

KATE MAREK

organizational storytelling

FOR LIBRARIANS

USING STORIES FOR
EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP



organizational storytelling FOR LIBRARIANS

USING STORIES FOR EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

KATE MAREK



AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
CHICAGO 2011

www.alastore.ala.org

Kate Marek is a professor at Dominican University's Graduate School of Library and Information Science, where she teaches in the areas of technology and policy. She has worked as a library consultant and in all types of library organizations, and she writes in the areas of libraries, technology, and teaching.

© 2011 by the American Library Association. Any claim of copyright is subject to applicable limitations and exceptions, such as rights of fair use and library copying pursuant to Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Act. No copyright is claimed in content that is in the public domain, such as works of the U.S. government.

Printed in the United States of America
15 14 13 12 11 5 4 3 2 1

While extensive effort has gone into ensuring the reliability of the information in this book, the publisher makes no warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein.

Note that any URLs referenced in this volume, which were valid at the time of first print publication, may have changed prior to electronic publication.

ISBN: 978-0-8389-1079-5

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Marek, Kate.

Organizational storytelling for librarians : using stories for effective leadership / Kate Marek.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8389-1079-5 (alk. paper)

1. Communication in library administration. 2. Storytelling. 3. Communication in organizations. 4. Leadership. I. Title.

Z678.M33 2011

025.1--dc22

2010033485

Cover design by Karen Sheets de Gracia. Text design in Georgia and Andika Basic by Chelsea McGorisk and Karen Sheets de Gracia.

♾️ This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (Permanence of Paper).

ALA Editions also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. For more information, visit the ALA Store at www.alastore.ala.org and select eEditions.

contents

Introduction ix

ONE	STORYTELLING RETOOLED	1
TWO	COMMUNICATING VISION AND VALUES	15
THREE	USING STORIES TO NAVIGATE CHANGE	29
FOUR	USING STORIES TO BUILD COMMUNITY	45
FIVE	TELLING STORIES THROUGH BUILDINGS	57
SIX	DEVELOPING THE SKILL SET	75

Resources 93

Index 99

introduction

I HAVE BEEN a proponent of using literature to teach for many years. The value of the vicarious experience we get from fiction is endless; I learned, for example, about American frontier history from Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House books and about the English countryside (and about healing) from Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*. As an adult I continue to learn so much about people and cultures through literature. We can extend that learning through discussion, applying the characters' successes and failures to our own understanding of life.

A strong parallel to my work with the power of literature is the sister concept of the power of narrative. The fine points of the similarities and differences between literature, fiction, and narrative are not important here. What is important is that my awareness of narrative led to a discovery of a fairly new facet of this huge part of life that is story: the power of narrative within the daily workings of an organization, and particularly for enhancing leadership.

Today organizational storytelling is an area of keen interest in the business community. Stephen Denning and Annette Simmons are among the best-known authors in this area, both of whom came from strong business backgrounds and who themselves began only hesitantly to embrace the power of story for corporate America. Denning has been especially successful in building a corporate following, although his background with the World

Bank did not exactly grease the skids for his initial forays into the use of story at work. He consistently retells his experience of the first time he ditched his PowerPoint graphs for a personal narrative to describe a significant World Bank service gap. He was understandably quite panicked about trying something so dramatically different in front of a very large and traditional World Bank executive audience, and yet he knew he needed to find a new way to communicate. His brief story about the impact of a knowledge network for medical information, told through the experiences of individuals rather than through numbers, was wildly successful at changing the direction of World Bank policies and helped forever change the development of knowledge management at the bank.¹

As I continued to read more of the literature on organizational storytelling, I knew it made sense, and I knew others could do it effectively. I wasn't convinced, however, that I could do it. I decided to try. Rather than pouring out my life story, which I think is a fear we all have when we think about opening up or talking about ourselves, I decided to tell pieces of my "library story." I brought to my mind memories of library experiences throughout my life, both good and bad. I worked on converting those memories into language and images, so I could both talk about the memory and paint a verbal picture for my listeners.

I chose a few stories and a few captive audiences of graduate library school students, and I began to experiment. Almost immediately, the difference was amazing. For example, rather than tell a group of incoming students where I got my degree and what library jobs I had had, I told them of an early experience as a young girl, visiting a public library in the summer with my mother. I described the harsh Texas heat and the cool, air-conditioned public library, and the sense of wonder and security I had in the midst of the books and the building. Each time I told the story, I thought of more connections from my experience to what I wanted to convey to my students: that I had been a beneficiary of a strong library system in a country of strong libraries, but that as I grew older I realized this was not the case for all citizens, for all communities, or for all nations. I could use the same story to talk about "library as place," the changing nature of library services, and other timely issues. And as I understood my own story more, my listeners also understood more about libraries.

The power of story is within us all, and it is not just about telling tall tales or classical myths from past cultures. It is about making connections with

people, with ideas, and with values. It is about communicating, and about inspiration. And what is so wonderful is that each of us can do it.

This book is about telling stories in the workplace. Librarians have a unique opportunity to learn from the growing body of literature regarding organizational storytelling. We are lovers of stories, but often we overlook the stories that are closest to us—our own stories, the stories of those with whom we work, and the stories of those we serve.

When I began to tell students about my experiences as a little girl in a wonderful public library children's department, I used it to launch a discussion of core values such as equity of access and intellectual freedom. In the workplace, the same story could be used to generate a brainstorming session about planning a redesign of children's services, the circulation workflow, or the latchkey children's policy. When we tell stories and, just as important, when we listen to the stories of those around us, things just seem to matter more. We enhance our understanding and form bonds. This, in turn, makes a better workplace, which makes happier and more creative workers and generates an ongoing cycle of quality improvement.

