

Tell a Story and You'll Connect

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Most managers or executives begrudgingly attend meetings with vendors or salespeople. They look upon them as an interruption. The last thing they want when they are busy is more information about a product or service thrown at them. When they actually do meet with you, they are often distracted and pre-occupied—anything but focused on you. Afterwards, they quickly forget your message as they move to another meeting. Your job is to pull distracted executives into your world; otherwise, all your hard preparation is for naught. A golden opportunity may be lost forever.

A great way to engage multi-tasking decision makers is with a good story. People love stories. Since Biblical days, it is the way we have learned and retained information. By telling a story, your value proposition comes alive. If you aren't already incorporating stories into your conversations, you need to get on the bandwagon.

The mistake that many of us make is to think our listeners want only the facts, the data. We assume we might waste time and annoy them if we tell a story. While managers do need the facts, the data becomes relevant or makes sense through your story.

Consider for a moment how many people like yourself your customer sees in a day or a week. Often customers get confused when so many companies seem to promise the same thing. The one that wins the business is not necessarily the one with the best solution. It's the one that connects with the customer. A story can do just that.

Many people feel they are already using stories when they cite a case study or an example. While these do add color, the human or emotional element is missing. Remember, data is sterile, while stories paint a picture.

Stories have to be short—two minutes or less, and the link between your story and what your customer cares about has to be obvious. Your story has to be rich enough to keep your customer engaged from start to finish.

A good story needs a main character, someone with whom your listeners can identify. For listeners to visualize it, your story also needs a setting and some action. The action begins with an inciting incident and intensifies with additional difficult challenges your hero or main character must overcome. Finally, your story needs a strong ending or resolution.

If your story is engaging, your customer will connect on more than an intellectual level. Pay attention to the fact that there are three levels of connection. The first is to think, the second to feel and the third to remember. This third level is where you should aim. It is reached when you tie your story to your customer's business issue. It enables your customer to repeat your value proposition to others after you walk out the door.

As you prepare for your next customer meeting, spend time ahead thinking of one or two stories to make your topic come alive and to create a memory hook for your customer to share your idea or solution to others. Remember, any event in your life can make for a good story.

Question: *Have stories worked for you? What results have you seen when incorporating a story? We're interested in your reaction to this article. Click here – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.*

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