Ongoing Discussion "Thought Piece"

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Richard Maxwell and Robert Dickman

THE
ELEMENTS
OF
PERSUASION

Use Storytelling to Pitch Better,
Sell Faster & Win More Business

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Dedicated to Oscar Ichazo

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CHAPTER ONE
So What's Your Story?

There are two things everyone in business does every day. We all sell something—our products, our ser vices, our skills, our ideas, our vision of where our business is going—and we tell stories. We sell things because that is how we as a democratic, capitalist society organize our energy. We tell stories because, as cognitive psychology is continuing to discover, stories are how we as human beings organize our minds. If we want to sell something, we have to persuade someone else to buy it.

We didn't always put such a high premium on persuasion. There was a time when the biggest and toughest among us simply told the smaller and more delicate what to do and punched them in the nose if that was a problem. Everyone, with the possible exception of Mike Tyson, agrees our modern way is better. But it has required us to learn a whole new skill set.

Compared to our great grandparents, even the least skilled among us are crackerjack sales people. It comes from practice.

One hundred years ago we didn't get much. Most of us lived on more or less self-contained farms. Our business was agriculture, controlled by slow seasonal rhythms. We sold our harvest once or twice a year. We got the market price. We hitched up our buckboard and rode into town once or twice a month and shopped at the general store. What we got there was largely generic. We wanted biscuits, but the type of biscuit we got was the type the store sold. Limited shelf space and the difficulties of transportation made brand options rare. We might try a new product, if the store clerk took the time to tell us how it was improved and how many satisfied customers he had, or we might not. Then, having completed our relatively intense commercial experience—intense enough so that going to the store was considered not a chore but entertainment—we headed back to our farm and our normal daily routine, secure in the knowledge that for the next week or so we wouldn't have to either buy or sell anything.

This left us easy marks for anyone who really knew how to deliver a sales pitch. Which is one of the reasons traveling salesmen got the reputation they got—and why some of us still feel slightly embarrassed about "being in sales." When the telephone reached out to even the most distant farms we resented it and called the salesmen who used this new media to catch us around the dinner table "phonies." The name stuck.

Admittedly things weren't so leisurely paced if you lived in the slums of New York, and if you are reading this in Europe you will have to adjust the dates back one or two hundred years, but you get the idea. Buying and selling used to be an occasional thing.

Compare that to how many times you were involved in a sales pitch just on your way to work today. The newspaper ads your eyes skimmed past (but which had their subliminal effect), the radio spots that interrupted the news on your morning drive, the focus-group-tested sound bites the politicians used to push their parties' agendas (or, if your radio tastes are different, the product-placement mentions of burgers and beverages by your favorite rap artist), the billboards, the bumper stickers, the product logos on T-shirts. And they aren't just selling products. They are selling ideas, opinions, brand loyalties, political affiliations—you name it. Persuasion is very big business.

How big? In 1999, economist Deirdre McCloskey, writing in the *American Economic Review,* estimated that 28 percent of the GNP of the United States was involved in commercial persuasion. This includes law, public relations, the ministry, psychology, and marketing. That means last year almost $3.3 trillion was spent in the United States on commercial persuasion—selling.

Think about that—*$3.3 trillion.* That makes the "country of persuaders" the third-largest economy in the world.

To deal with all that persuasive pressure, to have even a few meager dollars in our pockets at the end of the day, we have all had to develop tremendous sales resistance. To keep from being overwhelmed and paralyzed by all the demands that we do this or buy that, we have developed thick skins and the ability to ignore most of the chatter. For those of us whose business depends on being able to persuade others—which is all of us in business—the key to survival is being able to cut through all that clutter and make the sale.

The good news is that the secret of selling is what it has always been—a good story. It's that simple. Stories sell.

The even better news is that storytelling is innate in the human psyche. It is something we all know how to do.

In fact, it is so hardwired into us that it has its own place on our genome—a gene called *FOXP2*. Discovered in 2001 by Professor Anthony Monaco and his research team at Oxford University, *FOXP2* is now thought to be only the first of what scientists believe is a whole constellation of genes that make language and narrative possible. *FOXP2* specifically makes possible the subtle physical and neurological skills needed to speak words rapidly and precisely, and is probably linked to the use of complex syntax as well. From a cellular level on up, we are all born storytellers.