Welcome to *Organizational Storytelling for Librarians: Using Stories for Effective Leadership*. This book will help librarians understand new ways to use the skills we have developed, or perhaps left undeveloped, to communicate with each other and with our communities. I will share with you some of what I've learned about organizational storytelling from the key thinkers in this area, including David Boje, Stephen Denning, and Annette Simmons. Then I will look at some unique applications of organizational storytelling for libraries, from sharing values to building community. I will also relate examples I found through interviewing librarians who are excellent organizational storytellers. Those conversations were key in the development of my thinking about this topic and play an important part in the book. The last chapter will focus on building your own storytelling skills—including types of stories, stories that match specific situations, story triggers, and building your own organizational storytelling skills.

Note

1. Stephen Denning, "Storytelling for Organizational Change," in *The Springboard* (Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2001), xiii–xxiii.

chapter one

STORYTELLING RETOOLED

*Not everything that can be counted counts,
and not everything that counts can be counted.*

—Albert Einstein

WHAT DO YOU think of when you hear the word *storytelling*? Chances are you typically think of something like Little Red Riding Hood, Anansi the Spider, or Peter Rabbit. We grew up with these stories. Libraries are by their very definitions repositories of stories, and many librarians tell stories as a key part of their jobs. We use stories with children to entertain, to teach, and to share culture. We understand the value of stories for children.

We are also surrounded by stories in daily life. When we wake up in the morning, we remember the stories in our dreams. We turn on the news or open the newspaper and hear stories of events and people beyond our front door. We look out our window and see elements of story everywhere—a woman feeding the squirrels, the young neighbor polishing her new car, the student walking to school with his heavy backpack. Once at work, we chat with friends and coworkers about the previous evening, the news, the upcoming day. And yet all these stories embedded in us and surrounding us typically have no legitimate place in our modern workday.

There are applications of storytelling beyond the children's services area in our libraries. Stories have great potential to inform, enlighten,

persuade, and connect among adults as well as with children. Librarians are lovers of stories, but often we overlook the stories that are closest to us—our own stories, the stories of those with whom we work, and the stories of those we serve. Stories add richness to our lives and help us make sense of the world.

We have many opportunities to use stories in our daily work life. We can learn to *retool* storytelling, based on what we know to be true about stories and what we can learn anew about their potential in organizations, where stories can be shared for communication and community building. Organizational storytelling also involves *listening* to the stories of others—the people with whom we work, our patrons, and our funders. For librarians, there is no need to explain the value of storytelling. However, we can learn to bring storytelling out of the children’s room and into our daily interactions with each other, our patrons, and our funders. We can learn to use the daily stories of our lives to enhance our organizational lives. Telling stories is essentially about sharing experiences and thus making connections with people, ideas, and values; *organizational storytelling* is about learning how to do that effectively in the workplace.

Organizational Storytelling

Although at the time I didn’t see the explicit connection, I experienced an early realization of the communicative power of organizational storytelling when reading *The Social Life of Information* shortly after it was published in 2000.¹ This academic but quite readable book emphasizes the essential *human* quality of information as it is shared. *The Social Life of Information* is where I first read John Seely Brown’s story of the Xerox Corporation’s technician staff members, through whom research demonstrated the essential business value of shared coffee breaks. With time together over coffee, technicians could chat informally about their work. This sharing was significantly more effective for developing copier maintenance skills than the typical process charts or printed manuals. Research clearly demonstrated the greater economic value of employee sharing over closely regulated, quantifiable performance measures. This vignette was a “boring” example of organizational storytelling—after all, these were technicians, talking about the inner workings of photocopy machines—but in a sense the very dry content of those

shared stories made the example even more powerful. It was the human sharing of common experience that brought power to the information, and that made it relevant to the teller and to the listener.

There is a second example of story in that book that has stuck with me for the decade since I read it and one that I use continually in my teaching. It's a story that coauthor Paul Duguid told about his experience in a closed-stacks archive, where he was reviewing 250-year-old primary documents for a research project. Duguid, who suffers from asthma, was careful to cover his nose and mouth with a scarf while working with the dusty documents. One day, a fellow researcher in the study room (to Duguid's horror, as he recalls it) spent his time with a box of letters not reading them, but instead holding each letter to his face, drawing deep breaths through his nose to capture its smell. Here's what Duguid writes about their conversation:

Choking behind my mask, I asked him what he was doing. He was, he told me, a medical historian. (A profession to avoid if you have asthma.) He was documenting outbreaks of cholera. When that disease occurred in a town in the eighteenth century, all letters from that town were disinfected with vinegar to prevent the disease from spreading. By sniffing for the faint traces of vinegar that survived 250 years and noting the date and source of the letter, he was able to chart the progress of cholera outbreaks.²

I have used this story repeatedly when talking about digitization in libraries. It is a perfect illustration of the potential losses we face when we digitize—what information we lose when we move from physical to electronic and how we may be totally unaware and unsuspecting about those potential losses.

Although these two examples from *The Social Life of Information* are very different and are used to make different points, they are connected by their effective illustrations of the power of story. The first example shows the essential quality of human sharing within every workplace and for every job. Rather than the coffee break strictly being a “soft” investment for happy workers, structuring informal conversation in the workplace is also a sound business investment for knowledge management. The second example of the vinegar-scented primary documents shows the power of a simple story to illustrate a point, to facilitate learning, and to stick in one's memory over time. Quite frankly, I don't remember much else from *The Social Life of Information*, although it is on my bookshelf and I do still take it down and

reread various sections. But I remember these two stories quite clearly and share them frequently.

