

-CXO- THE STORY TELLER

MAKE YOUR IDEAS RESONATE



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Introduction

“The great accomplishments of man have resulted from the transmission of ideas of enthusiasm.” Thomas Watson – Founder -IBM

“According to most studies, people's number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does that sound, right? This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy” – Jerry Seinfeld

An open Letter to Ceo's, Executive Directors and other Corner Office Inhabitants!

Storytelling is demonstrated to be the most effective tool to drive impact, celebrate successes and shape powerful narratives. They help us learn from failures and unify a team with vision, passion and a shared purpose. Story telling transforms a leader into an inspirational one. A man who affected World History with his skilful oration, the Ceo of the buzziest brand in the World with 35 companies, One of the World's richest men and savviest investor and a Woman who built New York's Largest Real Estate Company- All these outstanding people had one thing in common, they all considered themselves extremely poor story tellers. Sir Winston Churchill, Sir Richard Branson, Warren Buffett, Billionaire Barbara Corcoran respectively.

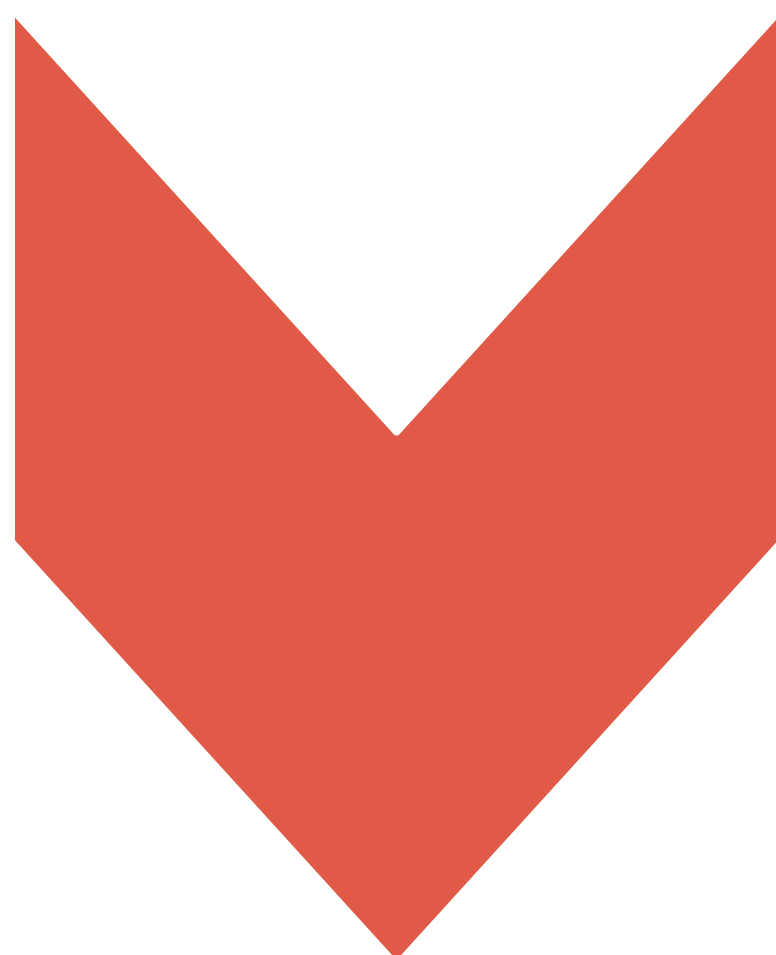
Through adroit hacks and resilience, they mastered the art of storytelling and enabled them to influence millions around the world.

We have all been there at some point in time – sweaty palms, raspy voice, going blank, ill-timed quips and so on. This is for the Leader speaker in all of us!

- Look around your corporate Landscape, all things being equal – The CXO Story teller has a solid advantage. We are the stories we hear and tell, a penchant for stories is what has shaped our dreams, thoughts and ideas. Any crucial conversation either at a board room or at a conference helps us mould and communicate a narrative to our listeners
- Mentally run through all the Leader speakers you have heard and count the number of you have been inspired or engaged, I am sure you can count these occasions on your fingertips.
- There is an appalling 70:20:10 speaker ratio in any conference! 10% turn out to be great speakers with great ideas, 20% -mediocre and 70% will make you reach for the snooze button.
- This is not a panacea for all leadership ills, a shallow or light weight won't be able to pull this purely on story telling skills, Storytelling skills are not a puff job. This is a process that works best “inside out”

- The ability to capture the heart and the head is possible only through the power of stories! It plays a very crucial role when the ask is a moonshot and you need to rouse the troops, instill confidence amongst peers and management. As the captain, when you alone can see the promised land, you have no choice, but to be the best storyteller you can be!
- CEO Speakers hardly get any feedback on their speaking skills and they have a fairly lax attitude toward the same (Dear Reader, I hope you don't belong to that tribe)
- Ideas are due to neurons firing away, the sad tragedy is an unfulfilled idea not because it is bad, but because its packaged in a way that does not move people. Story telling has two components:
 - Making your idea sticky
 - Narrating like a Rockstar

The Following framework will enable you to have a sound checklist to make your ideas resonate and equip you with inputs on narrative and style.





