Storytelling as Socializing

Excerpted from *Tell Me a Story: Storytelling Strategies to Build Organizational Capacity* Workshop

Storytelling is a great strategy to help socialize members into your organization. This technique is especially helpful to guide organizational members to understand company values, beliefs and cultural norms by providing a platform for common stories.

When you manage or lead, it’s important to cultivate stories that have meaning for employees, while directing them back to the core messages of the organization. For example, a principal of an elementary school might tell a story of a student who emulates her teacher in order to reveal how much impact teachers have on children. An executive director of a non-profit might share a story of the agency’s founder including her personality, character, and vision to motivate current employees in their work.

The choice of the stories, the characters they choose, the timing of the story, and the details they emphasize creates memorable stories that stay within the minds of organizational members. By doing this, leaders create organizational stories that can and will be passed on throughout the life cycle of their organizations.

**Exercise**

The exercise below will help you to create shared stories for your company. The objective is to create positive organizational stories that will bring members back to the core values and principles of your organization.

**Step 1: Select your core value.** Choose one core value of your organization that you feel organizational members need to understand or demonstrate. You will tell a story to organizational members using this core value as the “theme” or foundation. For example, if one of your core values is *unity* and your staff is having problems with working together, you want to tell a story that illustrates *unity*.

**Step 2: Choose a character.** Think about the best character (fictional or real) that illustrates your core value. Organizational members must feel something for this character. They need to have a connection to or feel that this character has something to offer them. Describe this character’s personality, their hopes and dreams, anything that will help members to relate to the character. For example, in a high school football game, a coach might use an example of a physically disabled player that scored the winning point for the team. Don’t be afraid to create a hero out of your character. Create a character that emulates the value(s) you want your members to embrace.

*If you don’t know the trees you may be lost in the forest, but if you don’t know the stories you may be lost in life.*

-- Siberian Elder
Step 3: Describe the plot. How will you set up your character? Think about a situation with your character that best illustrates the concept of the value you want to talk about. For example, if your core value is *spirit and faith* maybe your character is an orphaned child that lived in the depression era, and as she grew older she helped build a national organization that provides food to the hungry. You can tell this story by illustrating aspects of *spirit and faith* that your character has. Maybe there is a lesson to be learned from your story. If so, weave it into your plot.

Step 4: Choose a time, place, and audience for your story. Storytelling is an art. This art form requires a delicate balance of time, place, and audience. You need to know the best time to tell your story, where you will tell it, and who will be listening. Ask yourself the following: *Where will this story take place? When will I tell the story? Who will listen to this story?* Don’t plan on telling your story if only half the people you want to hear it will be absent. Also, create a space that is appropriate for the story you want to tell even if that means carving time outside of work hours to tell your story.

Step 5: Write your story down and rehearse your story often. It’s always good to write your story down and memorize the parts of your story. Tell your story to others before telling it to the group you want to share it with. This will help you to refine your story. Maybe you will find that you need to add more emphasis in one area and less in another. Perhaps your story makes no sense at all and doesn’t convey the message you want to share. This is the time to revisit, revise, and recreate it so that it will create the impact you want when you share it with your audience.

Step 6: This is your story. Remember, this story is yours. You’ve created this story because there is a need for it in your work and your organization. Your story has a value. Your story will shape your organizational culture. Create a story that you and your organization can be proud of. Don’t be afraid to bring your own personality into the story. Stories are powerful because of the storyteller. Own your story.

To request a presentation of this topic, schedule training, or for more information about workshop materials please contact: info@leadershipparadigms.com.