These points about the power of story (the importance of human sharing in the workplace and the “stickiness”³ of story) are made over and over in the emerging body of work on organizational storytelling. There is growing acknowledgment that our twentieth-century emphasis on mechanics, logic, and the quantitative should be revised in light of twenty-first-century social norms and behaviors. Remember Dagwood’s workplace from the *Blondie* comic strip? That was an environment reflective of our twentieth-century paradigm: hierarchical, task-oriented, pretty boring, and governed by a patriarchal boss who could fire at will or on a whim.

Much has changed in the twenty-first-century workplace and for the twenty-first-century worker. Technology has facilitated greater connections, but much of that has been at the expense of lost human face-to-face interaction. We are awash with data, information, and connections, but we sometimes suffer from a lack of that human touch. As Annette Simmons puts it, “People float in an ocean of data and disconnected facts that overwhelm them with choices. . . . In this ocean of choice, a meaningful story can feel like a life preserver that tethers us to something safe, important, or at the very least more solid than disembodied voices begging for attention.”⁴ It’s not just about *telling* stories in the workplace, but rather an acknowledgment and understanding of the deeper significance stories have in the role of community and basic human interaction. Stories explain, inspire, comfort, and in general help us understand the complexities of daily life in small and large ways.

Stories for Libraries, Stories for Leadership, and Stories for Building Community

Many people in the business community and from various academic disciplines are writing in the broad area of organizational narrative. There are applications in communications, social sciences, decision-making, and leadership, to name just a few. I will focus on three broad categories of organizational storytelling: stories for organizations (for our purposes, stories for libraries), stories for leadership, and stories for building community.

Stories for Libraries: The Organizational Narrative

I love to use literature in my teaching, and I do so as often as possible. For example, *Fahrenheit 451* and *1984* are excellent tools to stimulate deep thought and discussion when exploring issues of intellectual freedom, privacy, and information in a democracy. Josephine Tey's *The Daughter of Time* is another book I use when teaching about the information profession. It's a mystery novel about England's Richard III, exploring the unsolved murder of Richard's two young nephews, heirs to his throne. Was Richard III their murderer? Or was it his successor Henry VII? How much is historical fact, and how much of Richard's story do we believe based on accounts written by historians in the employ of the next king? (Hint: Henry Tudor, later Henry VII, defeated Richard in battle to ascend to the throne. Richard and Henry were not on friendly terms.) Whatever you believe about the death of the princes in the tower, *The Daughter of Time* is a book that makes a clear point: whoever controls the information gets to tell the story, and whoever gets to tell the story wins. This is true just as much in the workplace as it is in history. Learn to capture and even construct your own story, as well as your organization's story.

You can call this anything from “premise control”⁵ to “spin” to “taking the bull by the horns,” but basically the idea is that you want to control your own story and the story of your organization. First, you must be aware that there is a story out there, whether you are the one telling it or not!

Stories are among our earliest forms of communication. The ancient cave paintings, Greek and Roman myths, and biblical parables are all forms of stories that inform, teach, and inspire toward action. It is through these types of stories that cultural norms and modes of behavior are transmitted from generation to generation. So, too, are organizational behavior norms transmitted at work, through personal storytelling and through larger stories, sometimes referred to as “organizational narratives.”

An organization is essentially a social system, made up of workers who come from a wide variety of backgrounds and belief systems. Karl Weick, a scholar in organizational theory, writes about the challenges of “sensemaking” within the contemporary organization.⁶ One method of sensemaking is through the construction of an organizational narrative. A classic organizational narrative is described by David Boje as the BME (beginning, middle, and end) retrospective narrative.⁷

The BME narrative is just what it sounds like—a cohesive story about an organization from its origins to its current state, with the metaphorical “end” sometimes used as a vision narrative. Boje tells us that a good retrospective narrative is very important to an organization; it tells us all about the organization’s (or in our case, the library’s) mission and early days. It will include some heroes, such as the founding mothers and fathers whose ideas still guide us today. The narrative might also include some key events in the library’s life, such as a successful censorship challenge or the construction of a new building. Memories of converting the card catalog to the OPAC would be in many of those library narratives. What else? Think about your own organization’s narrative, or in other words, your library’s life story. Who are the heroes of your library’s story? What are some of the key events from your library’s past, and how might you weave those into a compelling contemporary tale that will help you move forward?

Sylvia Jenkins is the vice president of academic affairs at Moraine Valley Community College. When I interviewed her for this book, she was Moraine Valley’s dean of learning resources and academic development. In that role, she worked with librarians, library users, and faculty across the college. As the director of the library, Sylvia knew her organization’s story and used it intentionally as she led (and continues to lead) toward the future.

I tell new people as they come into the organization that even though we want to move forward, because that’s what we’re all about—advancing, improving, and moving forward—it’s very important to know where you’ve come from in order to make that happen. I tell new faculty members especially that I believe that they are very fortunate to be able to work at a college like Moraine Valley, that it’s a very forward-thinking, progressive school—but it didn’t happen without hard work: hard work that was put in by other faculty members who came before them. It’s important that they know about those faculty members—faculty members who didn’t mind unpacking the boxes, and taking the desks out, and putting the computers on the desks. You know, those things didn’t happen with them staying at home and dictating or delegating it to somebody else—you had to show up and do it. And the reason why I think it’s important is that I want to impress upon them the expectations we have for them: yes, you’ve been hired to teach, and yes, you have a base load of classes that you have to teach—but making an organization what it is requires more than

that. It requires you participating, it requires you doing things outside of that fifteen credit-hour base load that you have. And if you want the organization to be what you think it should be, you have to participate.⁸

In the example above, Sylvia Jenkins uses the organizational narrative to communicate organizational values and to express cultural behavioral norms. I include more examples of this kind in chapter 2, which focuses on using organizational storytelling to communicate values and vision. You can also use an organizational narrative very effectively externally. Doing this well can be powerful marketing. Martha Hale's article "Stories in the Workplace" provides an excellent introduction to this idea for librarians. "Stories provide a human face to library advocacy, orientation, and discovery."⁹ Think of a component of your own organizational narrative that you'd like to highlight and how you'd like to use it.

