

Why Something You Loved As A Child Is Your Key To Success Today

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I write about personal branding.

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- Ken Burns has stated, when it comes to story “one and one equals three.”

Remember how riveted you were when your mother or father read you a bedtime story? Remember how much you looked forward to it?

Well, stories are powerful – and not just to five-year-olds.

We hear a lot about storytelling these days. Companies are hiring storytelling experts to help them engage customers. Leaders are bolstering their storytelling skills to engage their teams. Career-minded professionals are seeking out the ideal formula for building and delivering a powerful story. Yet effective storytelling requires a lot more than plugging content into a formula.

To truly understand the power of story and all its business applications, I reached out to one of the world’s leading experts in story, [Lani Peterson](#).



Lani has been working in the field for two decades and brings her expertise as a psychologist to her story work with Fortune 100 companies, the homeless, prisoners, doctors, architects – the list goes surprisingly on. And although her work is vast and varied, her approach can yield solutions to many of the challenges facing individuals and companies today.

I asked Lani for some advice we could all use to become more impactful storytellers.

WA: Why are stories so powerful?

LP: Stories are in our bones and our DNA. We actually think in stories. Our brains are hardwired to sift all incoming information through the vast reservoir of stories we've already lived and experienced. Through that sifting, we figure out how to make sense of and ultimately react to whatever this new story means to us. Simultaneously, we are integrating the meaning with emotion. In hearing a story, the same parts of the brain light up as if we were actually engaged in the experience. So a story engages the head as well as the

heart, setting into motion a metaphorical understanding that conveys values and culture, all the while allowing complexity, contradiction, and leaps of understanding. Story is pretty powerful stuff.

There are those who believe that facts and data speak for themselves, and dismiss story as being too soft. But in fact, story is an essential component for spurring most change. Whether you tell a story or not, listeners are taking your facts and running them through their own stories to determine whether your new information holds water. If your facts aren't substantiated by the stories they already have, yours will be rejected. The best way to get someone to accept your data is to offer them a story that trumps the one they are already telling themselves. In the long run, you don't need stronger facts; you need a better story.

WA: What do you think is the biggest misconception about storytelling?

LP: The biggest misconception is that it is easy to do it well. It's true that we are all natural storytellers, but to know which one is the right story to tell at this time for this particular listener or audience, to achieve the intended impact, and then to deliver it well – that takes some forethought, emotional intelligence and practice. You can try to put your message into the story formula, but as filmmaker Ken Burns has stated, when it comes to story “one and one equals three.” His metaphor reminds us there is a deeply emotional, personal, and intuitive aspect to creating a story that defies method, and there is an inherent danger in breaking the whole thing down into formulaic pieces.

WA: Where is story most helpful in the challenges facing business today?

LP: Where is it not helpful? You've already mentioned many of the ways that story is being used in companies today. Many people have caught on to how story is central to strong marketing but have overlooked story as a powerful change agent. People get stuck in limiting stories all the time. Sometimes it's a matter of letting go of an old story and finding a new one to carry you forward. More often, all you can do is change your relationship to the story you're in; find a reframe that allows a different perspective to emerge. I have found this work to be incredibly empowering, whether I am coaching an executive to step into her leadership role more effectively, or helping a recently released

prisoner make sense of his journey story prior to a job interview. When either an individual or a company starts exploring their “guiding stories” on deeper levels, the awareness, personal insights and ability to connect to others will enhance relationships, deepen vision, and motivate action.

To learn more about how storytelling can solve challenges your business is facing, watch this interview with Lani:

WA: How can individuals use story to be more successful?

LP: Ironically, one of the best ways is to become a good story listener.

First of all, listen to yourself. Pay attention to the stories you tell yourself about who you are and what you believe. What are the inner stories you hear when trying to engage, motivate or influence others? Do they actually work for you or hold you back?

Secondly, listen for the stories that are being told about you and/or your company, both within the company as well as on the street. Your brand is not the story you are telling but the story that is being told about you.

Lastly, prompt others with questions that get them telling and listening to the stories you want to grow and spread. Through listening to their stories, discover what they value, what challenges them, what motivates them to do what they do. Capture and disseminate the ones that will engage and inspire others. Get the right stories being told by those around you.

WA: What are some things we can do right away to be better at telling stories?

LP: Do your story homework so you are ready to tell the right story when the moment comes. Get clear in your intentions. Spend time thinking about the three engaged parties in any storytelling experience: the teller, the listener AND the story. Who are you as the teller? What are your values, experience and vision that lead you to be telling this story at this time? Who is your audience? Why are they the ones to hear this story? Not only what do they expect to hear, but what do they need to hear to move them to a new perspective?

Lastly, why is this message (story) important? Why do others need to hear it, and what do you want to have happen as a result of sharing this story? When all three are lined up, your one and one have the potential to add up to so much more than three!

If you would like to hear me interview Lani live, [register for this interview](#) on March 19, 2015 and we'll send you the details.

Follow me on [Twitter](#) and check out my latest book, *Ditch. Dare. Do! 3D Personal Branding for Executives*.



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I'm a personal branding pioneer, motivational speaker, founder of Reach Personal Branding and cofounder of CareerBlast.TV. I'm also the bestselling author of the definitive books on executive branding: Digital YOU, Ditch.Dare. Do! and Career Distinction. I'm passionate about how personal branding can inspire career-minded professionals to become indispensable, influential and incredibly happy at work—and I teach my clients (major global brands and 20% of the Fortune 100) to increase their success by infusing personal branding into their cultures. Here's a fun fact: I have the distinct privilege of having delivered more personal branding keynotes to more people, in more countries, than anyone on earth