

COURSE BOOK
BY SHE OWNS IT

How to Use Stories to Captivate, Engage and Grow Your Audience

Personal Storytelling in Business

How to Use Your Own Stories to
Captivate and Engage Others

Course Book

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Introduction

"Those who tell the stories rule the world."

-Hopi American Indian proverb

Storytelling is universal and has existed since the beginning of human history. Yet in business, we often forget to tell our stories and this is a shame, because stories are one of the best ways to connect with customers and encourage them to take action.

Storytelling reaches people on an emotional level. Stories communicate to the listener exactly what you do and what you stand for. Therefore, it's essential to craft compelling stories, both about yourself and your business.

Why We Love Stories

The human mind simply loves stories. Stories make a company or person relatable. Just like the characters in a book, we see ourselves in certain aspects of the story's characters. We identify and empathize with them. For a business, this breaks down the barrier between company and customer.

For example, we love rags-to-riches stories. There are many websites or businesses that tell this classic story. The owner was down and out, all of the odds were against them, they didn't know what to do and were nearing rock-bottom, when inspiration came knocking. This spark of an idea led to them founding the business whose website you're now reading. This is an rousing story that follows the classic conflict-to-resolution plot arc.

Consider the example of a social worker starting a fundraising organization. Social work is hard, and as she begins to grow into her role, it all seems like too much for her. Then, she has a breakthrough one night walking home from work where she encounters a homeless woman asking for money, and it hits her. She discovers that it truly is her calling and she needs to do whatever she can to help those in need. This story can help her raise money for her fundraiser.

Stories also work well because they're interesting and engaging. You can take any kind of content that may be slightly dry or dull, and weave it together with a story to make it much more interesting and dramatic. This is why we love TED Talks so much. TED Talks often present very difficult or technical information, but it's put together with the personal story of the presenter to give it life.

We are all natural storytellers at heart, but sometimes it's hard to discover stories that will help our businesses build relationships, stir emotions, and engage our customers. That is what you will learn to do in this course!

Learning Objectives:

In this course, you will:

- Identify different types of personal stories that you can use in your business to connect and engage with your audience
- Brainstorm a list of stories you've heard other business owners tell and which made an impact on you
- Use story prompts to help you get started writing your own personal stories to tell your audience and customers
- Discover specific features that will make your story more compelling and effective
- Explore how to tailor the message of your story to your audience, so that you're sure they can relate to it
- Test out methods for practicing and telling your story in a way that

increases your confidence while having the most impact

- Find opportunities for telling your stories that will help you attract your ideal audience and engage your prospects and customers

Let's get started by thinking about stories you've already heard and how they affected you.

Action Steps:

1. Think of some companies or business owners that you like and respect. What are some examples of personal stories they've used to express their reasons for setting up or establishing their business?
2. Think of some public speakers that you have heard speak. What did you like about their presentations? What personal stories have they used to express who they are, their values, or beliefs?

Module 1 – The Different Types of Personal Stories

Each story is unique, but all stories fall into certain patterns. There are different categories of stories and you can think of these as templates for your personal story. In this chapter, you'll learn a wide variety of story types and by the end, you'll select which are the most important ones you can use to tell your own personal story.



Story of Self

The story of self explains why you were called to do what you do. The social worker story in the introduction is an example of this. It focuses on change, and the key moments in our lives where we made important decisions that led to this great change. It might be when you first became concerned about an issue, or an experience that taught you that issue's importance.

These decision moments are called choice points, and they're the main focus of a story of self. A story of self follows this pattern: Challenge – Choice – Outcome.

Story of Us

A story of us is similar but instead of focusing on the challenges and choices of an individual, it focuses on the challenges and choices of a community, organization, campaign, or movement. The focus is on the impetus that leads a community to take action. It includes values, purposes, goals, and the vision that your organization has.

The values or goals that your organization strives for in a story of us should match those of your audience. This is what makes it effective. The audience feels that they are part of this community or organization.

