



# The Leader's Guide to Corporate Storytelling

6 Story Templates to Help You Tell a Better Story

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## SECTION 1

# The Need for Stories

Stories have always been part of the human element. We all love hearing stories because we are living a story.

As an audience member, when we hear a well-told story, we place ourselves into the situation. It makes transference of information easier because we see how the data impacts us.



### Audiences Want the Story

Even when I'm sitting in a meeting with senior leaders and executives reviewing data, they're always looking for the story behind the data.

#### I've actually heard comments like these:

- What's the story here?
- What is the data trying to tell us?
- How do we build the narrative we need to share with the customer?

Leadership is about setting a future destination and then moving the team toward that vision. It's the story of their tomorrow.

#### **A leader without stories is a leader without vision.**

Here are 6 of the most popular story templates I've seen leaders use. My genuine desire is that you find success building your own visions.

*Russ Peterson Jr.*

**Russ Peterson Jr.**  
Co-Founder of iSpeak, Inc.



The most powerful  
person in the world is the  
**STORYTELLER.**

STEVE JOBS

## SECTION 2

# Are You One of the 4 Types of Speakers We Love?

You've just been promoted to a leadership position. The people on your new team are new to you and you are new to them. How can you possibly connect with this group quickly?



**This is more than a one-time struggle for all leaders.**

How can I connect with my team better? Leaders help groups achieve more over time, but that will not happen if the leader has no connection with the audience.

As a speaker, if you can build a strong connection with your audience, you'll have more leadership influence with the team.



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# Influence Through 4 Storyteller Types

John C. Maxwell has summarized leadership into one word...influence. Remember, influence has a noble purpose, not a self-serving purpose. The negative side of influence is called manipulation. It's purely selfish and evil. We're talking about the noble skill of leadership influence.

Influence is not about what the leader wants personally. Influence benefits the team by moving everyone to a better tomorrow... a vision. Here are four methods John C. Maxwell defines as bridges we can all use to better connect with others.



## 1. WHAT YOU KNOW

Do you remember the game show called “Who Wants to be a Millionaire?” In that trivia game show, if you didn’t know the answer, you could use a life line and phone a friend. From the show, you could tell the host who you’d like to call for help on the question. Then, they would ring up your friend so you could ask the question.

When people need advice or guidance, they call upon people who have knowledge or experience they don’t. When speaking to a team you may have advanced training and knowledge they don’t or you may have just received the information from your executives directly. Either way, your audience wants to know! When you have the information the team wants and needs, they will connect with you and seek your help.

## 2. WHAT YOU’VE DONE

Imagine if you were attending an industry conference and the breakout sessions were about to begin. There were 2 speakers speaking in different breakout rooms at the same time. You obviously can’t be in two places at once, so you’re being forced to pick just one. Choose wisely because you will never get to hear the other. Who will you pick?

The first speaker is a great speaker. Delivery is impeccable, great tone in the voice, little bit of humor, and uses the stage effectively. Not sure about the content she’s talking about, but she is guaranteed to have a great delivery.

The second speaker is not nearly as good on the stage. That’s a fact because he’s not a professional speaker. But, he’s just returned from being stranded on a desert island in the Pacific after a shipwreck. He was trapped on the island all alone for 7 weeks. He’s going to speak about his physical, mental and emotional struggles. I’m guessing 9 out of 10 of you would rather hear the Castaway speaker! Why? Because of what he’s done. When people have had struggle experiences we have not, we want to learn from them. It creates a curiosity connection.

This isn’t about bragging to others. It’s about recognizing if you have something of value you can share with others to help them move farther down the road and avoid some of the issues you’ve had to endure. Don’t think of yourself as the hero... you’re the coach. The audience gets to be the hero.



### 3. WHAT YOU CAN DO

One of our instructors once had a student in class mention he could do a back flip. Seriously! From a standing position in the classroom, he said he could do a full back flip. What do you think the next comment was from another student? You guessed it. “Do it!”

But before he did, someone else asked, “How did you learn to do that?” The student told his back story of always challenging himself. He came up with the idea to learn a back flip and committed himself to doing it. He recruited a friend to come over and spot him and after many bruises and attempts, he did it! The moral? Find your next challenge, recruit help from others, and commit to overcoming it!

