

HYPNOTIC STORYTELLING

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Why Stories?

Most people understand the necessity of building up some kind of social skills. We all recognize the value of being assertive, of being able to calmly say, "no," to ask for what we want. And even though most of us will do anything to avoid speaking in public, at the same time we know instinctively that if we *could* speak in public, we'd make a lot more money. Many of us also realize that being able to persuade people is a good skill to have. If you can effectively persuade people to do things, like buy products or go on date (or even go home with you) you'll be able to make more money and have better relationships.

If you can combine the two, public speaking and persuasion, you can do a lot. You can "sell from the stage," you can become a world class, in-demand motivational speaker. You can even run for public office if you can eloquently pace and lead people on a large scale.

But stories? How many people, when they are kids, want to become great storytellers? Can you even major in "storytelling" in college? Sure, you can study creative writing, literature, understand the necessity of character development, or perhaps go to Hollywood and learn filmmaking, but storytelling?

Yet stories are everywhere. Which means if you can learn the art (or rather the skill, as we'll learn later) of storytelling, it may help you as much, perhaps even more, than being a persuasive speaker. We'll soon see that there is virtually no area of life that cannot be easily and quickly enhanced by being able to spin a quick tale.

Newspapers

Know why they call them "stories" even though they are about (allegedly) factual events? Because of how those factual events are structured. Perhaps you've seen a movie about the newspaper-reporter-hero, about to sniff out the big "story" that will change the world. They only have a hunch, so they try and pitch their idea to their editor. Their editor listens patiently and says, "I don't see the story." What does that mean?

Facts are only worth reporting if they can be told in "story" form. For example, if you bought a newspaper and you found that the main "story" on the front page was about how farmers were coming along fine in the current carrot crop, you'd want a refund. Stories need to have structure. Stories need to have good guys and bad guys. Stories need to have tension. So, when the fictional editor says to the fictional reporter-hero, "I don't see the story," what she means is that there are no good guys, no bad guys, no tension, no underdog to root for. There's just some facts that don't seem interesting.

The Moral of The Story Is...

Stories are the easiest ways to teach kids important lessons. All of Aesop's Fables come pre-written with the punch line at the end. Slow and steady wins the race. Preparing for winter is better than waiting for the last minute. If you're too greedy you'll lose everything. Why not just tell kids, "Hey, if you are greedy, you'll make stupid mistakes, which will cost you more money in the long run." Because nobody likes advice, but everybody loves a story. And by telling stories, and creating characters that people

can relate to, we can impart wisdom from the inside out.

If you simply give people advice, they may or may not take it. But when you lead them through a story, one where they follow along and identify with the characters, they'll feel the advice. They'll feel the loss that comes from greed. They'll feel the tension as the rabbit takes a nap and is overcome by the slow but steady tortoise. Stories work because they do what Dale Carnegie taught about giving advice:

"The best way to get somebody to do something is to let them think it is their idea."

You don't need to have dreams of being a best-selling novelist, or to be remembered for thousands of years of writing short, entertaining but powerful fables. But if you can take a simple idea, wrap it in a story, and be able to tell it or write it effectively, you'll have a much better chance of getting your idea accepted and acted upon, whatever it is.

Once Upon a Time

Luckily, there are plenty of ways to use the idea of "stories" without anybody even knowing you are telling stories. In later chapters, you'll learn how to pick simple stories from your own experience, and combine them in ways that can move people to action. The action you'd like them to take. You'll learn how to create short metaphors that take only a moment to spit out, but will have a lasting impact on your listener. You'll learn how to be a hit at parties, how to mesmerize entire rooms, all while feeling extremely comfortable and never ever saying, "Hey, this reminds me

of a story, once up a time..."

What's Ahead

You'll learn why it's nearly impossible to avoid telling stories. You'll learn why every time humans communicate, we are speaking metaphorically in one way or another. You'll learn why all humans, by virtue of being alive at this stage in our evolutionary history, are master (or can easily become master) storytellers. You'll learn how to rearrange what you are already doing, so that it becomes much more effective, much more entertaining, and much more powerful.