For example, say your academic library prides itself on its strong information literacy program. Could you use that internal pride to create an external marketing program, simply by telling your information literacy story more effectively? Get the students involved in creating a video, or write a short vignette about one person's experience in an information literacy session. Our stories evolve as we tell them and as more people get involved in the telling/listening/retelling process.

Stories for Leadership

Storytelling in the workplace can also be highly effective at this more personal level, particularly in the area of leadership. Much of the literature about organizational storytelling focuses on how leaders can learn to use stories more effectively to communicate. When thinking of leadership, by the way, include yourself, no matter what your position or job title in the library. Building leadership skills is something everyone should consider, because leadership comes from all across the organization.

Who I Am, and Why I Am Here

One of the best ways for a leader to connect to her audience is to share parts of herself: where she comes from, what brought her to this profession and this particular job, and what her values are. Sharing personal stories (both

good ones and not-so-good ones) makes the leader more human. Chances are that parts of the leader's story will connect with the listeners. Two of Annette Simmons's "Six Stories You Need to Know How to Tell" are in this category: the "who I am" stories and the "why I am here" stories.¹⁰ And as Simmons says, if you don't tell them these things, people will form their own assumptions and tell their stories about you. You can control what people think about who you are and why you are there simply by telling them—by sharing your story.

A wonderful example of this can be found in Danny Meyer's book *Setting the Table*.¹¹ In this memoir, Meyer tells his personal story about life as a restaurateur—from his early youthful inspirations to the current group of highly successful restaurants he owns and manages. Throughout the book Meyer talks about things he's proud of as well as some missteps he's made along the way; he highlights lessons learned through experience and through mentorship. The essence of Meyer's book, however, is not the field of restaurant management. His real focus is on customer service and community building, no matter what the field of endeavor. For this reason alone I would highly recommend the book to librarians. But in terms of storytelling, Meyer's book is also a wonderful illustration of the power of "who I am" and "why I am here" stories; in telling us his story, Meyer communicates to us his passion for food and for people, and we are inspired by his lessons. I have included some great examples of "who I am" and "why I am here" stories from the field of librarianship in this book, particularly where I talk about using stories to communicate values within our own organizations.¹²

Springboard Stories

Another early discovery I made in the realm of organizational storytelling was Stephen Denning's "springboard" story. Denning was an executive at the World Bank in the 1990s when he discovered the communicative potential of storytelling. He wanted to share his excitement about possible growth areas for the World Bank in the area of global knowledge sharing. This idea was not selling well at all, and Denning was struggling mightily to give life to the new concept. By chance, Denning started telling a brief vignette about a health worker in Zambia. That health worker was getting lifesaving information from a distant information source, via the Internet. But, as Denning told the story to key decision-makers, the World Bank, despite huge potential to facilitate information sharing in developing countries, *wasn't in* that Zambia success story. "*But what if it were?*" Denning asked.¹³

The brief story didn't have the typical story structure—no plot, no development, no real hero, and no clear ending. What it did provide was a springboard for the listener—the “*what if we were . . .*” that opened minds to new possibilities and gave each of those minds the freedom to imagine independently. Denning writes:

A tiny story—29 words or 200 bytes—is less a vehicle for communication of large amounts of information and more a tiny fuse that ignites a new story in the listeners' minds, which establishes new connections and patterns in the listeners' existing information, attitudes, and perceptions.¹⁴

Using Stories to Persuade

Persuasion is an interesting concept. Sometimes it's about getting someone to accept a new idea, and sometimes it's about actually changing people's minds about a firmly held belief. (“That won't work here” could be a firmly held belief.) What persuades you to accept a new idea or to change your mind?

Many people would say that this is based on personality type; an individual makes decisions either through intuition or through logic, for example. But most people do a little of both, and so to base a proposal on logic makes good sense. This is of course what we have learned to do in the business world, where each proposal for a new idea must be supported with hard evidence from feasibility studies, statistics, and budget projections.

But more and more there is an acknowledgment that you must engage a listener's heart as well as his mind if you truly want to generate commitment for change or for a new idea. Stories pull the listener in and make individual human connections that data and information alone cannot make.

Confirmation Bias

Recently we have been hearing more about the concept of “confirmation bias,” where a person tends to seek out information that confirms his or her established beliefs. In the information field, we have been worried about this from the perspective of “personal information filters”—where technology does indeed make it quite easy to receive very specialized packages of information based on a person's profiled interests and biases.

Stephen Denning reports on a 1979 study that actually demonstrates people's tendency to read information from their established perspective, and then to interpret that information as supporting their point of view.¹⁵

Subsequent research actually studied brain scans of research participants as they reviewed partisan political information. These scans showed—quite interestingly—very little activity from the parts of the brain associated with reasoning and increased activity in brain circuits connected to human emotion. As the experiment proceeded, data showed that the parts of the brain associated with rewards also became active once the participant found a way to match the information to an existing bias; the resulting pleasure sensors stimulated by the brain once again reinforced the original bias.