So if we all can tell stories, and stories are crucial to selling, why are some of us better at selling our products and ideas than others?

It's a lot like running. We all know how to do it, but only a few of us will ever break a four-minute mile. What separates the great runners from the also-rans is that great runners understand how to run *from the inside out*. They know how every stride, every muscle in that stride, fits together to achieve the goal. If we want to excel at persuasion, we need to understand story that same way.

The problem is that we are bombarded by so many stories every day—stories about what toothpaste is best, about terrorists lurking in the shadows, about new scientific discoveries and eternal spiritual truths—that it is hard to focus on story as story. To see a story for what it is rather than what it is about. We need to get stories to hold still long enough for us to get a good look at them. For that, we need a good definition.

The definition we will use throughout this book is a simple one:

> *A story is a fact, wrapped in an emotion that compels us to take an action that transforms our world.*

In the early 1970s Jerome Bruner, one of the fathers of modern cognitive psychology, was closely observing very young children. He noticed, and soon proved, that even before children are able to talk they are organizing their world and communicating by simple stories.

First are what he called the stories of completion. The young child says (by means of gesture and facial expression), "All gone," when the bottle is empty. The child says, "Uhoh," when she feels she has made a mistake and "Ohh!" when surprised or pleased.

These stories are short but complete. And they meet our definition. Take "All gone." The fact is that the bottle is empty. The baby wraps this fact in an emotion—either satisfaction or desire for more—and expresses that. Depending on which emotion is expressed, the parent is compelled to take an action—either to burp the baby and settle her down, or to get another bottle. Either way, the baby's world has been transformed for the better. Bruner went on to assert that infants develop meaning through narrative, and that the need to create stories precedes language. He even suggests that infants are motivated to learn to speak precisely because they already have stories inside themselves that they want to share with others.

In 1981 Bruner was involved in another study that extended these ideas. This one centered on a two-year-old girl known as "Emily." Emily's parents, university professors, noticed that when they put her to bed she spent time talking to herself before going to sleep. If you have kids you probably have noticed the same thing. Curious, Emily's parents put a micro-recorder in her room and occasionally taped her monologues for the next eighteen months. The tapes (122 in total) were then given to a group of linguists and psychologists led by Harvard's Katherine Nelson, who discusses this research in her classic book *Narratives from the Crib*.

What Emily was doing in her room alone after her parents left wasn't pleasant babbling. She was mulling over the exciting events of her day, which was to be expected, but she was also projecting out, sometimes in great detail, what she would be doing tomorrow, who she would be doing it with, and how she might be feeling about it. In business terms, she was engaged in scenario planning, and she was doing it with an often wry sense of humor.

Bruner and the other researchers realized that Emily wasn't just using story to communicate with others. She was using it to shape and mold her own view of reality as well. Though Emily may have been more verbal than most, what she was doing is something we all did at her age as we drifted off to sleep—and what we all still do, though we might not be aware of it. She was weaving together the strands of her day into the fabric of her memory, and in doing that she was shaping the mental lens through which she would view each succeeding day. And she was doing it through the power of story.

So story is not simply the content of what we think, *it is also the how of how we think*. It is one of the key organizing principles of our mind.

There are three things that we should take away from Bruner's research for now.

1. Stories don't have to be long.
2. Stories don't have to be verbal.
3. The right story, at the right time, helps us shape and control our world.

The "George Bush at Ground Zero" story is a good example of all three of points.

On September 14, 2001, President Bush visited the site of the 9/11 tragedy. He moved through the crowd of rescue workers who were still hoping to find the bodies of some of the nearly three thousand people who had died when the World Trade Center towers collapsed three days earlier. He climbed over the rubble, talking to workers, then he put an arm around the shoulders of a fireman who was wearing a white helmet, offering him a few words of hope. Someone handed the president a bullhorn. He stood up on a piece of the fallen tower and spoke briefly to the crowd. What he said was heartfelt but not often remembered. What is unforgettable is the image of the president standing in the rubble, his arm around a fireman, speaking to the crowd with calm, forceful resolve. That image, sometimes reduced to a single frame of video and put on the front page of a hundred newspapers, *is* the story.

