

How to Tell Your Story

FOR YOUR CAUSE

Related Cause Clarity topics:

- How to create a core message
- How to customize your message
- How to create a consistent brand



This worksheet is a complementary guide to help you put into practice the advice found in our “How to Tell Your Story for Your Cause” video. Each 3-minute video is packed with information and is designed to be watched multiple times—even while you are completing this worksheet.

WHAT Tell your story (for a cause, organization, issue or project)

TIME REQUIRED 1 hour

WHO IS INVOLVED We suggest brainstorming responses as a team. Alternatively, you can start this process alone and then refine with a larger group.

The work of nonprofit organizations and social ventures can change lives and improve our world, but sometimes nonprofits do not know how to tell a story that compels people to act, assist or contribute. By telling the story of individuals affected by the issue you are working to solve, you personalize your mission and goals and make them more memorable.

This worksheet walks you through three steps that will lead you to a compelling story about your cause.

1. Gather elements for your story
2. Lay out the plot
3. Integrate the story

Here is an example:

Cause: Healthy Young People Centerville



Story: Glenda and Morris grew up in Centerville, California, where they went to school, hung out with friends and lived a typical Centerville lifestyle. However, in 2004, at the age of 16, Glenda was diagnosed with diabetes. Morris knew that his little sister couldn't possibly be the only teenager to have this problem in Centerville, especially since Glenda was such a “normal” kid. After doing some research, Morris learned that most families in Centerville did not have access to fresh fruits and vegetables—and that Centerville had a 65% rate of diabetes throughout the city. Morris decided to fix this. He started Healthy Young People Centerville to bring a farmers market into town once a week and to provide information about healthy eating. Each week, more and more people attended the farmers market and now, 10 years later, diabetes rates are down to 13%, Glenda is diabetes-free—and 65% of families in Centerville have changed their diet thanks to Healthy Young People Centerville.

→ For more help, contact Cause Communications at CauseClarity@CauseComm.org or visit CauseCommunications.org/tools to see other Bite-Size Courses.

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Storytelling can be used effectively no matter what communications vehicles you employ—from your annual report to your website to direct-mail appeals. The best stories have a beginning, middle and end, establish the heroes and villains, involve a conflict and have an emotional hook. Complete the following steps to create a compelling story.

1. Gather elements for your story:

A. Spend 10 minutes with your group thinking about heroes you see in your daily work (e.g., the founder who created the organization to solve a problem or a beneficiary of the program whose life has been transformed). What challenges did they face? What did they accomplish? Who helped? Write down the names and types of people mentioned.

Heroes:

Challenges/Obstacles:

B. Then, gather facts and metrics about your impact. Who is your cause helping? How many people have you helped? How did you help? What are some numbers that show your cause's impact and where you made a difference?

Impact Facts:



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2. Lay out the plot:

Fill in the story map below with the key elements to create an outline to track the arc of your story.

Main Characters

Setting

Key Impact Metrics

Cause

Challenges/Obstacles

Solution



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3. Integrate the story:

You have the elements and the plot from step 2, this is where you write it out and add emotion. You want to evoke themes of redemption, change, courage and hope so people can relate to your cause. Write your story in full sentences and include emotions. Refer to the "Extra Tips" section for more inspiration.



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Seven questions from Andy Goodman's "Storytelling as Best Practice" to sharpen your story:

1. Who's the protagonist?
2. What's the hook?
3. What keeps it interesting?
4. Where's the conflict?
5. Have you included telling details?
6. What's the emotional hook?
7. Is the meaning clear?

Top tips from expert storytellers:

- The best stories are the ones that you remember and move you to re-tell or take action.
- People will forget what you told them. They will forget what you did. But, they will never forget how you made them feel through stories.
- Do not make your story about your organization, make it about your cause and clients.
- Storytelling does not have to live within the marketing team. Employees, clients and supporters can contribute to a culture of storytelling.
- Get your staff or others to share stories by pairing them up with a partner to transcribe it.
- A story has to have a beginning, middle and end. Talking heads are not stories.
- For viral videos, statistics show that maximum 1-2 minutes works. You lose viewers every 10-20 seconds.
- Make a link between the person watching the video and who they are watching.

Summarized from a session "The Future of Nonprofit Storytelling" at the 2012 Nonprofit Technology Conference.