When others know we are capable, they may want to leverage our skill set in the future. If you are willing and able to help others with a skill you have, they will want to connect with you. Use your skills to help others, not so you can expect something in return. Do it because it aligns with your core value for serving others. Which leads us to the 4th method of connection...

### 4. HOW YOU’VE LIVED

This is all about your values. It’s so true that words are cheap. I’m sure we’ve all experienced the pain of hearing a friend say the right things and then act in a completely different or inappropriate manner. It’s the source of the expression, “Actions speak louder than words.”

People like Mother Teresa, Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Jesus...all lived lives of sacrifice. If we had the opportunity to have a conversation with any of these people, we would want to listen! We appreciate strong core values, worthy of admiration, but even more than that... we appreciate someone who has lived out the values they preach.

Know your values and live in alignment with them. It sounds so simple.

I’m willing to admit...I’m still working on doing just that. A challenge for all of us...let’s work on better conversations, stories to convey meaning, and let’s combine it all with living out our core values. Then, let’s start building stronger connections and relationships with the ones we serve and love.

## SECTION 3

# 5 Tools the Pros Use to Tell Better Stories

I was on a video chat with Paul Slattery, iSpeak Certified Master Instructor based in Dublin, Ireland, and he told me about the sparkler and the comet. He said, “Russ, did you use any sparklers when you celebrated American Independence Day on the 4th of July?” With my two kids at college-age now, the answer was “No, but we’ve definitely used them in the past. Why do you ask?”



### The Sparkler vs. the Comet

“Sparklers are brilliant for a short time, but then they’re gone and soon forgotten. Now have you ever seen a comet?” I couldn’t see where my Irish friend was going with this, so I had to ask him another question. “Yes, I’ve seen pictures of comets but I don’t see where you’re going with all this?”



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## Comets Have a Big Impact

Paul continued, “The comet and the sparkler are both fiery and bright and both eventually fade. Comets are tremendous in size and we anticipate their arrival for years before they reach earth. Most are given names because of their significance. They travel the galaxies, they pass by earth, carry their brilliance to other parts of the universe and eventually fade from us. A sparkler is much smaller, held in your hand and also fades. But...it can be a lasting memory for a child who holds one... The stories we tell to our audiences...can be sparklers or comets but either can have a lasting impact.”



## You Don't Always Need a Story

There are other ways of engaging an audience like using a catchy quote, a startling statistic, or asking them a thought-provoking question. They'll all get the audience's attention, but they're just sparklers compared to the comet!

## How Can We Tell Better Stories?

Here are 5 tips I've learned to bring your stories to life.

### 1. HAVE A POINT

If the point is to make us laugh and that's it, then we better be at a comedy club and not a business presentation. Your audiences may enjoy a humorous story, but they value their time at work even more. If they feel like you wasted it with a story with no point, they won't be happy. How will you relate the story back to the business point you want to make?

### 2. USE DIALOGUE

This is simple to do but it has a profound effect on your audience. Instead of just telling us about the information you obtained from a character in the story, why not become the character and speak the information to us just the way you originally heard it from them? Don't be unprofessional and turn this into over acting, but you might be shocked to hear...using dialogue is one of the most engaging things to any audience!



### 3. NAME YOUR CHARACTERS

We don't relate to something without a name. Think about it! If you work for a corporate company I bet you even name your projects! Apple names their operating systems, Dell names their projects, you name your dog.

We relate to characters with names, so name them! If you need to change a name to protect the innocent, then do so, but the audience won't connect without a name.

### 4. GET YOUR TIMING RIGHT

You've heard this before and probably associated with comedians on stage... and it's true. But it's also true for anyone in public speaking. I've got a line I deliver from one story I've told hundreds of times and I've recently started playing with the timing for the delivery of that line. It's amazing when I add a subtle extra-long pause before the line it gets a much bigger laugh. Timing is not just for comedy. It could be used to create intrigue, thought provocation, anxiety, tension, or anticipation.

### 5. USE YOUR BODY LANGUAGE

We are visual creatures, and we interpret what we see in relation to the words we are hearing. We want everything to have meaning because it makes it easier for us to understand. Think about how you will use your stance, hands and your facial expressions to tell the parts of the story that aren't in the words. Your audience will appreciate it!