It meets our definition. The fact is that the World Trade Center was destroyed by a terrorist attack, and this is conveyed clearly in every camera angle. By placing his arm around the fireman the president has wrapped that fact in a mix of simple but extremely powerful emotions—compassion, respect for the sacrifice of those who died going to the aid of others, clear resolve that this sacrifice would not be in vain. And in hindsight this image was the moment when the nation came out of its collective sense of shock and made up its mind to do something. When everything changed.

That is the power of the right story at the right time.

Now that we have a workable definition of what a story is, we can turn to this book's core questions: What makes a good story? What makes a story great? What gives a story staying power at the box office and in the boss's office?

Having spent our professional lives crafting and presenting stories that sell—first in the entertainment industry and more recently as corporate consultants—we've realized that all successful stories have five basic components: the *passion* with which the story is told, a *hero* who leads us through the story and allows us to see it through his or her eyes, an *anatagonist* or obstacle that the hero must overcome, a moment of *awareness* that allows the hero to prevail, and the *transformation* in the hero and in the world that naturally results.

These are the five basic elements of every story.

Why five elements and not, say, six or seven? To understand that we have to go back to the dawn of our culture.

Pythagoras was the first great systems thinker in Western culture. He did more than develop that triangle theorem we all had to memorize for our SATs. He pioneered the study of harmonics and created our musical scale. He established the discipline of philosophy, and gave it its name. He founded what was arguably the first modern university. So Pythagoras would be a logical place to start in our study of story. Unfortunately, he left no writing behind. So our story begins with his student, the philosopher and poet Empedocles.

From Empedocles, we first get the concept of the world made up of four elements: Fire, Earth, Air, and Water. A fifth element, implied by his theory but unstated, was added a generation later by Plato and his student Aristotle. Sometimes called "Ether," this fifth element is perhaps more accurately referred to as "Space" because it is the field in which the other elements occur.

Until recently, conventional wisdom viewed Empedocles as a natural philosopher—in essence a proto-scientist—primarily trying to describe the material world. More recent scholarship, most preeminently by contemporary philosopher Oscar Ichazo, has shown that the four elements of Empedocles were not solely material but also described inner psychological states. It is in this archetypal psychological sense that Empedocles' elements relate to our understanding of story. They are keys that allow us to see story nonlinearly. Ichazo, whose understanding of the ancient elements is by far the most profound (and whose work has deeply influenced our own), goes so far as to call the elements "ideotropic," meaning that they are ideas that attract our mind to an inner truth in the same way a plant is attracted to the sun.

So how do the five archetypal elements of Empedocles and Plato relate to our five narrative elements? Since story is the carrier of culture, and Empedocles' elements lie at the core of ours, it is not surprising that there is a direct correlation.

Once again, the five-element story model is *passion, hero, antagonist, awareness, and transformation.*

PASSION

Every powerful narrative has passion, the energy that makes you want, even need, to tell it. It is the essential spark, the irreducible cohesive core from which the rest of the story grows. Having it is vital. This corresponds to first of Empedocles' five elements—Fire.

It is passion that ignites the story in the heart of the audience. It is passion that calls the audience's attention to the story in the first place, particularly if the story is aimed at more than one listener.

When an audience first comes to a story, it is composed of separate individuals with differing needs, desires, and distractions. Theater people call a new or difficult audience "cold." They understand that such an audience must be "warmed up" before it can absorb new material.

That is what passion does. It kindles our interests and makes us want to hear more. It unifies us as an audience. And in that unity, which both transcends our self and reinforces it, there is tremendous strength. We turn on the TV every night even when there is nothing really good on just to be part of the story.

The shorter the story, the more powerful the passion must be. A perfect example of a really passionate story well told is the famous "1984" spot that introduced the Macintosh computer to the world. It lasted only sixty seconds. It was only played once on national TV, at the beginning of the third quarter of the 1984 Super Bowl. It almost didn't run at all. People are still talking about it.