Founding Stories

A founding story is a great opportunity for storytelling. Typically, businesses start with humble beginnings. This provides a great template for a founding story. You started on a shoestring budget in a closet office with 2 staff members and gradually found success, growing to become the company you are now.

Your founding story could be a story of us that goes back to your life before founding the organization, highlighting the beliefs, experiences, and decisions that led to its founding. The key element to this story is that crucial moment when you knew this was what you had to do.

Through a founding story, you can highlight important choice points as well as drive home the value you've brought to your customers and community. Through a founding story, you can also convey your vision, values, and other things that make your company unique.

What You Stand For Stories

A "what you stand for" story explains what you value and care about the most. It can describe the moment you realized that you had this value, or about the time you knew this was something non-negotiable. This could come from some personal experience that's not related to your organization or business, or it could be something you learned through work. These stories don't usually come from the organization you work for currently.

What You Do Stories

You can tell a story about something your organization does or something you do personally. It could be a memorable moment that happened in the course of serving the needs of your customers. The key to this kind of story is that this memorable moment or experience defines how you go about your business. It could be a success or a failure. These stories should be told in a way that the reader can relate to. The reader can experience it through your story.

The same type of story can be used for either what you do personally or what your organization does as a whole. It can be used to explain why your organization does what it does and what it believes in. However, it's the personal side of the story that people relate to.

Personal Vision

Every story type discussed so far deals with the past or present, but a personal vision story deals with the future. This type of story paints the reader a picture of a possible, attractive and desirable state of affairs that's not yet realized. It explains the kind of future you hope to bring about through your work. The key here is to paint that picture vividly and for it to be a future your audience would like to see materialize as well.

Company Vision

The company vision story is essentially the same but it's for an entire organization rather than an individual. This is the future state of affairs your organization hopes to bring about, or the type of world you're striving for. For example, a solar energy company might tell a story about a future where we all live on renewable energy and no longer rely on fossil fuels.

Failure to Success Stories

A great plot arc for any story is the failure-to-success storyline. With this type of story, you tried something and failed in the past. But most importantly, you learned from this failure and kept trying. Perhaps, somewhere along the way, you discovered your vision or a key idea that led to your success the next time. If you can interweave this with a vision or values the audience shares, you'll have a very compelling story.

Loss and Gain

A similar story type is the loss and gain story. This is where the teller had something in the past which he or she thought was fulfilling and helping them achieve success. But either something went wrong or they had an experience that taught them it wasn't right. They lose everything but then come out of it gaining even more. An example of this would be a

stressed-out Wall Streeter or executive who loses it all and then ends up discovering that his or her true calling was to run a scuba diving company in Florida.

Memorable Customer Stories

A memorable customer story is a story that tells of your encounter with a particular customer, who led you to have a choice point. It can be about a change you made personally or professionally in order to better meet your customer's needs. A memorable customer story needs to lead back to your vision or what you stand for. It shouldn't be a bragging story about a great thing you did for a customer.

Action Steps:

1. From either a personal or business perspective, write down any stories that you have already used or are familiar with. These could be stories you've told in meetings, at conferences, to a client, to your family etc. Write as many as you can down from the various categories discussed in this module.
2. Now go through each of the story types described in this module and think about whether you have a personal story that would fit that type. Make notes about key points that might go into that story.

Module 2 - Writing Your Story

In this module, you're going to write your story. This sounds simple enough, but it's harder than most people realize to write their story. The reason is that it requires self-reflection, and in our stressed, overworked state of modern life, most of us aren't used to spending time on self-reflection.

How do you go about reflecting on yourself when you're unaccustomed to it? It's just a matter of practice. You don't just sit down once and figure out everything you need to know. There are several ways to practice self-reflection and discover the things you need in order to tell your story. These practices include meditation, yoga, spending time in nature, spending time with close friends actively reflecting on your lives, art, or any other means to connect with what's within.