The confirmation bias helps explain why the traditional approach of trying to persuade people by giving them reasons to change isn't a good idea if the audience is at all skeptical, cynical, or hostile. If a leader offers reasons at the outset of a communication to such an audience, the maneuver will likely activate the confirmation bias and the reasons for change will be reinterpreted as reasons not to change. This occurs without the thinking part of the brain being activated: the audience becomes even more deeply dug into its current contrary position. Reasons don't work at the outset, because the audience is neither listening nor thinking.¹⁶

What Denning proposes, then, is a three-step process: (1) get the audience's attention; (2) elicit desire for a different future; and (3) reinforce with reasons. Stories are effective at each of these stages.

1. Get the audience's attention.

Denning suggests a negative story here. Frequently your audience is not completely focused on your presentation; they may be daydreaming about lunch, grocery shopping, or piles of unfinished work. You want to grab their attention, and a negative story has been shown to be effective for this result. Denning suggests stories about the organization's or individuals' problems, and perhaps even how those problems are getting worse. Another option is to tell a story about adversity and possibly connect that adversity to a current situation.

2. Elicit desire for a different future.

Negative stories get attention, but they also generate worry and anxiety.¹⁷ And while a negative story will grab the audience's attention, a positive story is more likely to inspire them to new action. These positive stories can be small or large, but most frequently they connect in some way to a similar problem

in the past where there has been a positive outcome due to a new idea. For libraries, that might mean telling a story about how another library successfully moved to a team-based leadership model or successfully completed a bond initiative for increased library staffing and services.

3. Reinforce with reasons.

The last step in the process is to give the audience supporting data and information to confirm the need for a change. Even this stage of the process can be accomplished with stories. Denning suggests

- stories of what the change is, often seen through the eyes of some typical characters who will be affected by the change
- the story of how the change will be implemented, showing in simple steps how we will get from here to there
- the story of why the change will work, showing the underlying causal mechanisms that make the change virtually inevitable.¹⁸

This three-step process of getting the audience's attention, eliciting desire for a different future, and reinforcing with reasons is an excellent template for working with people rather than against them, engaging their emotions as well as their logic when it comes to leading toward a new vision. Emotions are not sufficient without logic, just as logic alone will not create passionate commitment to a new idea.

Chapter 3, "Using Stories to Navigate Change," will look more closely at using organizational storytelling to help facilitate change. Getting people to truly listen to you is the first step, and engaging their emotions is an essential part of this process.

Getting the Story Right

There is a caveat to all this. When using examples told through stories, it's essential that you get the story right. Beware of the heartwarming story that turns out to be not quite true or just a little off. Politicians often make this kind of mistake, and today's information technologies make disconfirmation quite easy. For example, Al Gore was burned by this in the 2000 presidential campaign, when he told the story of a young Florida girl in an overcrowded classroom. Gore hoped to generate support for his educational funding plans, but instead, due to some subtle but definite inaccuracies in his

story, the whole thing backfired. See Denning's book *The Secret Language of Leadership* for an informative description of Gore's missteps in the area of storytelling, as well as how Gore eventually became a masterful storyteller in his work on global climate change.

The takeaway for us is the danger in telling a story poorly, or worse, a story that is inaccurate. Gore's inaccuracies were just enough to totally discredit his message, causing subsequent collateral damage way beyond the lost potential of that single story. The message actually becomes destructive to your cause, as your credibility is completely lost. Check your facts if you are using real stories about real people.

Reframing

Check your *frame* as well.¹⁹ An effective way to present information is to reframe it, or see it from a different point of view. Each person comes to a situation with a backstory and with her own filters, and each person interprets a situation based on those filters. Frequently, a leader can frame a situation in a way that provides better control (or spin!) on an organizational event. An example of this comes from the book *The Art of Possibility*:

A shoe factory sends two marketing scouts to a region of Africa to study the prospects for expanding business. One sends back a telegram saying: SITUATION HOPELESS STOP NO ONE WEARS SHOES. The other writes back triumphantly: GLORIOUS BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY STOP THEY HAVE NO SHOES. Each scout comes to the scene with his own perspective; each returns telling a different tale.²⁰

Framing a story can be quite powerful; how we frame a story significantly affects how the content is received. This example shows how a subtle shift in perception and attitude can produce completely different results.

But again, beware of the inauthentic story or frame. Here's a pretty positive spin that might sound good, but would in truth be quite offensive:

Several hundred happy passengers arrived safely in New York after the *Titanic's* maiden voyage.

Stories for Building Community: Effective Listening

True influences come from knowing the listener's story. This holds true for the people inside the organization, as well as knowing your customers' stories. Consider a different point of view; walk in another's shoes. A powerful example is the story of Oz told from the "bad" witch's point of view; Gregory Maguire's novel *Wicked* helps us to see that there can be a whole new way of looking at something we took for granted. Listening to different points of view adds a sense of respect for the listeners, providing a deep acknowledgment of their value. And building connections through listening to others' stories truly builds community.

Professional storyteller Jack Maguire describes the "three Rs" of good listening:

- Remain silent until the other person has finished speaking.
- Respond with appropriate verbal and nonverbal cues.
- Remind yourself afterward of what you've heard that day.²¹

Stories have tremendous potential to connect us to each other. Sharing aspects of your own life with others, and truly listening to their stories as well, connects us to each other in powerful ways. It is important to create opportunities for sharing stories both within the organization and for your library's customers. Chapter 4 of this book focuses on the important topic of community building through storytelling. First, however, I will explore the potential of stories for sharing personal and organizational values in chapter 2 and using stories to help navigate change in chapter 3.