If you want some great advice on storytelling, follow Craig Valentine on social media. He's a master of telling stories. Someone else I enjoy listening to is John C. Maxwell. He has an amazing way of pulling you in with his conversational tone and infectious smile.

And if you ever get to see my friend Paul Slattery on stage...get ready for comets and sparklers!

You know we're all waiting to hear from you... so go rehearse that story and we'll be ready the next time you and your comet come to town.

**I know it'll be brilliant!**

## SECTION 4

# 6 Story Templates for Leaders

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Stories come in many shapes and styles, but there are simple templates used by business leaders to engage their audiences and inspire them to achieve more.



## STORY TEMPLATE 1:

# The Inspiring Challenge Story

It was the start of the day and I had just asked my Storytelling workshop attendees what they wanted to learn today. One Sr. Manager spoke up, “I want to learn how to get people to do something.” As a coach myself, I couldn’t help but respond with...

**“Can you tell me what you mean by that?”**



**His eagerness to learn more about persuasion...**

Was both common and understandable among the leaders I’m privileged to serve. He answered me, “When we need to get something done as a team, I want to be able to use stories to help motivate them all to get it done... even if they don’t really want to do it.”



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# One method for persuading a group toward action is with a template I call “The Inspiring Challenge” where the focus is on two key areas:

- a tough situation from the past and...
- an opportunity for the future

This template generates two emotions in your audience. The emotional piece is important and shouldn't be overlooked. While we all like to think we make our decisions based on logic and data, science says otherwise. All of our decisions require a feeling element before we act upon them. In fact, Mel Robbins points out in her book *The 5 Second Rule: Transform your Life, Work, and Confidence with Everyday Courage*, that we don't keep our New Year's Resolutions for one simple reason...we don't feel like doing them anymore!

So how do you get the team to do something? They will need to feel like doing it. This is why the emotional element is so critical. The first emotion focuses more on the negative side (anxious, nervous, scared, etc.) while the second emotion focuses on the positive (inspired, intrigued, curious, empowered, etc.).

## First Emotion: The Negative

Start with an experience from your past and then draw the audience into the story. Let them look at the tough situation through your eyes. Let them see themselves in your role. What does this sound like?

*I was 2 months into my new role as Sr. Project Manager and my supplier for the 40 web servers told me he would be 6 weeks late on delivery to our data center. My project update meeting with our executive sponsors is in 20 minutes. I'm about to walk into a meat grinder...*

## INVITE THEM IN

Next, you invite the audience into the story by placing them in the situation. This is where they need to feel the emotion of the tough situation. What does this part sound like?

*We've probably all been there before... What do I say in this meeting? How do I address this issue? ... What would you say? How do you handle a situation like that? We all face situations like this more than we think...*

## SHOW VULNERABILITY AND THE LESSON

Next, let them know how you handled it, how you failed, and what you learned from the experience. What might this part sound like?

*I started my presentation and began with an update of the bad news I had just received. I'm immediately interrupted by the COO when she says, "Stop. Where is this in your handout I have here?" I began to respond, "Well, I didn't have time to update the handout or the slide deck so..." She interrupted again, "STOP. This meeting is over. I expect you to be prepared when you're speaking to this group. Please come back tomorrow at the same time when you're better prepared." I learned a lot that day...*

## SHARE THE CHALLENGE / OPPORTUNITY

At this point, the audience understands what you learned through failure. You've got their attention because they've experienced the emotion of a stressful situation. You've shown your own vulnerability, which helps the audience relate to you better, and they also know how you solved the situation.

The next step is to share the current challenge or opportunity the team is facing. They need to see the similarity between the story you've just shared and what you learned so they'll be open to solving it. When they know similar tough situations have been solved successfully in the past, they're more eager to play the protagonist role of the hero in this new story. What does this part sound like?

*Our current reporting situation with our customers is very similar. We don't have a timely method for updating our project scopes or schedules after we get off our weekly calls. There's a way we can improve our project updates. We just need to find the right solution and implement it.*

## Second Emotion: Inspiration to Solve It

This is where you turn the challenge over to them without solving it for them! Avoid your urge to step in and solve the issue! Don't let the message turn into a command and control message.