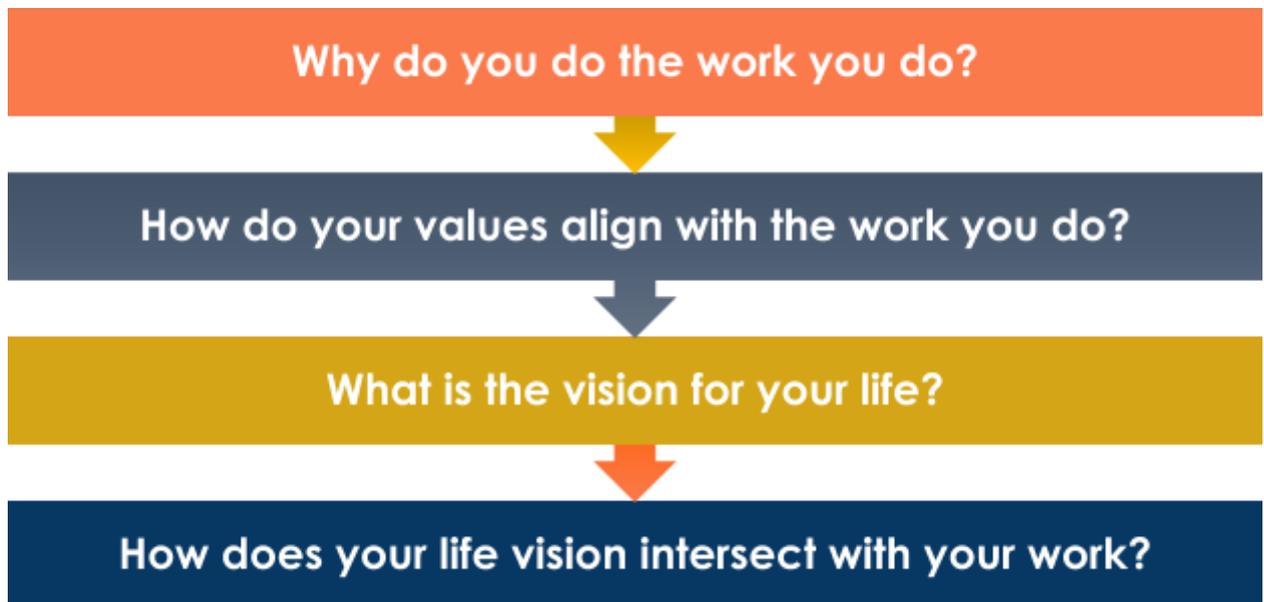
A good way to start getting better in touch with what's within is through journaling. It's easier than more involved practices such as yoga and meditation, and through writing in your journal, you'll begin writing parts of your story.

Journaling is best done on a regular basis. You should do it daily if at all possible. If not, look at your calendar and set aside some time on a regular basis when you can journal. Decide on a time when you feel focused and have few distractions.

Create blocks of time where you do nothing but write in your journal. Find a place with as few distractions as possible. Turn off your phone, your computer and any other electronic distractions. Close the door and ask the people in your house or office to leave you alone during this time.

You can focus on your business or organization and let the words flow, or you can journal in a more focused way by using questions such as these as prompts:

- Why do you do the work you do?
- How do your values align with the work you do?
- What is the vision for your life?
- How does your life vision intersect with your work?



Think about your vision and your experiences, and ask yourself, "Why?" Try to uncover the reasons for the decisions you made or steps you took. Consider each major failure, success, change, realization or experience that led to results and have an impact on what you're doing today.

Here are some story prompts that can also help you get started when journaling:

- Talk about the moment when you knew for certain that you needed to pursue the career or path that you have today.
- Talk about an event or situation that was a key turning point in your life.

- Talk about a principle that you believe is fundamental to who you are and how you do what you do.
- Talk about a time when a mentor, teacher or coach influenced you and how that contributed to who you are today.
- Talk about an experience that helped to define the reason why you started doing what you do.
- Talk about a moment in your career or daily life that reinforced your principles or your perception of what you do.