Notes

1. John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid, *The Social Life of Information* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2000).
2. *Ibid.*, 173–74.
3. "Stickiness" refers to the ability of an idea to remain vital over time. See, for example, *Made to Stick*, by Chip Heath and Dan Heath. The authors include "stories" as their sixth principle of a successful idea, or an idea that is "made to stick."
4. Annette Simmons, *Whoever Tells the Best Story Wins: How to Use Your Own Stories to Communicate with Power and Impact* (New York: American Management Association, 2007), 5.

5. Karl Weick, *Sensemaking in Organizations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995), 170.
6. Weick describes “sensemaking” as a complex process that includes placing events within a context or framework, comprehending, and constructing meaning. See Weick, *Sensemaking in Organizations*.
7. David Boje, *Storytelling Organizations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 9–11.
8. Sylvia Jenkins, interviewed by Kate Marek, July 7, 2009.
9. Martha Hale, “Stories in the Workplace,” *Public Libraries* 42, no. 3 (May/June 2002): 166.
10. A complete list of Annette Simmons’s “Six Stories You Need to Know How to Tell,” from *The Story Factor*, can be found in chapter 6 of the present volume.
11. Danny Meyer, *Setting the Table: The Transforming Power of Hospitality in Business* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006).
12. See particularly chapter 2, “Communicating Vision and Values.”
13. See chapter 3, “Using Stories to Navigate Change,” for a more extensive discussion of springboard stories.
14. Stephen Denning, *The Springboard* (Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2001), 82.
15. Stephen Denning, *The Secret Language of Leadership: How Leaders Inspire Action through Narrative* (San Francisco: John Wiley, 2007), 23–38.
16. *Ibid.*, 26.
17. *Ibid.*, 33.
18. *Ibid.*, 36.
19. “Framing” an idea or issue puts a specific focus on one aspect of it, such as when you frame a particular aspect of a work of art. Adjusting your frame changes your perspective in some way, whether it be a subtle change or a broader one.
20. Rosamund Zander and Benjamin Zander, *The Art of Possibility* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 9.
21. Jack Maguire, *The Power of Personal Storytelling: Spinning Tales to Connect With Others* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1998), 231.

index

A

Abergel, Ronni, 52
accuracy in stories, 12–13, 77
action and springboard stories, 78,
82–83
Agora project, 49–51
analyze-think-change model,
30–32
Anthony, Carolyn, 19–20, 21–22, 89
architects, working with, 60–61
Aristotelian story structure, 82
Armstrong, David, 23
The Art of Possibility (Zander and
Zander), 12
artifacts in personal stories, 27
audience
getting attention of, 10, 32
and personal interpretation of
stories, 90
for practice storytelling, 81
understanding of, 78
authenticity in stories, 23, 41, 77

B

Berry, Louise Parker, 71
Block, Peter, 46–48
BME (beginning, middle, end)
narrative, 5–6, 16–17
Boekesteijn, Erik, 49
Boje, David, 5–6
Boogaard, Geert van den, 49
brevity, need for, 90
Bridges, William, 41
Brown, John Seely, 2–3
Buckley, Don, 62

C

case studies as stories, 82
cautionary tales, 35–38
Cerritos (Calif.) Public Library, 61–64
change, 29–44
honoring the past, 41–43
models of, 30–34
and overcoming confirmation
bias, 11

change (*cont.*)
 and reframing, 40–41
 as result of emotions, 31
 stories for, 34–40
 children’s spaces, themes for,
 63–64
 coffee breaks, sharing stories at,
 2–3
 collaboration, fostering, 83
 collecting stories, 90
 “communicating who you are”
 stories, 83
 See also “Who I Am” stories
 community building, 45–55
 and collective transformation,
 47–48
 and information commons, 67
 need for, 45–47
 as opportunity for libraries, 48–51
 use of stories for, 2
 community stories and library
 buildings, 72–73
*Community: The Structure of
 Belonging* (Block), 46
 comprehensibility in springboard
 stories, 40
 confirmation bias, overcoming, 9–11
 connectedness
 in springboard stories, 39
 using stories, x–xi
 conversation, continuing, 33–34, 59
 cornerstones, objects for, 26
Coyote Wisdom (Mehl-Madrona), 87
 crisis events
 in personal values, 27
 in sacred bundle, 24, 26
 customer service, stories about, 21

D

Darien (Conn.) Public Library, 60,
 69–72
 data and change, 30
The Daughter of Time (Tey), 5
 Davis, Donald, 88
 Deiss, Kathryn, 43
 Demas, Sam, 65
 Denning, Stephen
 on confirmation bias, 9–10
 key steps in language of leadership,
 32–34
 on springboard stories, 8–9, 37–39
 start in storytelling, ix–x
 on types of stories, 82–84
 “values-in-action” stories, 22–23
 desire for a different future, eliciting,
 10–11, 32–33
 details, management of, 90
Digital Storytelling Cookbook
 (Lambert), 88
 Disney, Walt, 61–62
 diversity, advantages of, 47
 DOK Library Concept Center,
 49–50
 drafts of stories, 80
 Duguid, Paul, 2

E

emotions, appealing to
 and change, 30, 31
 and confirmation bias, 10
 and design of physical space, 58
 and honoring the past, 41
 events
 in personal values stories, 27
 in sacred bundle stories, 24, 26

F

- fables, 37
- fear as motivator, 36–37
- feelings. *See* emotions
- The Fifth Discipline* (Senge), 15
- firefighters, story about, 35–36, 39–40
- framing. *See* reframing
- future, eliciting desire for a different
 - future, 10–11, 32–33