At the time the computer industry was in transition and Apple Computer was in big trouble. Apple had been a major player when computers were seen as expensive toys for hobbyists or learning platforms for children. But when corporations began seriously going digital, they naturally turned to a name they had come to trust—IBM. IBM PC computers became "industry standard," with all the purchasing and advertising muscles that implied.

In response, Apple CEO Steve Jobs, one of America's most passionately committed executives, came up with the Macintosh, a computer that redefined the paradigm. It was easy to use, creative, not corporate, "the computer for the rest of us." It was cutting edge, but unless people found out about it quick, Apple would be buried under an avalanche of IBM sales. Apple needed lots of light and heat, and it needed it fast. The "1984" spot filled the bill.

The sixty-second commercial begins with a line of gray, blank-faced men filling the screen as they march in lockstep down a narrow passage. Orwellian dialogue about "information purification" drones on in the background. Suddenly an athletic young blonde, in red running shorts, carrying a large Olympic-style throwing hammer, runs into frame, pursued by helmeted riot police. The marching men enter a large room where hundred of others just like them are staring blank-faced at a wall-sized video screen on which the image of Big Brother is pontificating. The blonde runs in, spins around twice, and releases her hammer. It twirls through the air, then smashes into the video screen. The screen explodes in a flash of light that washes over the now startled faces of the prisoners, metaphorically setting them free. The ad's tagline scrolls up: "On January 24 Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh and you'll see why 1984 won't be like 1984."

The result of this ad was explosive. Seven days later there wasn't a Macintosh left unsold on any store shelf in America, and back orders were beginning to stretch out for months. A whole new product area had been created, and the myth that a single ad during the Super Bowl could make or break a corporation had been born.

There are lots of reasons why this commercial was such a successful story. It was written by the legendary adman Lee Clow at the absolute top of his game and filmed by Academy Award–winning director Ridley Scott. It brilliantly piggybacked its own story on an already culturally accepted myth, the George Orwell novel *1984,* absorbing that novel's energy and making it its own. But at its cohesive core, what made this ad white-hot was Steve Job's passionate belief that a computer was meant to be a tool to set people free.

Real passion, properly focused, makes a story—or a product—impossible to ignore.

HERO

All the passion in the world won't do any good unless you have someplace to put it. That is where the hero comes in. The hero is the second of our story elements and relates to Empedocles' element Earth. The hero grounds the story in our reality. By hero, we don't mean Superman or a grandmother who rushes into a burning building to save a baby, though these are examples of heroes. We mean the character in the story who gives the audience a point of view.

This point of view needs to be substantial enough that the story has "a leg to stand on," but of a scale that allows us to identify with it. The hero is both our surrogate and our guide through the narrative. The hero's vision of the world creates the landscape that the audience enters.

For the audience to identify with the hero's point of view, they must feel a little piece of themselves in the hero's situation, so part of the hero's function is to create a sense of equality with the audience. We need to feel comfortable walking in the hero's shoes.

In corporate storytelling, this is often the role of the corporate spokesperson. Done well, it can establish a brand. Michael Jordan's "Air Jordan" campaign is a good case in point. When "His Airness" first signed to endorse Nike in 1985, the company was a distant third in the athletic shoe market. By the time Jordan retired, Nike was a number one, holding almost 40 percent of the total market, more than twice as much as its closest competitor. Jordan's salary had gone from an initial $2.5 million per year, considered at the time he signed outrageously high, to $20 million a year—and everyone knew it was a bargain.

Michael Jordan is handsome, personable, and talented in a broad number of areas. But what made him really work as the Nike spokesman was that he personified their slogan "Just Do It." To watch Jordan drive toward the hoop, go into the air and soar around a defender, changing direction in mid-leap in a way that made you believe in levitation, was to watch the impossible. He seems to defy the laws of physics. If he can do that, maybe I can do what I've been meaning to do. Get off the couch and get in shape. Go for a run. Play some ball. Try something active. Maybe I can "just do it" too. Of course, first I'll need a good pair of shoes.