The Structure of Your Story

Once you've identified some stories that you can tell, you'll need to structure them. No matter what type of story you write, there are three key elements to include:

1. **Challenge.** Your story begins with an unexpected challenge that you must pay attention to.
2. **Choice.** You must make a choice that you were unprepared to make.
3. **Outcome.** The choice leads to an outcome and the outcome teaches you an important lesson.

Let's look at an example:

Say that you're a company in the business of selling organic, environmentally-responsible coffee. Your challenge is: How do I sell high-quality coffee without exploiting workers, damaging the environment, or using additives and other harmful ingredients?

You make a choice to give up the profit margin and high sales in order to offer something you feel good about and which allows you to sleep at night.

The outcome is that you discover there's high demand for your socially-responsible coffee after all, and your company grows.

Here's another example:

You work at a real estate agency but feel frustrated. It seems like the methods of selling that your coworkers use are inefficient and not entirely ethical. You're wondering if you can advance your career at this agency, or if there's a better way. Your challenge is to find this better way. After a particularly frustrating day, you realize you simply can't take it anymore. You have no other option but to strike out on your own, and this is the choice you make. The outcome is that you now run a successful real estate agency that puts clients' interests first.

If your story involves a future vision, it may be a challenge you or the world is facing right now. The change is one you're making now through your business with the intended outcome of your future vision. This is especially useful for charities or organizations trying to make a positive change in the world.

The Elements of a Good Story

Specificity. Make your story as specific as possible. Tell the reader when and where things happened. Describe the setting to them and, like any good story, try to use the five senses to make it more realistic.

Write for Your Audience. Although you're writing about yourself, you're actually writing about your audience. Look at the different potential stories you have from your life and identify the one that would be most important, emotional, or valuable for your audience.

Personal or Too Personal. While you want your story to be personal, don't get too personal. Share, but don't overshare. You shouldn't include anything that might alienate or offend your reader. Go through your story after it's written and look for things that could potentially be over-sharing.

For example, if you're a recovering alcoholic and it's part of your story's challenge, you might share a few things you did when drunk, such as neglecting your family or gambling away money. But don't get too specific with things that are truly horrible, creepy, or alienating.

Identify a Protagonist. Whether it's you or someone else, every good story must have a protagonist. This is the main character and it's the person in the story with whom your audience will identify the most.

The key points are:

- Be open and honest about your past.
- Pull useful ideas for the reader from life lessons you learned and experiences you've had.
- Think of the key people who influenced the way you see the world and the work you do today.

Action Steps:

1. Use the 'why' questions and story prompts presented in this module to make a list of personal stories you can write
2. Select one idea from your list and draft a personal story using the challenge, choice, outcome model.
3. Review the stories that you listed in module 2. Highlight or note down places where you can enhance these past stories, using details from the prompts in this module or the challenge/choice/outcome model.
4. Pick 3 of your stories to work on. Wait a day if possible, and then spend some time editing and refining those stories. Make sure they are 3 completely different stories, based on the types listed in the previous module.

Module 3 – Telling Your Story

In the previous module, you identified your stories and fleshed them out. In this module, you'll be introduced to different methods for practicing and telling your story so that you'll be ready to tell one of your stories by the end of the course.

A story is meaningless unless it's told. Telling a story is not as simple as relating the details or following the structures and templates outlined previously. You need to practice telling your story so that it will have the most impact. Practice telling it out loud. Start with small audiences and gradually build to larger audiences.