When the leader takes command and attempts to control exactly what the team should do next, they'll feel less than inspired or encouraged. In social psychology of persuasion we call this **compliance** but not **commitment**! Rather than just doing it, we want them to want to do it! What does that sound like?

*Imagine your next call with Acme Corporation. Imagine when they ask you for the status on a change request given to you only 15 minutes earlier. You already have it built into the project plan and you can show them exactly how it affects the delivery timelines. Think about how you'd feel after that call compared to how I felt after my meeting with the COO many years ago. I know we can fix this. Let's see how we can make this a reality. Let me know what you come up with and we'll discuss it next week at our team meeting.*

### MAKE IT SO...

Giving your audience the opportunity to solve a problem, overcome an obstacle, rise to a challenge...is motivating. It's inspirational and it feels empowering to the audience. Remember, we can all logically agree with what we should do (eat better, exercise more, etc.) but if we don't feel like it...it won't get done. Help your audience feel better about their challenges when you want them to do something!



## STORY TEMPLATE 2:

# The “David & Goliath” Story

Whether you’re Jewish, Christian or neither, you’ve probably heard the Biblical story of the shepherd boy destined to become a king. David was the shepherd boy who courageously accepted the fight-to-the-death challenge from the Philistine warrior Goliath, a man twice his size. It’s a classic tale of the underdog facing the champion.



**If you’ve heard this story, then you already know the outcome. If you haven’t heard this story, you can probably still guess how it turned out.**

Our shepherd boy, armed with only a few stones and a sling, was the champion of the day when he defeated the heavily armored and weaponized giant.

According to [Malcolm Gladwell](#), in his book [David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants](#), the best way to pull off the upset is to play by a different set of rules. In other words, be unconventional.

# Do We Truly Love Underdogs?

We love any story that fits the template of this classic tale. The underdog defeats the heavily favored champion! In a 2007 study published in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, the researchers asked 71 participants to imagine two teams.

One was described as a strong champion, most likely to win. The other was described as the underdog. With only knowing the information of who was most favored to win, participants in the study were asked who they would rather see win. The underdog was chosen in every instance.

## OR, DO WE JUST DESPISE THE MOST LIKELY WINNERS?

There seems to be something deep inside us that makes us want to see the underdog win. Or, according to one study by the *Baylor College of Medicine*, maybe we like to see winners lose because we're envious of the teams that always win. This phenomenon is called *schadenfreude*. *Homer Simpson is a great example* of someone who expresses this often.

Regardless of whether it's a love for the unlikely hero or a joy for seeing the champions struggle, you can't deny there's something that attracts us all to the underdog stories. Maybe it's that we can see ourselves as the underdog in these stories?

## WHEN TO USE THIS TEMPLATE IN BUSINESS

This type of story is used by leaders to inspire. When the team has to overcome tremendous odds to be successful, they need encouragement to press on. Leaders can use a David-and-Goliath story to give them hope and inspiration. If it's been done in the past, we can do it now!

I'm not suggesting you tell the actual David-and-Goliath story, but instead, use it as a template to show your audience that nothing is impossible. Show them how their current situation is not impossible. It can be overcome!

## HOW DO I PICK A STORY?

The closer your story is in relation to the actual situation they're facing, the more impact it will have on the audience. In other words, just sharing a college basketball comeback story from March Madness may be exciting, but the audience can easily dismiss the story by saying, "Yeah, but that's basketball! This is managed IT services we're talking about here! It's not the same thing."

Try to find an underdog victory story that aligns closely with the current situation your team is facing. If it's a tough business situation where you'd like to use the story, try to find another business story similar in scope. I recommend you use *Paul Smith's* storytelling book called *Lead with a Story* if you're looking for stories you can use.

## HOW DO I STRUCTURE THE STORY?

The key to any David-and-Goliath story is to make sure your audience can see themselves as David. The audience needs to be invited into the story if you want to generate the feeling of encouragement and inspiration.