FIND THE CORE!

“Google provides access to the world’s information in one click” - Sergey Brin and Larry page’s pitch to Sequoia –

“If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it well” - Einstein

If there is one thing for you to say, what would that be? How can we craft a sticky idea and tell an excellent story? Your audience does not want to just listen, they want to experience, engage and endeavour! As a Speaker, that’s what you need to do!

What makes some ideas thrive and some ideas flounder? In the year 1893, more than 400 different versions of Cinderella were found around the world.

How does one get to the CORE?

- Proverbs, quotes, Fables -these ideas have thrived because of their anchoring on the Jungian archetypes that are in turn based on the collective unconscious, characters like the Hero, Villain, Mentor, Child, evil mother (step mother) etc. Archetypal images are characters that represent deeply fundamental human needs and desires. Search and anchor your idea on an archetype.

- Getting to the Core does not mean dumbing down- you must strip it down to its barest essentials.
- What is simple, but profound about your message?
- Contrast “Maximise stakeholder Value” with
- “Putting a man on the Moon” – JFK
- “Make a dent in the universe” – Steve Jobs
- “Think Different” – Apple
- “Just Do it” -Nike
- ‘What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas’ :)
- Force Prioritization – Don’t bury the lead, Dive into the core of your story early.
- Use a Schema – Explain a New concept by lifting off from a known concept. Ex. Uber –“ Everyone’s Private driver” In fact, Uber itself has become a zeitgeist for disintermediation. A housing portal describes itself as an Uber for housing, a Jet rental company – “an Uber for the skies” etc.
- Use Metaphors and Analogies – They generate new perceptions explanations and inventions. "A figure of speech that expresses an idea through the image of another object “- Jaguar (Speed, grace), Amazon (huge number of titles), Blue Fire –(Fire is Alchemy and Blue is about serenity and ethereal) etc
- Compact message with Insight – my own example – “I help Leaders do more, get more and be more”
- Can you describe your pitch in one sentence?- “I help Leaders become the best versions of themselves”

A person is standing on a concrete ledge, looking out over a calm lake towards a range of mountains under a blue sky with light clouds. A large, semi-transparent yellow circle is centered over the image, partially obscuring the person and the landscape. The text "DO THE UNEXPECTED" is written in a bold, pink, sans-serif font across the middle of the yellow circle.

**DO THE
UNEXPECTED**

“When Everyone zigs, you swagger”

“The Brain is a “lazy piece of meat”, you must find new and novel ways to help the brain perceive differently- Neuroscientist Gregory Burns

Overused tropes get painted into a blind spot including the line “when everyone zigs, you zag”. A good idea or story has to be postdictable as against predictable. When you make your final flourish and exit, the audience must be able to go back and look at all the clues you have given away.

Which of these animals are likely to cause more deaths in a year? Deer or sharks? Fact -In a year, Deer is 300% more likely to kill you than sharks.

How does one build Unexpectedness?

- Focus on two questions – How do I get Audience attention? How can I sustain it?
- Break a Pattern – It could be as simple as, if everyone speaks from the podium, mix it up and move to the centre of the stage or walk into the audience.
- Does your story generate surprise and interest? (Without being gimmicky) – leading to “planned unexpectedness”
- What is the Insight? Why is it counter intuitive? Without that, the audience will feel cheated.
- Break someone’s guessing machine – Play to the established fact and then, if you can – break it with your story. I use a version like **this**.
- Set relevant context in addition to an unexpected outcome. A super cool story, **read on**



BE CONCRETE

“Chocolate, I am sure is the concrete manifestation of Love” – Geneen Roth

Imagine an NGO that calls you up and asks you for money to put 100 kids from a modest background through school, would you lend some money? What if they were to call and talk to you about 6-year-old Naina, who loves books. Her father Hari ram is a daily wage labourer and her mother Rani works at a construction site. Their dream is to put her through school. Your money would help in changing Naina’s life – An amount that would cost you less than a Coffee a day for you! Which story would make you reach for your cheque book?

“If I look at the mass, I will never act. If I look at the one, I will “– Mother Theresa

Search out the best references for your story. What else can you talk about that strengthens the Velcro in their memory.