The Right Story for the Right Audience

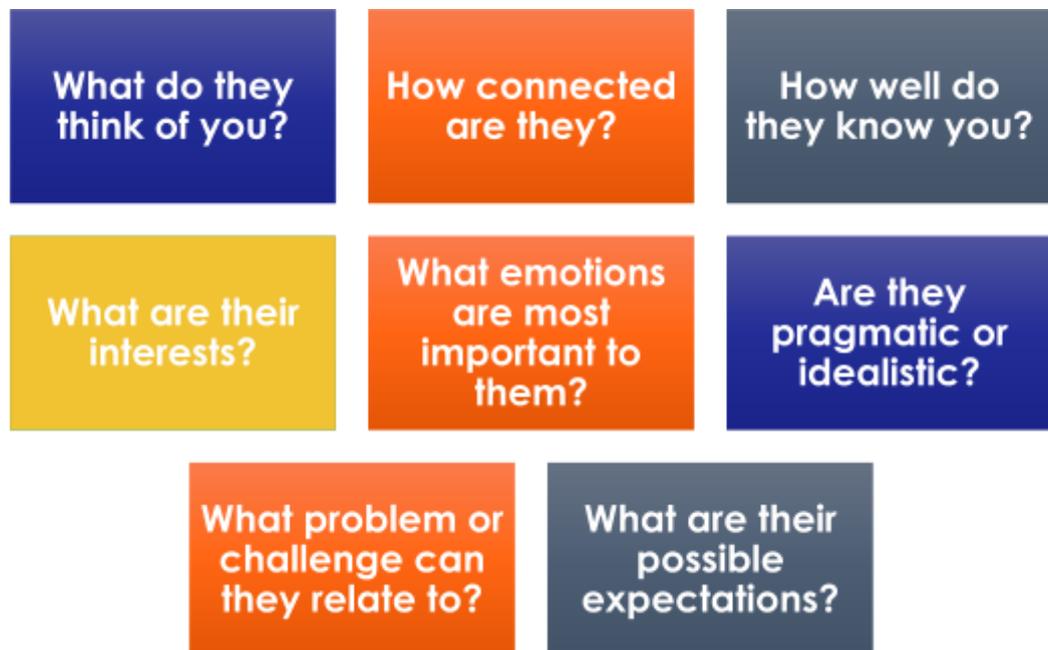
You'll need to create not only one, but several stories. These might detail different important parts of your life that made an impact on who you are today. But even more importantly, they should each be tailored to a different audience. When creating stories and when choosing which to tell, when and where, you should always keep your audience in mind.

For example, the story that you'd tell to your business associates would be different than the one you'd tell customers. For your business customers, you may choose a story that focuses more on the specifics of your life as an entrepreneur or business problems you solved. Your story for potential customers might be about the change you want to make in the world, a story to communicate your vision.

The best way to choose the right story for the right audience is to create audience personas. Identify each type of audience you may be telling stories to. Create a profile for that person. Once you have some profiles, you

can look at each and decide what kind of story would be most appropriate and effective. Some stories might work for more than one persona.

For each persona, here are a few things to consider when creating or choosing a story:



- What do they think of you?** For example, a visitor to your website doesn't trust you yet. Or, your audience may see you as a mentor or more experienced person; or vice versa.
- How connected is your audience to you?** Do they feel a kinship with you? For example, a person at a networking event may feel that you're already a member of their in-group.
- How well does the person know you?** You should have different stories for a person who doesn't know you at all, as opposed to

someone you have a deep relationship with already.

- What are the person's interests?** Your story should be appropriate for those specific interests.
- What emotions are most important to the listener?** Whatever emotions you identify should be key elements to your story, and especially to its choice point or turning point. This will also influence how you choose a protagonist and how they're portrayed in your story.
- Is the listener pragmatic or idealistic?** This one trait is a major factor in how well they'll relate to a particular story.
- What problem or challenge can your audience relate to?** This should be the key problem or challenge in your story's plot.
- What are the listener's possible expectations for a good story?** For example, what do they expect to happen next? How do they expect the story to end?

You may also choose different stories for written vs. oral presentation. For written text, you might choose stories that are longer and more involved, considering that your audience is the type that will settle in and read.