Knowing Where to Tap

You know the one about the plumber, right? Guy's basement is flooded, so he calls the plumber. Plumber shows up, wanders around in the basement, starting at all the pipes. Finally, he taps once with his wrench, and the leak stops.

"That'll be \$500," the plumber said.

"\$500?!" the homeowner shrieks, wondering if maybe he should have tried some tapping himself. "But all you did was tap once with your wrench!"

"That's true," said the wealthy plumber, "but it's knowing where to tap that's the trick."

What's this got to do with stories? (Other than being a story illustrating an aspect of stories inside a book about how to tell stories...) Armed with why and how stories work, you'll

be the one doing the tapping. Imagine this. You're at a party, listening to your friends grumbling about something or other like friends tend to do. You wait for a long enough period of silence, and then say a few words. These words hit home. These words not only pace the problem, but offer a unique and elegant solution. The same words that turn frowns into smiles as they look at you and nod, "Wow, that's **so** true!"

You want to become a master storyteller so you can spin tales, help your friends, and get people thinking exactly the way you want them to, all while entertaining and enlightening them at the same time? Keep reading!

Rich Communication

Chomsky made his mark on the world with his theory of Transformational Grammar, which was also instrumental in helping Bandler and Grinder make sense of NLP, as they understood it at the time. If you've ever read, "The Structure of Magic," you'll find it filled with "language trees" that Chomsky created. Chomsky realized that all human languages have more or less the same structure. Nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, particles. He concluded that since all human languages follow the same structure they are the same language, only different dialects. Stephen Pinker in "The Language Instinct," describes how we have these (either metaphorical or literal) language "switches" in our brains. When kids are between zero and around two, they are "setting" these switches. That is, they are trying to figure out the unique structure of their "local dialect." For example, English is a S-V-O (subject - verb - object) language. I eat peanut butter. Japanese, on the other hand is a S-O-V language. I peanut butter eat. The rules for other structures (how exactly adjectives modify nouns, adverbs modify verbs, how phrasal structures work, etc.) is what children are trying to figure out (unconsciously and instinctively, of course,) when they are spitting out gibberish.

Word Fountains

But once they get all the "language switches" figured out for their local "dialect" (e.g. English or Spanish or Russian, etc.) that's when they suddenly turn into non-stop word factories. Interestingly enough, as Pinker points out in "Words and Rules," the mistakes kids make are when they assume the sentences they are saying are based in the

structure, as they understand it. It almost always when they incorrectly assuming a verb is regular when it's irregular. They say things like "I petted the dog" instead of "I pet the dog," since they are relying on the language structure rather than using irregular verbs, as Pinker shows must be memorized one by one, rather than understood structurally.

Language Instinct

It's clear that one of our big selling points, (as animals) is our use of language. Sure, chimps and gorillas can learn a few hundred sign language symbols, but nothing remotely close to the rich tapestry we can weave with our words. The wonderful mental imagery based on pure hallucinations, that we can transfer from our heads into the heads of our fellow humans. If all we could do was grunt to one another, how could we ever have invented shopping malls or microwavable burritos?

Language binds us together, it helps us console one another and uplift one another. It helps us describe complicated ideas, and complicated things that aren't even invented yet. As we'll see later, our ability to transfer ideas from one head to another goes far beyond transferring simple data, like when you backup your computer every day. We transfer not just complicated ideas from one head to another, but how we'd like our friends and colleagues to think about those complicated ideas.

Chocolate Chip Cookies

Think of the steps involved in making a few dozen cookies. First mix the flour and the water. Then add the eggs. Then

the sugar. Finally add the chocolate chips. Then preheat the oven. While the oven is heating up, take out a few cookie sheets and spread a few dabs of oil on them. Then take the cookies in small lumps and place them a few inches apart. Put in the oven, and wait patiently for twenty minutes. Take them out, let them cool, and eat them. A simple process but if will be disastrous if the steps aren't done in the correct order. Suppose you tried to bake the cookies before you heated up the oven. Or maybe you tried to pour the chocolate chips on top of the cookies after they were done baking. Or maybe you really goofed and mixed the flour and water, cooked that, and then tried to mix everything else in.