1. *Give the landscape and characters* for the story and do this quickly! This should also include the obvious problem (Goliath) that seems impossible to overcome.
2. *Provide the thoughts of the underdog (David) by showcasing two things:*
  - a. The underdog's *awareness of the challenge* and the insurmountable odds he/she is facing.
  - b. The *hope and faith to try anyway*. This should point directly to the reason why it is still worth pursuing.
3. *Describe the approach used to solve the problem.* What did the underdog do to approach the problem? Remember, history has proven when the underdog wins, they tend to use unconventional methods. What is the unique approach they took? It's important that this element be something within his/her control. Do NOT let this be a product of pure luck. If it is just a lucky break, your team can easily dismiss this as a fluke which is unlikely to occur again for them.
4. *Describe the feeling of victory and what it meant to the team.* This is the part of the story that gives the audience the deep sense of satisfaction. It should generate the feeling of a tough victory earned by fighting unconventionally to overcome amazing odds.

It's time for you to go slay that giant and inspire your team.



## STORY TEMPLATE 3:

# The “Who Am I?” Story

You’ve finally got the promotion you’ve been looking for at work. In this new position you will be leading a team of 12 people who have never met you before. Your manager suggests calling a team meeting where she will introduce you to your new team. “Then you can take over the meeting and introduce yourself. You know the routine...just tell them more about yourself. It’ll be fun.”



**That all sounds great, but now you start to feel some anxiety creeping in...**

Because this will be your first presentation to your team! What will you say? What will they think of you? How will they react to you?



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# When to Use the Model

Any time you need to introduce your authentic self to a group, this model works great.

## WHAT YOUR AUDIENCE DOES NOT WANT

I'm guessing you've all seen this before, when someone stands to speak in response to the request, "Hey, why don't you tell us a little about yourself?" Most people respond to this with a chronological list from their resume.

We all start to go a little numb when we realize you're walking down your timeline year by year telling us about each of your pit stops along the way.

It's a laundry list of company names and job titles which tells us nothing about the real you. We want to know the authentic you! To do that, you'll need to take us back to a **moment in time when you had to make a decision**. We learn about other people when we watch them react to a situation.

Someone who knows how to tell more about himself without giving a timeline of events is Michael Dell. In his autobiography he tells several stories about his past. This one is a story from his childhood, but it tells us about how Michael Dell leads today.

## ONE OF MICHAEL DELL'S "WHO AM I?" STORIES

Michael Dell tells a story from his past that gives us a window into "who he really is" as a person by showing us "what he has done" as a younger man.

*The father of my best friend was a pretty avid stamp collector, so now naturally my friend and I wanted to get into stamp collecting, too. To fund my interest in stamps, I got a job as a water boy in a Chinese restaurant two blocks from my house.*

*I started reading stamp journals just for fun, and soon began noticing that prices were rising. Before long, my interest in stamps began to shift from the joy of collecting to the idea that there was something here that my mother, a stockbroker, would have termed "a commercial opportunity."...*

*I was about to embark upon one of my very first business ventures. First, I got a bunch of people in the neighborhood to consign their stamps to me. Then I advertised "Dell's Stamps" in Linn's Stamp Journal, the trade journal of the day. And then I typed, with one finger, a twelve-page catalog...and mailed it out.*

*Much to my surprise, I made \$2,000. And I learned an early, powerful lesson about the rewards of eliminating the middleman. I also learned that if you've got a good idea, it pays to do something about it.*

## WHAT DO WE LEARN?

Stephen Denning, the author of *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling*, does a fantastic job of breaking down Michael Dell's story. Denning points out how we learn some very important things about Dell in this story, and I bet you can even pull more from it.

- Michael Dell is entrepreneurial and bold
- He's aggressive and direct
- We learn his perspective on his own actions from when he was young
- Seeing where he was then and where he is now gives you the sense that he will continue to follow that trend line

## HOW DO I BUILD MY OWN "WHO AM I?" STORY?

What's the formula for you to build your own story? It's actually quite simple. Even after you construct the story, don't forget to rehearse it a few times. Just knowing the story is very different from delivering the story!

**Focus on a turning point in your life**, maybe a fork in the road where a decision had to be made. Try to keep your story focused on the positive. If the turning point generates a negative feeling, leave the audience with the positive at the end showing how you overcame it.