A close-up photograph of a white ceramic coffee cup filled with a latte, featuring a light brown heart-shaped latte art design. The cup sits on a matching white saucer. In the background, a brass coffee pot with a wooden handle is visible on a dark wooden surface. A large, semi-transparent blue circle is overlaid on the center of the image, containing the text "BE CREDIBLE" in bold red capital letters. To the right of the text, a small portion of a document is visible, showing the words "CONFIDENTIAL" and "8-11-10" in red and blue ink.

BE CREDIBLE

The most essential quality for Leadership is not perfection, but credibility. People must be able to trust you- Rick Warren

- If you have a testimonial from the Dalai Lama, that would work. But most of us can't get eminent figures to build credibility for our stories, how can we build “internal credibility”. Details help us build internal credibility.
- Think about the best way you can make your product or service story tangible and experiential.
- When I speak at gigs, they are titled “Coffee Beans Session” and as a part of that experience, my team puts out coffee Bean Jars on each table.
- Make detailing a vital part of the story, be a master painter who paints every bit of colour to make sure each detail will be remembered. Details, details and more details – Make sure your story is filled with Interesting details. Vivid details triumph over a barrage of statistics.
- Make sure abstract ideas express themselves harder through metaphors and analogies.
- Humanise the jargon, Organisations are about people, making products for other people who go on to lead better lives, thanks to the products/ services delivered by your organization.
- Look for that one contract/ testimonial that can beat all other testimonials – That one signature connect.
- Talk about testable credentials. Offer them a test drive!



EXPRESS EMOTIONS

“Nothing great has ever been achieved without enthusiasm” - RW. Emerson

According to a research by profs from Michigan state university. Four separate studies were conducted to measure charisma, positive emotions and mood contagion. Individuals rated high on charisma tend to express positive emotions in written and spoken communication. Positive emotions such as Passion, Enthusiasm, Excitement and Optimism. Leader's emotional expressions also played an important role in the follower's perception of Leader effectiveness.

- How can you connect something they don't care about to something they do?
- Where is the self Interest in your story? Wiify – “What's in it for you?”
- Ensure you hit the right levels of their hierarchy of needs. Every tribe has a different hierarchy.
- Sometimes, the truth is nuanced - "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it"
Self Interest matters, but sometimes Identity is a far bigger emotional hook than mere self-interest.
- What would someone like me do in a situation like this?
If you can get the crowd to walk down this path, self-interest alone won't be a critical factor.
- How can you move the crowd from an analytical POV to an emotional one?



“For too long, the business world has ignored or belittled the power of oral narratives preferring soulless powerpoints slides, facts, figures and data” - Peter Guber – president of Mandalay entertainment.

- How does one spot a story? Find the most interesting and high impact event for your firm/ division or yourself that is your story:)
- Where is the Drama? Find the highs and the lows?
- Which Plot works best for your pitch? The Challenge plot, The connection plot or the creativity plot!
- The Challenge plot – David and Goliath, Rags to Riches, Overcoming adversity through Grit.
- The Connection plot bridges the gap between classes, racial, religious, demographic.
- The Creativity Plot involves solving a challenge innovatively, a breakthrough or solving a long standing puzzle.

A hand holding a small globe against a starry background, with a teal circle overlaying the image.

FIND YOUR WHY

"He who has a why to live can bear almost any how." - Friedrich Nietzsche

My favourite question to my CEO Coachee is “What does your company make? And because of that, what happens? And because of that, what happens? Dig deep enough, you will find a profound why. That “Why”. Your customers don’t buy what you do, they buy “why” you do!

- Why do you care about your story? What does it mean-deep down –for you? Ask this question repeatedly till you find an impactful answer.
- Align your personality with that of your organization and your story- that will become your legend.
- Find a larger purpose, a bigger plot in the scheme of things -Howard Schultz (Founder – Starbucks) wasn’t as passionate about coffee as much as building a third place between office and home.
- Find your meaning and that is your story
- Be consistent with your story, dig deep to find an origin story- My origin story- **My First Client**
- When your passion and Purpose meet – The world is truly your oyster.



AUTHENTICITY

“Work is not separate from play and play is not separate from work- It’s all living”- Branson

“It takes practice to appear natural.

Authenticity doesn’t happen naturally”

“Don’t Fake it till you make it, fake it till you become it” – Amy Cuddy

Authenticity doesn’t happen naturally! that’s right! How can that be? After all, if you are authentic, doesn’t it make sense to speak from your heart with no practice at all? Not necessarily, any authentic presentation needs hours of work, digging deep into your soul, choosing the right words that best represent the way you feel about your topic, delivering those words for maximum impact and making sure your non verbal communication, gestures, facial expressions and body language are perfectly in sync. Manasa, Vaacha, karmana as the Sanskrit saying goes – One in mind, body and action is the best way to define authenticity.