A simple process conveyed through language. But when we tell stories, we do the same thing. We explain certain things in certain order. But instead of just mixing raw ingredients, we are creating characters and putting them through a specific sequence in a specific order. First, we get to know the character. Then the character faces some difficulties. Then the character meets some friends. Then the character and the friends join forces to kill the bad guy. Along the way, one of the good guy dies, but they kill the bad guy in the end.

When you pay attention to the instructions, you get several delicious cookies. Or when you pay attention to the story, you are moved through emotions. Certain emotions that pay off in a way that will help you defeat your demons in your own life. Stories can be thought of as idea recipes to get people thinking the deep emotions you'd like them to feel.

Reason for Language

Why did we talking monkeys learn to talk in the first place? Was it to convey information, or was it for something much deeper? We tend to pick up and develop traits, over the long period of our evolutionary history, because those with the traits tended to do better than those without. So, what is the benefit of having language? Obviously, there are many. But as we'll soon learn, one of the prime reasons we make sounds other than grunts is something you can do much more effectively as a skilled storyteller.

What's the Punchline?

Aesop's Fables are unique in that they are very clear in their purpose. The message of the famous Tortoise and the Hare is to convince us to take our time. It says it right there at the end, "Slow and steady wins the race." But with other stories, it's not so easy. Sometimes stories are told just for the sake of keeping us entertained. But even then, there are certain story structures we respond to more than others. Like our metaphorical newspaper editor. Stories need to have good guys and bad guys, tension, and plenty of other things. The deeper meaning of stories, even when the meaning of a particular story isn't clear, is that there is a deeper meaning. Every story was concocted to create an emotional impact. And like all communication, stories are a tool to do one primary function. And that is to persuade. Let's talk about that next.

All Communication Is Persuasion

Many people believe that communication is only partly used for persuasion, and mostly used for transmitting data. However, very rarely do we communicate and **only** want to transmit data. Even if we think we are only transmitting data, we are doing so under a larger context of getting some kind of intention fulfilled. It's nearly impossible to separate our communication from the surrounding actions, all which are in flux and dependent on the flow of data between two communicators. As they say in NLP, "you can't not communicate." We can take that to mean "You can't not persuade." Let's look at a few seemingly trivial examples.

Asking for The Time

So, you're on the street away from home. There are no clocks in sight, and you're supposed to meet a friend at half past two. You left your phone in your car. You want to know the time. You make a request, and ask a passerby. On one level, you requested information and you received information. But what was your request? A merely transfer of information? If it was indeed only a transfer of information, what would the information be? "I don't know what time it is." How about, "I need to meet my friend at half past two and I don't know the time." Suppose that this was a simple transfer of information. Would you have been happy in that situation if everybody you transferred that piece of data to only smiled in return? Not likely. The process of asking politely is to generate a needed response. You wanted them to pause in whatever they were doing, stop thinking about whatever they were thinking, and look at the time, and then look at you and tell you the time. For

most people, this happens quickly and barely consciously. If you were a wanted criminal and the police later asked the time-giver what you looked like, they would scarcely remember. Another aspect of this simple transaction is polite behavior. Did you ask calmly, with a smile? Or did you scream at them with the wild eyes of an escaped lunatic? Chances are you asked them politely. Perhaps polite behavior is a subconscious attempt to elicit the proper behavior, or to avoid unwanted behavior. You might even say that polite behavior exists to make persuasion more likely.