By the end of the "Air Jordan" campaign, people had so identified with the Nike story that they weren't just wearing Nike shoes, they were also wearing the Nike trademark swatch on hats, T-shirts, jackets, you name it, happily making themselves billboards for the Nike brand. Their story and the Nike story had become one and the same.

Having a hero that can bring your audience comfortably into your story is crucial to a successful sales story, particularly when what you are selling isn't a physical product but an abstract concept.

Ronald Reagan was a great storyteller. We're not talking about Ronald Reagan the president, but about Ronald Reagan the Warner Brothers–trained movie star, ex-president of the Screen Actors Guild, and former host of *General Electric*

Theater. As the "great communicator," he knew the importance of heroes. He understood that with the right hero, people would see even dry and technical facts from a personal viewpoint. So during his State of the Union addresses, when he got to a point that might be abstract or an issue that might be divisive, he would point up to the Congressional Gallery and there, posed and waiting, was an "American Hero" who personified the point Reagan was trying to make. Reagan controlled the national debate by using heroes to define the territory it would cover. We understood his stories because we knew his heroes—they were the same as us.

ANTAGONIST

Problems are like water—without them a story dries up and blows away. Antagonists, and the conflict they represent for the hero, are the beating heart at the center of the story. By antagonist we mean the obstacle the hero must overcome. The antagonist doesn't have to be a person—if the hero is struggling to climb Mount Everest, the antagonist might be the mountain itself—but there has to be an antagonist. If the hero faces no obstacles, there really is no story. If there were no defenders, Michael Jordan jumping up and putting the ball in the hoop wouldn't be much of a story at all. But since there were—the Detroit Pistons had been double-teaming Jordan all night long, we were in the final seconds of game six of the NBA championship, and the Chicago Bulls were only down by one as Jordan started his drive down the lane—it was really big news and an unforgettable moment.

The passion of the contest catches our attention, but it is the emotions released by the hero's victory that lock the story in our memory.

Stories often personify conflict in a villain, someone we love to hate. Two-time Academy Award–winner William Goldman says there are only three questions you need to answer to start a good screenplay: "Who is your hero? What does he want? Who the hell is keeping him from getting it?" This is how Goldman defines conflict.

The Dalai Lama, who won the Nobel Peace Prize for his understanding of how to deal with international conflict, put it in more general terms: “Each one of us has an innate desire to seek happiness and overcome suffering.” He also said, “Your enemies are your best teachers.”

Great stories mirror this reality. Seeking happiness is our motivation. Overcoming suffering is doing battle with our internal and external antagonists. Instinctively, humans are interested in how others deal with their problems. Funneling this curiosity into the narrative is what releases the emotions that wrap around the facts and create the story.

Research, including high-tech real-time brain scans, is now showing that emotions, triggered in the limbic area of the brain—also known as the mammalian brain—lock a story in memory.

This is particularly important in a sales story. It’s no good selling the board of directors on your idea if they forget all about it when you walk out the door. We’ll be talking about the connection between emotions, conflict, and memory in a later chapter, but the antagonist provides more than just a memory hook.

Where would Hamlet be without Claudius, Luke Skywalker without Darth Vader, the Road Runner without Wile E. Coyote? It is the antagonist that makes the hero’s actions meaningful. The same is true for corporate stories.

Roberto Goizueta, the former the CEO of Coca-Cola, consciously used this principle to revitalize Coke when it was in danger of becoming moribund in the 1990s. By directly attacking his main rival, Pepsi, Goizueta rallied his own troops and triggered what were known at the time as the Cola Wars. In an interview with Jack Welch for *Fortune* magazine, Goizueta suggested that a company that did not have a natural enemy should go out and find one. When asked why, he replied, “Because it is the only way to have a war.”

And for Coke, the Cola Wars worked. For a time the conflict between the two corporate giants, Coke and Pepsi, released tremendous advertising and marketing energy as they struggled for market dominance around the world. New sales techniques were discovered and perfected, new markets opened, lots of money was made all around. But in the end, when neither side could gain a decisive advantage, the story became boring. So be sure the antagonist you use in your story is one your hero can overcome. The dragon is there to be slain, not to become a pest.