**Share what you learned from the experience**. When the audience sees some key elements coming from the story that can be closely tied to your core values, they will understand that you've given them a sneak peek into who you really are as a person.

**Inject a little humor when appropriate**. Don't focus too much on your good qualities. You don't want to appear like you're bragging. Bring the story back to something relevant for the audience. If you are introducing yourself to a group for the first time, let them know how they can expect more of those same core values when dealing with you.

It can take some practice, but your audience will love this much more than you just providing the resume timeline of all the jobs and titles from your past.

## STORY TEMPLATE 4:

# The Fable Story Template

From **Aesop's fables** to **Jesus' parables**, we've heard these types of stories our whole life. The fable is both powerful and easy to implement. Here's why you should consider using them the next time you want to focus on a truth and reinforce the core values of your corporate culture.



### Fables and parables are fictional stories...

Used to focus on a core value, a moral, or an extended metaphor to help the audience understand a situation better. Once they are able to see the truth or the core value in the fictional story, they can also see how their approach to a current business issue should be no different.

# Fables are Easy to Understand and Relate to

Even with the simplest of short stories, we always look for the “why” in it. In other words, why is this important? What is the lesson to be learned here? When our minds are taken to a fictional place, we lower our inhibitions. We lower our guard.

When a leader speaks in actual stories from the workplace, it can be too close to the audience. In other words, everyone has an opinion on the event being described. If you're in the accounting department and the story is about the sales team closing a big deal, you may feel disconnected from the importance of it, the sales team loves the story, and the marketing department feels like they should be getting some of the credit for the win!

The power of the fable lies in the simplicity and the escape from the everyday reality. That escape allows the listener to forget the whirlwind of the real world for a moment and just focus on the deeper meaning, the moral, or the lesson to be applied.

## FABLES ARE EASY TO FIND

Anyone can find a fable. Why is that? Because they're everywhere! For those people who tell us in our workshops, “But, I don't have any stories to tell!” ... there are no more excuses!

Fables can be mined from the internet with ease. Just google Aesop's Fables and you'll find a complete listing.

## FABLES ARE EASY TO DELIVER

Fables are extremely short, which is what most audiences want! There's not much to them and they are easy to commit to memory. Fables don't need to be memorized word for word. In fact, when told with your own words, they can be more engaging to your audience because you sound more natural.

Since they are so short and easy to imagine, they're hard for the presenter to forget! You'll find them easy to commit to memory and even easier to deliver.

## FABLES ARE FUN

They're fun because they give the audience permission to escape briefly from reality. It gives the audience permission to enter a world where a mouse can have a conversation with a lion. While we know this is impossible, it unleashes our creativity when we get to imagine this.

One of the keys to being an engaging speaker is to engage **3 areas of the mind**: the **intellect**, the **emotion**, and the **imagination**. Choose the right fable and it will give you a short-cut to all three of these.

## FABLES PROVIDE TRUTH IN SIMPLICITY

The true power of the fable lies in the truth of the message. Regardless of the animal solving the problem in the story, we can see the truth in the message. Truth transcends all.

There is something so powerful about realizing the message of the story is not simply an interesting story, a learning lesson, or an opinion...it holds a deeper truth.

## NOW TIE IT BACK TO THE LESSON...

After the fable is delivered, the leader needs to tie it back to the current business situation and what it means to the organization. If it reinforces the culture, point that out. If it provides a gentle reminder of another time when the ethics were stronger, show it. If it gives the hope of a new direction based on a strong core value, give it.

I challenge you to bring a truth into an upcoming presentation with either a parable or a fable. Engage your audience, give them permission to imagine, and then bring them back to that same truth in the reality of their current situation.

## STORY TEMPLATE 5:

# The Lesson-Learned Story

The lesson-learned template has a simple structure. You share a mistake made in your past and the lesson you learned from it. Then, apply the same lesson learned to the current situation facing the team today. I had one student who shared a team decision on a project that proved to be costly. She then made the group aware they are facing the same decision today with this new project. She recommended a different path based on that experience. The rest of this section is one of the best examples I've ever heard from a student in my workshop. His lesson learned hit home for everyone in that classroom. Enjoy!



