THE POWER OF STORIES IN BUSINESS

Storyteller and Hollywood screenwriting guru Robert McKee said:

“Stories are the creative conversion of life itself into a more powerful, clearer, more meaningful experience.”

Stories can be a powerful tool for persuasion and leadership. Traditionally, business people persuade using mostly the left side of the brain, or reason. However, persuasion occurs, just as much (if not more) through emotion. By developing the right side of the brain, engagement can be better built through “uniting an idea with an emotion.” A critical tool is storytelling. And you are no strangers to storytelling – your application required you to write essays, which in essence are stories about yourself. On a daily basis you read and hear stories via the news media and blogs. And you share stories when you get together with friends. Stories can be evocative. Stories have impact. Through this course you will refine your ability to construct and deliver stories that will move people to action.

STANFORD BUSINESS SCHOOL
GSBGEN 543 (1 unit) | Fall 2012
Jennifer Aaker, General Atlantic Professor of Marketing
September 17 – 21 @ GSB C101
Book: Resonate by Nancy Duarte
Class Website: http://stanford.edu/class/gsbgem542/

A social psychologist and marketer, Jennifer Aaker is the General Atlantic Professor of Marketing at Stanford University’s Graduate School of Business. Her research focuses on time, money and happiness – and how small acts create significant change – fueled by social media. She loves a good story.

OVERVIEW
Stories are the currency of human contact. They help us inspire, move, and connect to people. Throughout our lives, the stories we share and the contexts in which they are valuable change. This course explores ways to use stories in business as our lives evolve. When you begin your career, it is critical to understand yourself and the value you add to a company. So we start the class by telling stories about our personal brands and personal value. (Day 1) Then we'll move toward stories that help you get hired by a company and lead the company (Day 2). Next, we focus on stories that help you promote your brand(s) to customers, investors, and the media (Day 3). Finally, we’ll end on stories you would want to share in ten years about how you grew your brands and lead your company (Day 4). By the end of the class, you will have completed six signature stories: Who I Am, Why Hire Me, Building Trust, Brand Differentiation, The Comeback and The Commencement (see workbook for instructions). Each story will be 3 min long. Although each person will work on all stories, only three will be presented in class. Everyone will share their Who I Am Story and Commencement Story. Additionally, each person will present one of the remaining four stories to the class and guest storyteller for feedback. If you have a preference for which story to pitch, email me before 9/14. Story assignments will be made by 9/17.

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GOALS
The goals of the class are:

- Gain insight into what makes for a good (and bad) story and how to use stories for strategic advantage to further business objectives
- Develop the understanding of how to craft signature essential stories you’ll need to use in business to build brands and lead companies.
- Acquire concrete tools focused on how to listen, engage, physically tell stories, and teach others to tell stories.

THE STORY APP
Many think that good storytellers are born, not made. Not true. Storytelling is a skill that you can acquire just like any other. However, to acquire it – you need to practice. And once you start practicing, you’ll notice a certain mindset develops – and you start to look at life with the lens of story. To cultivate the mindset, we created a StoryBank application for the iPhone or pad. (If you don’t have an i-gadget, email me and I’ll tell you how you can collect stories with pencils and paper. Old school). You will not only discover the plethora of stories that surround you, but also improve your ability to think of life in terms of stories – albeit really really short stories. So before Day 1 of the class, please bank 10 stories. Directions on how to download the app are in the introduction email.

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HOW THE COURSE WORKS

THE STORIES:

Everyone will craft six 3-minute stories, but you will not share every story. Everyone will share the Who I am Story (Day 1). Everyone will share the Commencement Story (Day 4). Each person will present one of the remaining four stories to the class (Why Hire Me Story, Building Trust Story, Brand Differentiation Story, and Comeback Story) on either Day 2 or Day 3.

When we talk about stories in this class, there are essentially two types. The first type is the anecdote. Many companies and speakers use these to share experiences or demonstrate ideals in action. The second type is a larger narrative form that moves the audience from one understanding of the topic to a new and more visionary belief. For examples, watch Steve Jobs’ introduction of the famous 1984 Apple ad. An example of the first type of story is his quote “It is 1958, IBM passes up the chance to buy a young, fledgling company that has invented a new technology called xerography. Two years later, Xerox is born and IBM has been kicking themselves ever since.” The entire speech taken as a whole is an example of the second type of story. The audience is moved from thinking that Apple is one of many computer companies to believing that they are unique and different from all of their competitors.

THE WORKBOOK:

The intent with each of the six stories is for you to use the workbook to write it verbatim rather than jotting down notes to connect when you present. Feel free to use the workbook in the way that you find most useful and consider using additional tools like a video camera or audio recorder. You will see that while some of the stories ask you to dig into your past for real experiences (Who I am, Why Hire Me & Commencement stories), others ask you to use your imagination to write a rousing speech or plan a press conference in your future career (Brand Differentiation, Come Back, & Commencement stories). In both cases we ask that you approach the exercise with introspection to tap into some of the core characteristics that make you who you are and when compelling and appropriate, include facts and data.

THE PARTNERS:

To help you prepare your stories, you will work with a partner from the class for two hours before each session. During this time, you will coach each other through your story three times. The first run should focus on the content, the second run should focus on the delivery and the third run should be videotaped to allow you to see your presentation for yourself. You should select your partner and then choose together who will present on Day 2 and who will present on Day 3. Once you have made these decisions, sign up on this Google doc by Friday, September 14. Only 4 people can sign up for each story, so if they will be assigned on a first come, first served basis. If your first choice of story already has 4 people signed up for it, please choose a different story. Make sure that you and your partner are signed up for different days so that you will have enough time to prepare for your presentation. If you have any questions about this, email Romy Saloner at rsaloner@stanford.edu.

THE FEEDBACK:

In addition to the feedback that you receive from your partner and the guest storyteller, you will give and get valuable feedback on the presentations given in class. For each presentation, you will be asked to fill out a short survey sharing your moment and ranking how compelling you found the story on a scale of 1-7. This will provide each person qualitative and quantitative feedback on their presentations that will help you improve your storytelling technique for the future.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Story by Robert McKee
The Story Factor by Annette Simmons
The Power of Personal Storytelling by Jack Maquire
The Art of Storytelling: Easy Steps to Presenting an Unforgettable Story by John Walsh
The Leader’s Guide to Storytelling by Stephen Denning
Slide:ology by Nancy Duarte
Storytelling as Best Practice by Andrew Goodman
Improving Your Storytelling by Doug Lipman