On the other hand, a written story, such as a story for your website's Home or About pages, should be immediately attention-grabbing. If you're telling a story in-person, this may not be quite as important since you have a somewhat captive audience. The web surfer can easily click away while it's much harder for a person to disengage when face-to-face.

Use audience personas and the above ideas when you go back to write more stories, refine the ones you've written, and choose which story to tell when.

Perfecting Your Story

Although it seems strange to talk to yourself, this is exactly how you should practice telling your story. Pick a quiet time when you're alone, close the door and begin your story. A commute to work or any other time when you're alone works great. Eliminate all distractions and tell your story, noting as you go areas that could be changed or improved.

Once you feel comfortable and your story is starting to sound natural and authentic, you should try recording yourself. This is terribly embarrassing for many people, but it's something you can get over if you try it a few times. Recording helps you refine and perfect your story. It also gets you used to telling it and hearing yourself telling it.

The easiest way to record yourself is on your phone. But it's even better to do a video recording, even if it's just a simple recording using your PC's camera. Video is good because you can refine not only the audio qualities like tone of voice or "ums" and "ers," but also eye contact and body language.

The key when reviewing your recording is to make sure that you look and sound comfortable telling your story. It should look natural and personable, and not fake or contrived.

Another reason to record is so that you understand the timing of your story. A good story should be told in 1 to 2 minutes. If it goes too long, you'll lose the listener and you may lose the impact.

If you want to tell a longer story, cut it up into 1-2 minute shorter stories that can all be wound together. You can then tell parts of your story or the whole story as the situation demands or time allows.

Go Live with Your Story

Once your story is well-formed, natural, and properly timed, it's time to start practicing it in front of a real audience. Consider low-risk opportunities where you can try out your personal story. Try practicing it with a friend or colleague. Tell them you're practicing your story and you'd love their feedback.

Gradually start trying out your story with small groups. Look for opportunities, such as when someone asks you about your company or what you do. Try it out with any groups or associations to which you belong. Make sure you start small and gradually try it with larger groups when you know the story has the right impact. Otherwise, if it doesn't go over well with a large group, this will be a bad experience and potential confidence killer for you.

Your story is never exactly finished. You'll always find ways to tighten it, tweak it or make it more relevant. Always pay attention to feedback as you tell your stories and look for areas of improvement.

And remember that whenever telling your story, you must start with your audience. Consider your audience and position your story for them. For example, the age, gender or background of your audience may affect how you will tailor it to them. If you have a story that involves golf, the details of the game will be more interesting to people who actually play golf. But an overly detailed explanation of your golf game will risk losing the interest of those who don't know the sport well.

Opportunities to Tell Your Story

Once your story is finished, you'll want to start looking for more real-world opportunities to tell it. You've already told it to select groups of people as a sort of trial run. Now, it's time to start using it with a wider audience.



- **Presentations.** If you have an upcoming presentation, you can use this as an opportunity to tell your personal story. If you have a story that is related to the subject matter of your presentation, you can open with this story instead of just talking about your company. A personal story as an opener can help to set the tone of the presentation, just like it often does during a TED Talk. If you're using PowerPoint, consider devoting one slide to your story.
- **Meetings.** Look for any upcoming meetings with new people where you will be expected to introduce yourself. If you'll be introducing yourself to a new person or group of people, this is a good opportunity to tell your story. Personal stories make great professional introductions.

- **Groups.** Are there any groups where you could share your story? For example, do you belong to a local business group, an entrepreneurial group, Toastmasters or something along those lines?
- **Conferences.** Conferences offer a great opportunity for sharing your story. You can share your story as part of introducing your business. You can also prepare a condensed form of your story to use as an "elevator speech" when introducing yourself to new people you meet at the conference.
- **Interviews.** Any time you're interviewed by any media, whether offline such as a newspaper or online, you should have a good story prepared. This is an excellent chance to tell people what you're all about.
- **Online Opportunities.** Take advantage of as many online opportunities as possible to tell your story. A few good opportunities include:
 - Your website's About Page.
 - Social media profiles
 - Introducing yourself to new online forums that you join

If you don't have an online opportunity to tell your story at length, look for ways you can take an excerpt or snippet from your story and use it. For example, a social media profile may not give you enough space for the whole story. In this case, use a salient part of your story that shows who you are and what you're about.