## My Student's Wake-Up Call

Jerry stepped to the front of my classroom and began sharing his story. He was a student in my storytelling workshop.

Jerry was at home working on his laptop and preparing for his next trip to the airport. Both of his daughters approached him holding a piece of paper close to their chest. "Daddy we drew you a picture!" He finished typing his email and then looked up from his laptop with a smile, "You did? Show it to me!"

# The two girls proudly laid the picture on his lap and began to explain the picture.

“This is me” quickly followed by “And THIS is me!” They were both competing for his attention. Then they added, “And here’s you Daddy.” His smile began to fade as he gazed at the portrayal of his family through his children’s eyes. The picture needed no further explanation from his daughters. Jerry was speechless.

On one side of the drawing his daughters were standing with his wife by the house. On the other end of the page Jerry was standing next to an airplane with a computer and a suitcase, waving back to his family as he left for another business trip. There was something about the picture that struck a deep chord inside.

It was a realization of the life he was missing when he was gone. It was a picture of how his daughters would remember their life with him as they were growing up. It was the realization he would never get this time back again... ever. It was the forecasted pain of his future self looking back on a life full of business success but always wondering if he had failed at home.

In his own heart and mind, he wondered which was most important right now. At this point in his life...where can he make the greatest impact? Is it with his family? Is it at work and in business? Is it possible to impact both? In the end, he knew he needed to make a very tough decision.

## FINALLY HAPPY?

That day he turned in his resignation and began looking for another job, closer to home and with less travel. Luckily as a consultant with great relationships, it didn’t take long. Within a few weeks he ended up working for one of his consulting clients. Why didn’t he make this change before? Was he finally in the place where he’d be happy?

## NOPE.

While this job had much less travel and afforded him more time at home, he found himself dissatisfied at work. He felt like he was just going through the motions. That unsettled feeling came over him again. He couldn’t shake it. Once again, Jerry began looking for a new career opportunity. It was time for another change, but this time he’d approach his decision more methodically.

Jerry took more time to define his own professional skill set, the challenges he enjoys, all in a position with little travel required. That’s how he ended up with the job he has now, and he couldn’t be happier.

As he finished up his story, he paused for a moment. Then he shared the moral of his story with us all. Everything Jerry learned from this experience could be boiled down to one question we can all use to predict our future satisfaction.

## THE ONE QUESTION TO PREDICT YOUR FUTURE SATISFACTION

While none of us has a crystal ball, we’d all like to make better choices and avoid the bad ones. Here’s the one question we can all use to do just that. It’s so simple, but yet so profound.

## ARE YOU RUNNING AWAY OR RUNNING TOWARD?

With Jerry’s first move he realized he wasn’t running toward a better life and career choice. He was only running away from his current situation. This became clear to him when he lost all job satisfaction in his new role, and he started to question his first move. Jerry knew his career and family satisfaction required him to run toward a better tomorrow, not just run away from his current situation.

If you’re jumping into a new role because you’re trying to escape your current situation, you may find a lifeboat for now, but you may not be satisfied for long. Imagine if you were on a sinking ship, you’d gladly jump into any lifeboat just to get away. But after a few weeks on the open sea in a small lifeboat, you’d be ready jump again!

## THE POINT IS THIS...

If your primary motivation is to run away from something, you may end up in a less-than-ideal destination. True...it could serve as a lifeboat, but is that really what you want? You’ll take just about anything when you’re just trying to get away.

But, if you’re running toward something, something that truly inspires you, something that gives you purpose, then you’re moving in the right direction. Don’t live a life just running away. Live a life running toward!



## STORY TEMPLATE 6:

# The Springboard Story

### HOW TO INSPIRE YOUR AUDIENCE INTO ACTION

The audience was loud and boisterous as they funneled out of the convention center. Their final speaker for the day left them all inspired and chattering about possibilities. “We could start by talking to our customers and ask them!” Then someone else responded, “I think we should figure out how we could scale this beyond North America!” They were all working on building a new future.



**This moment of inspiration and collaboration was created by an average speaker using a powerful tool.**

She didn't deliver her story with the sights and sounds of an entertainer, nor did she use eloquent words like Hemingway. Instead, she used an often overlooked, but powerful tool for creating inspired audiences. **Stephen Denning** calls this type of story a “**Springboard Story**” because it springboards the audience into action through inspiration.

