



What's YOUR Story?

ShiftShapers
Strategies
Communicate • Engage • Profit

DAVID A. SALTZMAN

What's YOUR Story?

BY DAVID A. SALTZMAN

"The single greatest problem with communication is the illusion that it has taken place." -George Bernard Shaw

Motivational coach Tony Gaskins says that communication is like oxygen – without it, things die. That includes our business relationships. I don't mean "talking". We can all talk – sometimes too much – but that is for another paragraph further on. There is a difference between communication and talking and that is the first "secret weapon" of top advisors.

Talking is what happens when we show up and throw up. We have all been in "that" meeting, or business presentation, or sales meeting with a prospect or a client and we have *all* done it at one point or another of our careers. Folks who take this approach don't generally last in a business where real live in-depth communication is a major key to success. If you have been around for a while, odds are that you have already learned that lesson . . . the hard way.

The question is, "Why do we have to learn it the hard way?"

It is because we are hard wired to tell stories. "But isn't that a good thing?" I hear you say. Yes indeed – it is. But telling the right story the right way at the right time is the difference between success and failure.

THE HISTORY OF STORYTELLING

"Stories are our primary tools of learning and teaching."
-Edward Miller

Storytelling has been a product of continual, generational change. It is entirely possible that storytelling even predated language. Paintings and etchings on cave walls were the ancient equivalent of PowerPoint. They didn't have crazy animations, but they used pictures in a chronology to retell fables, myths, and history.

As time went on and language formed, telling stories around ancient campfires passed traditions from generation to generation. The best storytellers in every tribe were revered. They could paint those cave wall pictures with words!

Books – the later repositories of this type of information – were hand-lettered by scribes and, early on in the process, were the possessions of only the wealthy and powerful. In part, their power was due to the ability to hoard that knowledge and keep it from the masses. This was a terrific strategy that worked really well . . . until the development and deployment of the printing press by goldsmith and inventor Johannes Gutenberg in 1450. Then it all changed . . . again.

Over centuries, books and their knowledge became widely available. Those who had amassed power by hoarding books eventually lost their power. Anyone with an ability to read and a desire to learn now had the keys to *that* castle. As time and generations passed, everyone could communicate.

The real question is whether they communicate well, or poorly. And that, as Robert Frost said, has made all the difference. That “road” to good communication (to continue the Frost reference) is indeed, and sadly, “the one less traveled by.”

STORYTELLING TODAY

“Communication – the human connection – is the key to personal and career success.” –Paul J. Meyer

Personal communication is difficult. Business communication is survival. How often have you attended a convention or a meeting that had a guest speaker? Think about those meetings for a moment or two. We have all been to too many of them to count, right? I know I have. And if you are like me, the Pareto Principle applies. 80% of those guest speakers are . . . well . . . just dreadful. There is no nice way to say it! The other 20% are the ones you want to be. When you dream about giving a talk, that’s what you see.

The fundamental question is this: what in the hell is wrong with that 80% and what is *right* with the other 20, and how do *I* get that “secret sauce” so I can be a revered storyteller in *my* tribe? What did those ancient cave dwellers and fireside storytellers have in common – what set them apart?

The good news is that it is the very same thing that 20% of business meeting speakers know. Good storytelling is an incredibly valuable skill with certain strategic, repeatable, and customizable elements – all of which leave the impression we need in order to propel both personal and career success.

THE FIRST THING YOU HAVE TO KNOW

“The goal of advertising is not to convince people or make them think something. It is to make them feel something.”
–Matthew Luhn

And what is advertising? It is (let’s not always see the same hands) storytelling. And that whole “*feeling something*” stuff? That, my friends, is all about emotion. We think that we are wholly rational beings and that all of our humanness comes from being able to make reasoned and well-thought out decisions.

Psychologist Daniel Kahneman calls “BS” on that! Kahneman’s lifetime of research makes it clear that we do not make decisions with our prefrontal cortex – that reasoning part of the brain – but rather, with our amygdala, the old lizard fight-or-flight reflexive part of our brain.

Over many thousands of years, we have become really, really good at instantaneously rationalizing those emotional decisions. Those rationalizations come from our prefrontal cortex. It is easy to see how we head-fake (sorry – I couldn’t resist) ourselves into thinking that we reason our way through decisions.

We may reason ourselves into decisions, but I would like to suggest that rarely if ever can an advisor – or anyone selling solutions – reason a prospect or client to do much of anything. A recent ShiftShapers Podcast interview with a CFO made it completely clear that C-suite folks don't want to hear what you know until they hear that you know what matters to them.