Squeezing Out the Subway Door

What about wordless communication? Suppose you're hanging there balancing between two people on the A train at rush hour. Your stop is coming up, and there are two people between you and the door. As the train slows to a stop, what do you do? If you're like most people, you push just slightly toward the door, knowing that the people standing between you and the door will understand what's going on, and move back slightly. A large collection of unconscious, non-verbal but mutually agreed upon behavior. Whenever the train slows to stop, make way for whoever's getting off, and whoever's getting on. Do you need to make eye contact with the people you need to push past? No, you don't. Do they need to make eye contact with you? No, they don't. But the same dance happens in every large city with a subway system several hundred times per day. You want to elicit a specific response from them. You behave in a way that makes that response likely. You communicated your desire to them to get out of your way. Your desire for them to, if only for a moment, shift their thinking enough to accommodate your needs. To persuade

them in the easiest and most effective way possible.

Don't Say a Word

Let's say you're at the office. It's nearly quitting time on Friday. Your buddy is having a party, and you want to invite one of your coworkers, but not the other one. Finally, you've got about twenty seconds of free time. (Assume if you use your personal device you'll be fired. No texting allowed!) You take advantage of the free twenty seconds.

"Hey, party at Christy's tonight, but keep it to yourself," you say. Before your coworker can reply, the coworker you don't want to invite pops in.

"Hey, what are you guys doing tonight, anything?" he says, looking first at you and then your friend. You give her the universally understood look of, "don't say a word!"

"Nothing," she says, to your relief. When you mentioned the party, you were intending to persuade her to come. When the unwanted coworker popped in, you wanted to persuade her to be quiet. Both of you acted in a way to persuade the unwanted coworker to leave you both alone.

Highly Social Animals

Humans are very social. We hate being alone, that is when we don't want to be. Study after study shows this in primates and humans. Solitary confinement is the worst punishment for prisoners. Not only are we social creatures, but we are social creatures that are always communicating with one another. And every communication, every look, or lack thereof, is intended to create a desired response, even if it's to get somebody to ignore us. Little kids instinctively know this and do this when the teacher asks a question

nobody knows. Their body language is screaming, "Don't call on me!"

Just Saying

Sometimes, though, we pretend we are only "just saying." Pay close attention next time you say this, or somebody else says this. This innocent phrase is used when something is said, it doesn't have the intended effect, so we backtrack. Say you're hanging out with your friends, trying to figure out what to do on a Saturday night. You mention that your neighbor, the guy who collects butterflies and has them pinned all over his walls, is hosting a lecture in entomology at his apartment tonight. Everybody looks at you with stone faces.

"Just saying," you say before timidly breaking off eye contact. Perhaps you wanted to elicit a laugh, and it didn't work. Perhaps you are secretly in love with your bug loving neighbor, but now you're embarrassed. But when you say, "Just saying," you're not "Just saying." The act of saying, "Just saying," is an attempt to persuade. To persuade your friends that you didn't really mean what you just said.

All Persuasion All the Time

So, let's assume then, that all communication, verbal or not, is an attempt to persuade. To elicit something from other people. Information, laughter, behavior, whatever. In the next few chapters, we'll look over different methods of persuasion from a structural level.

Hard Sell

What is the dreaded "hard sell?" It's those highly confrontational sales situations. Cars, timeshares, any kind of environment where the whole scenario, including the furniture is designed to keep you stuck while you have no choice but to listen to the salesperson. Most people have a hard time saying, "no." This is leveraged during the hard sell. The longer you sit there, the more likely you'll buy. This type of persuasion shows up in a lot of places, a lot more than most of us realize. We are exposed to it, and we ourselves do it.

Overt Sales

Any time you are in a shop and the salesperson has a vested interest in selling you something, (they are making a commission) the hard sell (one some level) is going to be present. Think of you with your ideas in your mind. When you speak, you take those ideas, turn them into words, and present them to the person you are talking to. Three things can happen. One is your ideas will go into their head. Another is that their ideas will go into your head. The third is when both of your ideas mix together and then go back into each of your respective heads. Kind of a goofy way to describe it, but this simple metaphor is a good way to understand persuasion. Any sales will involve the sales person taking their ideas (you should buy this product because X, Y and Z) and putting them into your head as effectively as possible.