WASH, RINSE, REPEAT

We all get better at what we do, if we do it repeatedly! Research conducted on everyone from Taxi Drivers to Musicians has indicated the same.

London Taxi Drivers had a larger hippocampus- this has a specialized role in developing the skill used to navigate routes.

Scientists also found grey matter involved in playing music (motor regions, anterior superior parietal and inferior temporal areas) was highest in professional musicians, intermediate in amateur musicians and lowest in Non-musicians- This is due to Neuroplasticity.

The brain areas involved with Language become more activated the more they are used. If you speak a lot in public, the more the actual structure of the brain changes.

- The main caveat is to learn the right combination lock for your own story telling skill.
- Wash, rinse repeat continuously so when the day does arrive – you can wing it.
- I have seen CEO's flub, lose the plot and lose engagement with the audience –thanks to not prepping. Practice so you can deliver as comfortably as having a conversation with a close friend.
- Get your content right, but don't get too obsessed with it. An idea expressed well will drive a lot of parallel content in the minds of the listeners.

- Script out your talk, practice in front of the mirror, on camera. Every bit as you would on that day. Include a space for pauses, laughter etc.
- Dry run the same till you are comfortable doing that in your sleep.
- The best speakers in the world have spoken exclusively about their domain and have delivered the same talk 100's of times – That's the amount of practice that has gone in.
- Pitch to a smaller crowd to begin with and iron out kinks before the big day.

A white dove is shown in flight against a clear blue sky. The dove's wings are spread wide, and its tail feathers are visible. A large, semi-transparent yellow circle is centered over the image, partially obscuring the dove. The text "FIND YOUR ROOTS" is written in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font across the middle of the yellow circle.

FIND YOUR ROOTS

“Begin at the beginning” the king said gravely,
“and go on till you come to the end:then stop” –

Lewis Carroll -Alice in Wonderland

“Give the ones you love wings to fly, roots to
come back, and reasons to stay”. – Dalai Lama

An Brand/ Org origin story is an excellent tenet that
doubles as a North Star -A guiding principle of sorts to
help organisation during various times of stress and
strife. Various details get embellished like it happens with
most stories- the legend gets passed on from generation
to generation.

- Start with Problems-Many Founder stories have simply
originated from Injustices or a viscerally experienced
market need. The result is a compelling brand story.
People care and expect that the brand came into
existence for a good reason – to solve a problem, to
change how we do things, to meet a specific need – and
the story is central to communicating the brand’s
purpose.

- o When Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata – The founder of the
Tata Group of Companies was refused entry into a City
Hotel as it had a “whites only” policy, it spurred him into
buying the Apollo hotel which is now the Taj at Apollo
Bunder

- o Virgin: When Richard Branson and his Girlfriend were
travelling to the Virgin Islands and their flights got
cancelled, He chartered a flight and put up a board at the
airport –“Virgin Airlines” and sold all the seats at 39
Pounds each. – The love of your life and street smarts
and sheer pluck interplay in this brand origin story.

- Embrace the Underdog Status-Many brands came into being with a David and Goliath setting. Apple vs IBM pre1984. They came into the market as the ragged outfit that would take on the mighty incumbent. Many of these brands were/are underdogs who were undeterred when it came to tackling titans of industry. They're the so-called disruptors. And they have great stories to tell
 - o Netflix vs Blockbuster

- Foster Communities of Raving Fans-Brands that have a clear identity and purpose can form more meaningful connections. It's not just a brand or a product. In other words, the brand is integral to a coveted lifestyle.
 - o The Harley Owners Group (HOG) is much more than just a motorcycle organisation. It's one million people around the World united by a common passion: making the Harley-Davidson dream a way of life

- Have Visible Founders-Employees are the biggest ambassadors of a brand/org. Passionate employees also make fascinating story tellers. The Founders are just evangelists while employees build the narrative in the minds of the consumers. I work with CXO's of various companies and help them weave this narrative as Chief Story Tellers of their Brand.
 - o Branson and Virgin
 - o Steve Jobs and Apple

- Know Who They Are And What They Stand For-
“Brevity is the soul of wit”. It can also be the holy grail for a brand origin story, no one likes a long-winded story. An elevator pitch narrative can also help in sharpening the focus and drowning out the nonessentials.
 - o “Google provides access to the world’s information in one click” - Sergey Brin and Larry page’s pitch to Sequoia

Go forth and tell your story! The World is waiting!

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**COACHING ENABLES TO
DO MORE!
GET MORE!
BE MORE!**

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