If you go into a meeting thinking that your knowledge alone will get you the AOR or the sale, your kids are going to be pretty skinny.

BUT I HAVE ALL OF THE FACTS!

"Stories are order-of-magnitude more powerful than sets of facts." – David Aaker

And that, my friends, is where the problem begins. As Yoda said, "You must unlearn what you have learned." Spreadsheets (or "spreadshits" as someone in one of my audiences said in a Freudian slip) will not get you to the sales promised land. And now you know why. There isn't a whole heck of a lot of emotion in a spreadsheet – even a really well-reasoned, well-formatted spreadsheet. It is nothing more than . . . a bunch of numbers . . . in little boxes.

Apparently, the numbers know they aren't going to work. Maybe that's why we call the little boxes "cells". To be successful, we should really lock up the whole IDEA of spreadsheets.

Your story – the one with which you open and close a sale – has to be based in emotion. Recently, an advisor was trying to get a private school to understand how much they could save by taking their 700 employees into a partially self-funded plan. The number was well into six figures. SIX FIGURES! That just HAS to be compelling. But it wasn't. No matter how the advisor tried, she just couldn't grab the school CFO by the wallet.

She asked why such a compelling amount of money wouldn't get the CFO to "yes", or even to a decision to move forward and examine the pros and cons of a partially self-funded arrangement. I asked her about the pre-meeting chit chat.

She thought I was crazy, but I persisted. Among those things the advisor had heard (but not listened to – more on that later) was the fact that *all* of the private schools in the area were struggling with attracting students due to ever-increasing tuition costs.

I asked her what tuition was at this particular school and when she told me the amount, I asked her to divide the potential savings by the dollar amount of tuition. Now she was *certain* that I had lost my mind, but the number she arrived at was 110. “What in the world does *that* have to do with *anything*?” she asked. (You may have caught on by now, but she had not . . . yet).

“What”, I asked her, “would that CFO say if you told him that you could bring him 110 new students?” Then, the light went on. The emotional problem the CFO was struggling with could indeed be equated to the savings the advisor was proposing. It just had to be transformed from a static number to an emotional number – and a (partial) answer to the CFO’s biggest headache. Yes, the advisor made the sale.

You can’t understand how to hit that emotional chord without doing something at which many advisors do not, alas, excel.

“LISTEN” AND “SILENT” HAVE THE SAME LETTERS

“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.” –Steven Covey

The key to every successful advisor-client relationship is listening and asking strategic, open-ended question. Once you pose the question, you have to do what we do not do well . . . you have to shut up! That’s right. **Zip it.**

I know that you have all of this wonderful technical knowledge about how to help your clients lower their costs, create a healthier environment for their employees, build consumer confidence, provide transparency, and all the rest. Here’s a little secret: your client won’t give a flying fadoodle about all of that stuff if they don’t think you have listened to them in the first place.

One of the singularly best open-ended questions I have ever heard was written by Dan Sullivan of Strategic Coach. It is so compelling that an entire book was written around the question – and it is just one sentence! The book is called, “The Dan Sullivan Question” and is well worth the price. You can get it on Amazon:

<https://amzn.to/2L5a8Xi>.

The key isn't so much in the question, but in the technique required to use the question effectively. If you ask it and then: ***Just. Stop. Talking.*** your prospect will tell you ***everything*** you need to know to be able to help them solve their problems. But you have to be patient. I have asked the question and endured a full minute of silence until the prospect started talking. Trust me – as an old radio DJ I can tell you that a minute of silence can seem like several days.

Yes, it is excruciatingly awkward, but it is also exceptionally fruitful.

I have had prospects give me relatively succinct, two-minute answers and I have even had one prospect who talked for 40 minutes nonstop. In each case I knew how to position my solutions so that they resonated on an emotional level. No trickery, no flim-flam, no bait-and-switch, just good old-fashioned listening – with the intent to understand.

SO, NOW WHAT? AND HOW? AND WHY?

"The most powerful person in the world is the storyteller."

–Steve Jobs

Now that you have unlearned a lot of what you learned, what other skills do you need to apply all of this insight? The bad news is that there is quite a bit more. The good news is that it is pretty concise. There is a lot of noise in all of today's sales channels and you need to differentiate yourself. You want to be the person making the big sales hits and winning the big clients. But how do you tell a cogent story that accomplishes all of that?

Think of all of the stories you have ever heard, movies you have watched, operas you have enjoyed, or even most popular songs. They all have a hero (your client) who battles an antagonist (the villain) who keeps them from getting the thing they want. Something bad will happen to your hero if s/he can't get what it is that they want. They all begin with "once upon a time" and end with "happily ever after".