G

- Garguilo, Terrence, 79
- Geer, Jaap van de, 49
- Gisolfi, Peter, 70
- Glass, Ira, 89
- goals of storytelling, 78
- Gore, Al, 12–13
- grapevine, office, use of, 84
- Gray, Alan, 70
- Great Books discussions, 19, 89
- The Great Good Place* (Oldenberg), 58
- grief, stages of, 41

H

- healing stories, ix, 87
- heart, need to engage, 9
 - See also* emotions, appealing to
 - The Heart of Change* (Kotter and Cohen), 34
- Hench, John, 61–62
- heroes
 - and communicating personal values, 22, 27
 - in retrospective narratives, 6
 - in sacred bundle stories, 24–25
- human sharing in workplace, 4
- humor, 90

I

- “I Know What You are Thinking”
 - stories, 86–87
- IDs, requirement for, stories about, 23, 31–32
- imagination
 - in leadership stories, 84
 - and library buildings, 64
 - and springboard stories, 39, 40
- inclusion of all members of
 - organization, 17–18
- indexing of stories, 79, 88
- institutional commitment, stories
 - about, 25
- intellectual freedom, stories about, 20
- isolationism, 47

J

- Jenkins, Sylvia, 6–7, 18–19, 20–21
- journaling, 78–79
 - See also* reflection

K

- knowledge, sharing of, 84
- Kotter, John, 30, 34, 37
- Krista Tippett on Being* (radio program), 89

L

- Lambert, Joe, 88
- leadership stories
 - leading into the future, 84
 - and sacred bundle stories, 16–17
 - uses of, 7–12
- legacy stories and communicating with
 - community, 35
- Libeskind, Daniel, 57

library as place, 50, 58–59, 70
 library buildings, 57–74
 Cerritos (Calif.) Public Library, 61–64
 Darien Library, 70–72
 design of, 60–61
 Loyola University, Chicago, 67–72
 restoration of historic buildings, 64–66
 St. Paul Central Library, 64–67
 as story, 57–58, 72
 as “third place,” 50, 58–59, 70
 traditional feeling in, 68, 70–71
 lifelong learning, stories about, 19
 Lipman, Doug, 80–81
 listening to stories of others
 benefits of, 2, 13
 and building communication, 27
 and developing storytelling skills, 76–77
 literacy, stories about, 7, 33
 Living Library project, 51–55
 logic in persuasive stories, 9
 losses, honoring, 41–43
 Loyola University Chicago, 66–69

M

Maguire, Gregory, 13
 Maguire, Jack, 13, 77, 78, 88
 “main street” story line, 63, 70
Managing by Storying Around
 (Armstrong), 23
 Mehl-Madrona, Lewis, 87
 memories as story triggers, 88
 memorization of stories, 80
 metaphor as story, 87
 Meyer, Danny, 8

Microsoft Surface table, 50
 Moraine Valley Community College, 6–7, 18–19
 morals, stories with, 23
 “most important things” (MITs) in stories, 80–81

N

naming of spaces, 60, 69, 72
 narrative, power of, ix, 5–6
 negative stories and overcoming
 confirmation bias, 10–11
 Netherlands libraries, 49–51
 Neuhauser, Peg, 17–18, 22
 newsletters, communication of stories on, 35
 nonverbal cues and listening, 13, 77
 notetaking, 78–79

O

objections, defusing, 86–87
 objects in personal stories, 27
 Oldenberg, Ray, 58
 organizational behavior norms, 5
 organizing personal stories, 79
Our Iceberg Is Melting (Kotter and Rathgeber), 37

P

palace for the people, library as, 70–71
 paper sniffing story, 3
 parables and communicating values, 20, 22, 81, 83
 Pearson, Waynn, 61
 penguins, story about, 37
 personal stories
 and building trust, 83

- style of, 90
- use of by author, x
- personal values
 - building stories of, 26–27
 - and leadership, 20–22
- persuasion using stories, 9
- photocopier repair technicians,
 - stories of, 2, 82, 84
- photographs as story triggers, 88
- physical objects in sacred bundle, 26
- point of view, different, 13
- positive stories and overcoming
 - confirmation bias, 10–11
- The Power of Personal Storytelling* (Maguire), 88
- practice in storytelling, 81
- protagonist n springboard stories,
 - 39–40
- Putnam, Robert, 46

Q

- quiet, spaces for, 71

R

- radio broadcasts, storytelling on, 89
- real-life stories, 34–35
- reasoning, appeals to, 11, 30, 33
- reflection
 - after listening to others, 13, 77
 - and story triggers, 79
- reframing
 - benefits of, 40–41
 - and getting attention of audience,
 - 32
 - and moving forwards, 47
 - and overcoming confirmation bias,
 - 12, 14n19

- turning road blockers into tradition
 - bearers, 43
- rumors, defusing, 84

S

- sacred bundle stories
 - building stories, 24–26
 - and honoring the past, 43
 - for newcomers to organization, 77
 - and organizational values, 17–18
- Santa Monica (Calif.) Public Library,
 - 52–54
- scenario building, 87
- Scherer, Jeffrey, 58, 60, 65
- Seal, Robert, 66–67
- see-feel-change model, 30–32
- Senge, Peter, 15–16
- sensemaking, 5, 14n6
- Setting the Table* (Meyer), 8
- shared purpose, importance of, 47
- shared values and shared vision, 15–16
- Shera, Jesse, 71
- silence while listening, 13, 77
- Simmons, Annette
 - on listening, 77
 - on need for stories, 4
 - on storytelling style, 90
 - on types of stories, 85–87
 - “values-in-action” stories, 22–23
 - Who I Am stories and personal
 - values, 20
- Skokie (Illinois) Public Library, 19–20
- sniffing paper story, 3
- social capital, 46–47
- The Social Life of Information* (Brown), 2–3, 82
- Southwest Airlines and shared values, 16