Changing Your Story to Suit the Listener

You'll want to consider your audience not only when creating and choosing stories, but also as you tell them. You may find it expedient to change a story slightly to better suit the audience. You might change the timing, making it longer or shorter or emphasizing certain parts.

You might change the protagonist slightly so that he or she is more relatable to your audience. For the same story, you might emphasize that

the protagonist is an entrepreneur or businessperson when telling it to investors; but when telling it to customers, you may emphasize the protagonist's role in their family as a father or mother.

You could change something like the setting, or emphasize different aspects of the background of your story to suit the audience. For example, you can alter the background somewhat so that it more closely resembles the background of your listeners.

As mentioned before, consider any common ground you have with your listeners and bring this up to the fore of your story. Again, this makes the story you're telling more relatable, which will give it more impact and get listeners more engaged.

Other details of the story may include data, figures, or technical jargon. Exact sums of money may be more effective when telling a story to investors. When telling a story for disaster relief, figures such as those injured or the extent of damage will make it more effective. If telling your story to an audience with a high level of technical knowledge, you should use this specific language and jargon.

Aside from the details of the story, you may also adjust its tone depending on the audience and format in which it's published. A written story may have a more formal, fiction-like tone whereas it may be told in more casual language. Consider your audience when deciding which tone to use; written stories don't always call for a more formal tone.

Most of all, make sure that you're comfortable with telling one story before you start altering it too much for different audiences. The process of writing and telling different personal stories will get easier as you continue to practice at every opportunity you find.

Action Steps:

1. Practice telling one of your stories to a close friend, colleague, or mentor. Ask for feedback about what was engaging and what was not interesting.
2. Revise your story versions. Go back to each type of story after practicing/implementing and edit it based on feedback or reactions you experienced.
3. Now that you've practiced your story, what are your best opportunities for telling your story, and who are the key audiences you'll need to consider for each? How will different types of audiences affect your story or the details you include? How many minutes is ideal for your story? Use the provided worksheet to take notes.
4. Written story: Check your website and social media channels, like Linked In. Review your 'about us' or other 'about me' sections of your social media. Add in pieces from your personal stories in each place where people might go to learn more about you.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Now that you've created your personal stories, structured them and practiced them, it's time to wrap up. However, you should never stop creating new stories and improving old ones.

Practice your story wherever possible and pay close attention to the reaction of your listeners. Tighten up your story where needed, erase parts that are unnecessary, and sometimes add or change a bit to make it more effective. You may also discover that you have more stories to tell which are just as central to explaining who you are and what your values are.

In this course, you've learned:

- The importance of stories and why you need to identify and work on your own in order to engage your audience and build personal connections
- The different types of personal stories that are commonly used and how to choose the right one for you
- How to write your personal story so that it's interesting, authentic, and effective at communicating who you are to others
- How to practice your story, adjust it for different audiences, and find opportunities to practice and tell your story to the world.

Creating a personal story is about more than just promoting yourself or your business. It helps you to identify your true values, in addition to helping you to convey those values to others. The self-reflection you did during the course hopefully opened your eyes to who you are and what you're about. This helps you to convey yourself authentically to others, which in turn helps you form a close connection with prospects and

customers. That close connection is what helps you convert prospects to customers and build a loyal customer base, far better than any form of marketing can achieve.

Action Steps:

1. Review all your notes, worksheets, and checklists from the course.
2. Next, create a plan for refining your story; creating different versions of your story; continuing to practice your story/ies; identifying new ways and opportunities to tell your story; and implementing any changes to where you currently have or use your personal stories (social media, websites etc.).

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