This template includes three main elements: **The Setup, The Failure, The Possibility.**



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# The Setup

This first phase introduces the audience to a success from the past. While I wasn't there when Steve Jobs asked the engineers at Apple to start working on the iPod, we can use the technology as an example since I'm sure you're all familiar with the iPod. I can picture his setup going something like this...

*The problem for music lovers has always been twofold, portability and choice. We all want to take our music selections with us. Portability was first solved with the 8-track tape in cars and the cassette tape in a walkman. But the choice was limited with either program buttons or a linear rewind to get to the song you wanted. The CD was invented and solved both issues. Now you had portability and direct access to the exact song you wanted.*

# The Failure

At this point in the story, the audience is tracking with the speaker. They're actually waiting for the fork in the road. There's been nothing but a description of a landscape so far. This feels like a simple history lesson. What's the issue here? In the example we're using with the iPod, the audience of Apple engineers is waiting for the problem. If we have portability and direct access... then what's the big deal?

This is when the speaker drops the problem on the audience. It's a moment when the audience will choose to either get on board or discount the issue completely. Back to our fictitious Steve Jobs springboard message, it may have gone something like this...

*But now there's a new problem... the music lover wants more. One minute I'm in the mood for Van Halen, but the next I want to hear Neil Diamond or Katy Perry. I never know what music my mood will request so now my challenge is the quantity of CDs I need to carry. The solution can't be more suitcases for holding 100 CDs. Why can't this quantity issue be solved with technology?*

Boom. The failure (problem or opportunity) has been identified. Now the audience is thinking something like "It shouldn't be that way" or "We could fix that" or "Why haven't we started working on this already?"

# The Possibility

Without overdramatizing the delivery, I'd recommend the speaker gives the audience a healthy pause right here. Now there's only one step left for the speaker. Give the audience the prompt they need to get started on the issue.

The verbal prompt will tap into the audience's imagination. This is the fertile playground in the brain for taking action. All humans love games and puzzles. We like to work on creating something. This third step doesn't need to be lengthy or dramatic. It's just the prompt to get started. Back to Steve Jobs...

*Isn't that what we do? We improve life with technology. We can solve this. Just imagine a day when a jogger can carry over 10,000 songs in her hand while running and still be able to call up the exact song she wants to close out her race strong. I can't wait to meet you there on that day.*

While some may feel the speaker should provide the answer, the vision, the ending to the story... that won't always be the most effective with the audience if the goal is to move them into action. When the speaker leaves the possibility hanging in the air without a solid path to get there, the audience will take ownership and begin to build that bridge.

And when the audience builds the bridge to that possible future, they are much more likely to buy into the overall strategy and vision. They are co-creating the strategic plan as they leave.

Steve Jobs was known by many as a great presenter, speaker and storyteller. While my Steve Jobs iPod example above is purely fictional, I certainly hope it does his memory justice. We all know a great storyteller in our own life. Someone who captivates you and inspires you. Let's all learn from these storytellers and inspire the world to imagine a better future.

As we wrap up our list of story templates, I just have one question for you...

**What kind of future will you help create by inspiring others with story?**



# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Russ Peterson Jr.** is the Co-Founder / President of iSpeak, Inc.. He's also the co-author of *Corporate Ovation: Your roadmap to better presentations* (Discovery Tree Press, 2013) and the author of *Cut the C.R.A.P. and Make the Sale* (DC Press, 2003.)



Over the past 25 years I've worked for small companies, Fortune 500 companies, and I've owned my own companies. In each of my roles I've been fascinated and curious about other people's success. I was always curious what made some people succeed while others failed?

One common theme I found in every success situation was their ability to communicate well. Each person excelled at creating meaningful conversations, expressing genuine empathy and engaging others with effective stories.

Through our research at iSpeak we've developed communication tools and workshops to help you succeed in the very same way!

If we can help you and your organization, please contact us at **[info@ispeak.com](mailto:info@ispeak.com)**.



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## WANT MORE?

If you're interested in exploring how the **iSpeak Corporate Storytelling and Communication** workshops can benefit your organization, please click below to request an email contact from our team.

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