

Storytelling - The Great Motivator of People

By Eileen McDargh

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In a data-driven world, facts and figures are the order of the day in sales calls, employee meetings, board rooms, and political assemblies. Traditionally, when a person is trying to convince someone else to do something they use the logic of benefits and features - long the sacred domain of anyone in sales.

And they are missing the boat.

What truly moves us as human beings, what prompts us into action, is emotion. Imagination is the conduit of emotion and well-crafted storytelling carries the imagination.

Consider this story:

You place your hand on top of your head, only to feel the sun radiate from your scalp. Sweat trickles down your back and the once ironed shirt clings to your sides. The pavement roasts your feet even through your thick-soled shoes. You've been walking for a 45 minutes, trying to find the office where you are scheduled to make a sales call. Suddenly, a swoosh of cold air swirls at your side as a young couple comes charging out of an ice cream parlor, licking swirls of raspberry and vanilla perched in a sugar cone...

I'll bet you're ready for some ice cream!

What engaged you was the reliving of a common experience. I didn't need to itemize the benefits of cooling off or list the features of ice cream and this particular store. You were drawn in by your imagination. Facts tell. Emotion sells. You imagined how you would win over the odds of heat by taking a break for ice cream.

We follow leaders who capture us by stories that draw us in and give us purpose for being part of the company. We buy products when we see or read of the human experience with that product. (Remember the Maytag Man?) And we accept the call to action if we hear a compelling story about triumph over odds. Think about the solicitation letters you get from non-profits. They are often stories of individuals who suffered greatly until the non-profit's "product" allowed them to regain a semblance of their life.

In short, crafting compelling, honest stories that resonant core values in action is a skill worth learning by any leader, manager, sales executive, or parent.

In his best-selling book *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting*, Robert McKee, the world's best-known and most respected screenwriting lecturer, argues that stories "fulfill a profound human need to grasp the patterns of living-not merely as an intellectual exercise, but within a very personal, emotional experience." Or as USC leadership guru Dr. Warren Bennis states, "Man cannot live without story any more than he can live without bread."

What's the point you want to make at your next meeting? Is there a story that can be crafted to that point-not a sermon to be intoned?

Who has used your product and reported a wonderful story that came as a result of that product? Or did you even say, "Tell me a story..."

What stories are told in the coffee room about what it is like to work where you are? What contribution could you make to this story that could improve the ending?

What future do you want? Create a story about it.

Remember, people are not inspired to act by reason alone. The heart holds hands with the head.

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