Of course, not every story has a happy ending, and there is a real moral danger in creating villains. Living in Germany in the aftermath of World War I was frightening and brutal. Adolf Hitler wrapped that fact in the powerful emotions of paranoia and anti-Semitism. How passionately he conveyed those emotions can be seen in the surviving films of his speeches. The story he told—that the Jews were responsible—compelled the German people to take actions that transformed the world into a living hell. Storytelling is innate in human beings, but it is in some respects a value-free process.

Fortunately, there is a fail-safe. Those stories that produce destructive and negative actions tend to cannibalize the people who tell them. They rapidly eliminate themselves from the cultural dialogue. If you want your story to survive and have a long and profitable life, be sure not to demonize your antagonist. The function of the villain is not to create conflict, but to clarify it so that it can be overcome.

AWARENESS

So what allows the hero to prevail? How is the villain defeated? In a really bad story it might be a moment of dumb luck, or a character we've never met before who shows up with the combination to the locked safe, but in a good story—the type you'll be telling—it is a moment of awareness. Awareness corresponds to Air. It is literally the inspiration the hero has that lets him, or her, see the problem for what it is and take the right action. Emotions make the hero want to move. But if he or she doesn’t make the right move, the effort will be wasted.

In detective films, this element is highlighted. The moment the hero, having carefully pieced together all the clues, suddenly gets it is often marked with a musical throb, a close-up, or even a brief flashback. However it is done, we know that he knows who the killer is! We see it in the look in his eyes. If it is an older film, like the classic *The Thin Man,* he might invite all the other characters into the dining room and lay it out for them. In screenwriter terms, he would “make a meal of it.”

In real life, these moments are often very brief, almost like flashes of lightning, and it is sometimes easy to leave them out of a story, but putting them in is crucial.

Legend has it that Thomas J. Watson, the founder of IBM, had such a moment of awareness that changed everything. Locked in a struggle with Olivetti for control of the typewriter market, he suddenly realized something about his IBM that he had never seen before. In a flash of inspiration he saw that IBM wasn’t in the typewriter and adding machine business; it was in the information processing business. That discovery made all the difference. IBM moved into computers, and the rest is history.

There is something magical about these “aha” moments. Like air, they are almost impossible to get your fingers around. In fact, though the story of Watson’s moment of inspiration is widely told and believed—no one we have discussed this with doubts that it happened—it has been very difficult for us to run down exactly when and where it happened. Once you have heard the story, it seems so self-evident and obvious that you just accept it. Knowing about that moment of inspiration makes IBM’s corporate story—otherwise one of a relentless, repetitive rise to power—much more exciting. In the history of IBM it is like a breath of fresh air.

When you are looking for these moments of awareness in your story, one clue is that they are quite often triggered by the smallest detail.

Adam Kahane, formerly a scenario planner for Royal Dutch Shell, tells the story of a meeting he had as part of the Visión Guatemala team, a group that was working to find a way out of the seemingly endless cycle of violence and revenge that had marked the Guatemalan civil war, one of Central America's longest and bloodiest. His team had gotten representatives of many of the stakeholders—the army, the rebels, politicians, priests, villagers—together to talk. For days they had heard each other out, describing acts of unbearable cruelty committed by both sides. Things seemed to be going nowhere.

Then one politician described going to the exhumation of a mass grave at the site of a particularly brutal massacre. When the bodies were removed, this man noticed that there were still tiny little bones left at the bottom of the pit. He asked the forensic scientist doing the work if those were the bones of animals, perhaps monkeys that were somehow buried as well.

"No," he was told, "many of the women killed that day were pregnant. Those are the bones of their unborn children."

A quiet fell over the room. Deep and profound, it lasted not for seconds, but for minutes. And when the discussion began again, everything had changed. The image of those tiny little bones had made everyone aware just how horrible the civil war—a war they had all lived through and participated in—had really been. Afterward the participants in the conference said it was that moment that had made all the difference. It was at the moment that they really decided that things had to change.