spaces, social, libraries as, 57–58
Spartacus (movie) as story, 15–16, 85
 spin control, 5
 springboard stories
 and action, 37–40, 78, 82–83
 and leadership, 8–9
 and library buildings, 66–67
 St. Paul Central Library, 60, 64–66
 staff
 feelings of confidence and safety
 in, 27
 frontline, 31–32
 as heroes, 24–25
 ownership of stories, 42, 66
 and sacred bundle stories, 26
 and shared values, 28
 “stickiness” of story, 4, 13 n3
 stories, informal, 82
 stories for libraries, 5–7
The Story Factor (Simmons), 85
 story triggers, 79, 87–88
StoryCorps, 89
 storytelling in daily life, 1, 4
 strangeness in springboard stories, 39
 style in storytelling, 90
 surprise in springboard stories, 40

T

teaching stories, 86
 TED: Ideas Worth Spreading
 (website), 89
 Tey, Josephine, 5
 theme parks and library spaces, 61
 themes for library spaces, 60, 62–64
 themes in categorizing stories, 79
 third ear, listening with, 76–77, 91 n1
 “third place,” library as, 50, 58–59, 70

This American Life (radio program),
 89
 threats to change and honoring the
 past, 41–43
 TMI (too much information),
 avoidance of, 90
 tools for storytelling, 75–91
 tradition bearers, stories from, 43
 true stories as springboard stories, 39,
 40
 trust building
 and shared narratives, 47
 sharing personal values, 27
 and Who I Am stories, 78, 83
 twenty-first-century library spaces, 58,
 60–61, 71–72

U

urgency, sense of, creating, 30, 37
 USA PATRIOT Act, in sacred bundle
 story, 20
 user needs
 and library design, 58, 60, 68
 and planning, 87
 view of service, 49

V

values
 and library buildings, 65
 in sacred bundle stories, 25–26
 stories for transmitting, 83
 storytelling enhancing
 understanding and building
 bonds, xi
 “values-in-action” stories, 22–23, 86
 verbal cues and listening, 13, 77
 vision stories, 85–86

W

Walmart and shared values, 16
 Walt Disney theme parks, 61–62
 Weick, Karl, 5
 “What If We . . .” stories, 8–9, 39
 white water, constant, navigating, 29,
 44 n1

“Who I Am” stories, 7–8, 20, 78, 85
See also “communicating who you
 are” stories
 “Why I Am Here” stories, 7–8, 85
 Willms, Debbie, 64
 World Bank, stories about, x, 8,
 37–38

You may also be interested in

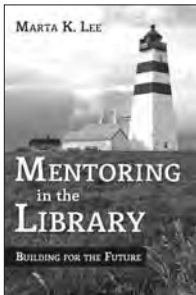


BE A GREAT BOSS: ONE YEAR TO SUCCESS

Catherine Hakala-Ausperk

To help library managers improve their skills and acumen, renowned speaker and trainer Catherine Hakala-Ausperk presents a handy self-study guide to the dynamic role of being a boss. This workbook is organized in 52 modules, designed to cover a year of weekly sessions but easily adaptable for any pace.

ISBN: 978-0-8389-1068-9 / 232 PGS / 8.5" × 11"

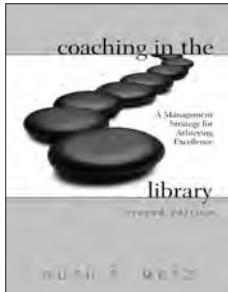


MENTORING IN THE LIBRARY: BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Marta K. Lee

Noted reference librarian and researcher Marta K. Lee offers librarians at all levels both her experience and her ideas about establishing a formal mentoring process at the library.

ISBN: 978-0-8389-3593-4 / 136 PGS / 6" × 9"



COACHING IN THE LIBRARY: A MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE, SECOND EDITION

Ruth F. Metz

Experienced librarian and coach Ruth Metz outlines a focused and results-oriented plan for achieving the best results from staff members through a coaching style of management.

ISBN: 978-0-8389-1037-5 / 120 PGS / 8.5" × 11"



SUCCESSION PLANNING IN THE LIBRARY: DEVELOPING LEADERS, MANAGING CHANGE

Paula M. Singer with Gail Griffith

Drawing on her expertise as a leading consultant on human resource issues in the library, Paula Singer addresses the often fraught issue of planning for change at all levels of an organization.

ISBN: 978-0-8389-1036-8 / 160 PGS / 8.5" × 11"

Order today at www.alastore.ala.org or 866-746-7252!

ALA Store purchases fund advocacy, awareness, and accreditation programs for library professionals worldwide.

You may also be
interested in



ORGANIZATIONAL STORYTELLING FOR LIBRARIANS

USING STORIES FOR EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Just as literature can be used for learning, the power of storytelling can be very effective when applied to leadership and management. Library expert and author **KATE MAREK** shows readers how they can use storytelling to communicate vision and values with

- A primer on how to develop storytelling skills
- Tips on how to use narratives to navigate change and build community
- Strategies for using your library's buildings and history to communicate shared goals

Applying solid management principles to a library setting, Marek provides the tools and explains the process of leading and managing through organizational storytelling.



AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION / alastore.ala.org
50 E. Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611
1 (866) SHOPALA (866) 746-7252



Scan this QR code to go to the
ALA Online Store from your
smartphone (app required).

ISBN 978-0-8389-1079-5



9 780838 910795