Ask yourself if your stories (a/k/a sales presentations, stage talks, etc.) have those elements. You have to be a bit more clever than Goldilocks or Little Red Riding Hood, but you get the picture. If you don't build to some kind of suspense you can't have the successful conclusion.

Become the expert every client thinks they deserve. Position yourself as that most powerful person that Steve Jobs spoke about. But . . . **how do you do that?**

THE TOOLKIT

"If an expert says it can't be done – get another expert."
–David Ben Gurion

First of all, to paraphrase Napoleon Bonaparte, you have to be a dealer in hope. You need to create a story that invites your client or prospect in. You, and you alone, have what it takes to get your prospects to the "promised land" of solving their problem in a way that answers and assuages their concerns.

This is true regardless of how you are delivering your message. If you can exhibit empathy and authority you are unstoppable. Of equal importance, is that you cannot ask the "reader" to expend a lot of energy figuring out that you know what they need and that you can deliver. Websites that are more dense than a jungle floor, marketing materials that are clever but ineffective, etc.

If you confuse, you will lose.

Let's use the example of public speaking, which is a great method for prospecting on a one-to-many basis, controlling the environment, and establishing authority. You hate public speaking? That makes you just like many who would rather be "in the box" at a funeral than giving the eulogy.

Once you understand your client, what they want and how to show that you can get them there, you aren't selling. In fact . . .

Remember, you aren't selling anything . . . except you!

If the meeting is “yours”, how do you get people to attend? You use half of the technique that you employ for opening your talk. You pose a question that is compelling to the audience. A general business audience might want to know how to tame the second biggest item on their balance sheet and how they can own and control their own healthcare plan.

An audience full of those private school CFOs might want to know how they can trim their tuition costs to attract more students. Hi-tech or other hot industries that struggle with personnel might want to know how to create a plan of benefits that attracts and retains the best people. You have to sell the problem you are solving, not the solution to the problem.

OTHER WAYS TO TELL YOUR STORY

“Never allow the fear of striking out keep you from playing the game.” -Babe Ruth

In today’s market, video is a powerful engagement tool – but ONLY if you have your story down pat.

72 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every hour.

Does that blow you away? It should. 85% of the U.S. Internet audience watches videos online. Worldwide, a full third of all time spent online is spent on video content. Millennials – the group that is the key demographic for everything that is consumed and purchased, watches the most online videos and men spend 40% more time watching videos on the Internet than women.

Well, hell, you must be thinking. I have to learn all of the technical things I need to know to create online videos. You would be thinking that – and you would be very, very wrong. MAKING videos is easy. You have a video camera and high-quality microphone in your pocket. The bad news is that they are completely and totally useless . . . unless you have a compelling story. Services abound that can take your mobile phone video and make it snappy looking. But if you don’t have something to say that resonates with your audience, you will be a one-time Harry.

Why did I focus in on video? Communication geeks (I am raising my hand, you just can't see me) know the answer to that question. Video content is like buying a rotisserie chicken at the market. You not only get dinner tonight, but you get one or two other meals from the same chicken. Video has video (of course – bear with me) but it ALSO gives you audio AND print.

COUM: Create Once – Use Many

Even podcasts, once the sole province of audio, are now beginning their lives as video because from that starting point, you get to use the “chicken” a few different ways. Whether you are creating your own material or you have a marketing specialist (like me!) working with you, time is our most precious commodity. Create it, parse it out, then lather, rinse, and repeat.

WRAPPING IT ALL UP IN A BOW

"To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others."
-Tony Robbins

Expertise will get you in front of the right people. Everyone wants to talk to an authority. A story that resonates with their needs will keep you engaged with the communities in which your prospects work. Listening to their needs and understanding their unique situation and framing the solution in a way that answers their concerns will keep you there long enough to build those relationships.

There is more to all of this than we can cover in a single white paper. The goals and objectives are easy to state, but the tasks you need to get there are standardized, though uniquely yours. There are many more steps to and specific tools and techniques to identify your market, understand the three needs of your prospect or client, show empathy and authority, give them a plan of action, and (most important of all) learn to be the guide. Always be the guide.

It is all about learning to answer the question, **"What's Your Story?"**. Call us today or visit us at www.shiftshapersstrategies.com to learn how we can help you define the story that will win clients, crush sales goals, and build your practice.

David A. Saltzman
What's your story?

David A. Saltzman
Chief Transformation Strategist

844.242.6438
david@shiftshapersstrategies.com
www.shiftshapersstrategies.com