Awareness is not always easy or comfortable, but if you want your stories to make a difference, it always has to be there.

TRANSFORMATION

Transformation is the element that needs the least explanation because it is the natural result of a well-told story. If you've taken care of the other elements, it just happens. Our heroes take action to overcome their problems, and they and the world around them changes. This of course relates to the element of Space. Change is the playing field on which stories are told.

At the beginning of *The Iliad,* Achilles is in a snit, refusing his duties to his comrades in arms, but ends the story defeating his enemy, Hector, and honoring his fallen foe in death. Hamlet dithers in a world of moral ambiguity, but in the end takes actions that remove a great evil from the heart of his kingdom. Luke Skywalker accepts the reality of the Force and gives the Republic new hope.

Successful stories don't have to have a happy ending—the last scene of *Hamlet* is hardly a laugh riot—but they all involve change.

In sales stories, you often don't give transformation a lot of thought because the change you want to produce is a given. You want to transform your listener from the owner of a five year-old Yugo to the proud possessor of a spanking-new Ford. You want to transform your client from an apartment dweller into someone who has invested in a white-picket-fenced piece of the American Dream. You put your attention in other elements. Getting them motivated to stop kicking tires and actually buy. Getting them to see the house the same way you do, as perfect for them. The story you tell them might do it, or it might not, but you know where you are headed right from the start.

But there is one type of business story where transformation *is* the story. These are leadership stories.

In his classic book *On Leadership,* John W. Gardner makes the point that the modern organization, whether it is political or corporate, depends on leadership from the factory floor to the highest executive suite. In this fluid, information-intensive environment, who ends up being the leaders? Usually it's the people who can effectively tell the right story—a story that harnesses the group's energy to deal with a common problem. Let's face it—leading is a lot more fun than following. Even if you never want to be a CEO or to change the world, you do want to have control over your own work and your own ideas. Ultimately, that is what the power of story can give you.

That is the transformation we want this book to produce. *Elements of Persuasion* can help you be that leader. It will help you use stories to build morale, strengthen teamwork, and define problems, then step back from them so that you and your coworkers can discover original and effective solutions. Then it will help you sell those solutions so they actually happen.

In the following chapters, we are going to talk about each of the five elements of successful storytelling in a lot more detail. So, what do you say? You want to hear a few good stories? It won't take long. And we promise you it will be worth your while.

Earlier, we mentioned that we would be including exercises that will help you polish your storytelling skills. They won't be time consuming, difficult, or embarrassing. Here is the first one. It is something you'll be doing anyway. Tomorrow, tell three stories. Any three stories. You'll tell many more than that in a normal day, but this time tell them while being consciously aware of the five elements each story contains. Either as you are telling them, or right afterward, run through these questions like a mental checklist:

> *Passion*: Why did I tell that story? What makes me care about it? Did I make my audience care?
>
> *Hero*: Who was the story about? Did the person I was telling seem to accept the hero's point of view?
>
> *Antagonist*: What problem was the hero confronting, and how did telling that story make me and my listener feel?

Awareness: What did my hero learn in the story?
What did I add to the cold facts to make it sparkle?

Transformation: What changed in the story?

Now listen to three stories others tell you, using the same questions. Why are they telling me this story? Who is the story really about? And so on.

It's an easy exercise. No one need know you are doing it (unless you want to make that a story of your own), and you'll be surprised at how quickly you get the hang of it. It will definitely help you remember the stories of others, and you might even begin to collect them. As any good salesman knows, collecting other people's stories can be a very valuable habit to have.

Biographies

Richard Maxwell brings the skills he developed in his twenty-five-year career as a screen and television writer-producer to FirstVoice's clients. In addition to his produced feature films and television series, he has worked as a script doctor writing or rewriting scripts for all of the major Hollywood studios.

Bob Dickman is an "International Coach Federation"- certified executive coach teaching narrative strategies as they relate to corporate communications, product design, and branding with his consulting firm, FirstVoice. Formerly a monk at the Ryutaku-ji Zen Monastery in Mishima, Japan his corporate clients have included Ford, The U. S. Naval Postgraduate School and Shell Oil, among others.

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