a glance, and you will have developed iconic or picture images in your brain that are easier to remember than verbal or scripted forms.
4. Try telling the story in rough form, using your own words, and not paying attention to details, and the smoothness of telling. Do this with a friend, colleague, or into a tape recorder. It sometimes helps to record the story verbatim on a tape player and listen to it several times before attempting to learn it. Keep your rough storyboard in front of you, and glance at it from time to time if you need help remembering where you are in the story. Ask your partner for feedback at the conclusion.

STORY WORKBOOK

5. There are no prescribed ways to tell a story. The same story can be told many different ways, all effectively. A lot depends upon your audience. I recommend that you experiment to find what is both most comfortable for you and best fits your own personal style; and, what is best received by your audience.
6. Start off at a walking pace. That way you've got room to speed up and slow down, as the story requires. Loudness, or softness of voice, can be used for emphasis at times, in addition to changing the pace or interjecting pauses, but don't overuse it.
7. After getting feedback you might want to cut out certain parts of the story and embellish other parts. A rule of thumb is to cut tedious lengthy descriptions of thoughts or emotions. Use metaphors to describe emotions instead of technical, psychological words. Those parts that your listener particularly enjoyed, stretch out. Notice which sections of the story need further development. Avoid side-trips unless they add suspense or help to paint the picture of an important character.

Story Clinic Part 3: Audience

Understanding Your Audience

Who are the key audiences that you must be aware of when creating your stories? Broadly describe three potential audiences.

Audience 1: _____

Audience 2: _____

Audience 3: _____

Matching Stories to Your Audience

Now, consider each of your audiences. It is important you match a story to best meet their profile, needs, and background, and is most likely to motivate them to support your work. If you don't have a particular story in mind, think about what kind of story this audience would want to hear. Describe who you'll need to interview and what the story would focus around. (Use the Story Synopsis section below)

Audience 1: _____

Story Synopsis:

STORY WORKBOOK

Audience 2: _____

Story Synopsis:

Audience 3: _____

Story Synopsis:

Focus on Your Audience

In the space below identify an individual from one of those audiences who could potentially be a strong supporter of your work.

- Give them a name.
- What are their key concerns?
- Why does the work of your alliance matter to them?
- What is it about a specific story that you might tell that would resonate with their story and background?
- What action do you want this audience to take?

Write 2 to 3 paragraphs. Be sure to tell us about this individual and helps us understand why they'd want to help.

Sharing and Feedback

Guidelines for Feedback:

1. **Give positive, specific feedback** about: Parts of the story you liked and the parts that you thought were very clear; and, ways the person told the story, e.g., their voice tone, use of eye contact, use of appropriate emotion, etc.
2. **Ask for clarity** on points you didn't understand. For example, "I didn't understand what happened when"
3. **Suggest** parts they might want to cut or stretch.

Resources

A Guide to Developing Powerful Innovation Stories

Inspire. Good stories allow the reader to view the world through the eyes of another, they grab readers or listeners, they *inspire*. Good stories are emotionally appealing—a key component to convey the overarching goals of any anecdote—and may help the audience remember the story enough to share it with others. Often funding decisions are determined first by emotions and second by analysis. Data and general overviews elicit analysis, and stories elicit powerful emotional involvement that invigorate.

Captivate. Why do stories work? People are captivated by stories that are easily relatable. If you can capture the essence of your innovation in the particulars and details of the lives that are ultimately impacted by those changes, your readers and listeners will sit up and take notice. This is what we refer to as “the universal in the particular.”

Frame. How do you construct a story? The following are some questions that can help guide you through your efforts. You may discover that the questions lead you to gather further narratives from stakeholders. Sit down and interview them. Dig for what it was like for them before and after the intervention. Learn what difference it has made for them. By answering these questions you will develop the building blocks to frame a story that can be crafted to truly engage key stakeholders.

STORY WORKBOOK

1. **What were the challenges or problems for the characters/stakeholders in the story before the innovation?**

Identify actual people involved, whether it's a payer, purchaser, provider, or patient. Describe their world (a typical day) before the intervention.

2. **Why was it important to the characters involved to make a change?** What would the world of these characters be like if the status quo continued?

3. **What were the interventions?** Who was involved? What did they do?

4. **How did the characters/stakeholders in the story respond at first to these initial changes?** Did they resist the change, and if so, how?

STORY WORKBOOK



64 E. Concord St.

Orlando, FL 32801

407-601-7878

rstone@ideasorlando.com

www.ideasorlando.com