Advice

Any time we give advice, whether it's asked for or unasked

for, we are taking our ideas and attempting to put them into somebody else's head. If you don't like unasked for advice, but aren't sure why, or how to respond, let's dig in a little bit and see what's happening. Suppose you're hungry, so you go into kitchen. You get out a couple of slices of bread and some peanut butter. You are just about to dig the knife into the jar and start spreading when your significant other walks in.

"You're just eating peanut butter by itself? You should at least put some jelly on there," they say and look at you as if you're committing a mortal sin. You pause, and feel a bit conflicted. If you follow their advice, you may feel a bit foolish, since you're so easily bossed around. On the other hand, if you ignore them and continue in your sandwich building, you feel as if you're being rude. After all, they're just trying to help, right? Well, maybe, maybe not. In the situation with a significant other, chances are they really **are** trying to help. But they're also looking at you doing something, and deciding that they know more about the situation than you do. Clearly, you're in your own kitchen and you know how to make a sandwich. You probably have a lot of experience with both plain peanut butter sandwiches and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. So why do they assume they know **more** about the situation than you do? Why do they assume that **their** opinion on what you eat is more important than **your** opinion on what you eat? This "feeling" of somebody else forcing their ideas into your brain is much more pronounced when advice comes from acquaintances and colleagues, especially when it's beyond the reason for your relationship (coworkers giving personal advice, etc.)

Might Makes Right

In its barest form, any kind of unasked for advice giving, or any type of hard sell is based on the ancient "law" of "might makes right." Whoever can describe their idea the most forcefully usually wins. This happens in presidential debates, barstool arguments and Internet forums. Despite us humans thinking we are logical and rational, this is rarely the case. Without needing to take an extended detour into logic, suffice it to say that few arguments are ever about logic. My idea vs. your idea, and whoever can describe their idea with the most passion, the most tenacity, and sometimes the most violently will win. While "might makes right" is usually associated with armies and empires, it's the same structure everywhere, even with little kids on a school yard.

"You're a poopie head!"

"Am not!"

"Are too!"

This goes on until one person gives up. Whoever gives up first (or whoever blinks first or looks away first or speaks first, depending on the situation) loses. Only when two parties agree on a mutually desire outcome, and then use logic, science and mathematics to find the most effective way to arrive at that mutually agreed upon outcome, is the "might makes right" rule not present.

How to Tell

If you find yourself in the middle of an argument, and you're wondering how much of it is based on "might makes right" and how much isn't, ask yourself these questions:

How much do I know about my opponent's intentions and

desires?

How much does my opponent know about my intentions and desires?

If the answer is "not much" then both of you, on some level, are using the "might makes right" strategy of persuasion. Sure, you may be friendly, you may be smiling, you may even be best friends or lovers, but if you are both trying to get your point or idea across without regard to the other's point or idea, you're using the oldest game in the book.

Chimpanzee Politics

A fascinating book by Frans de Waal (*Chimpanzee Politics*) studied the complicated social structure of chimps. And guess what? They are very similar to us humans. And since chimps are our closest ancestors (our DNA is 98% similar) and it's believed we split off from chimps about six million years ago, you might say that the "might makes right" strategy of persuasion literally **is** the oldest trick in the book.

Outside In

Thinking back in terms of the ideas in your head, and the ideas in their head, the hard sell, or the might-makes-right persuasion strategy is based on putting your ideas into their head with little regard to their ideas, or at most some basic assumptions about your ideas. In our peanut butter example, the advice giver assumed the peanut butter eater was hungry, and that was enough. From a hard sell standpoint, once we have a basic idea of what they want, we're ready to barrage them with unending advice until

they either give in, or run away. Luckily, persuading through the art of storytelling depends very little on the hard sell. But before we dive into storytelling, let's look at another form of persuasion next.

Less Harder Sell

A much preferable way to persuade than to hammer people with your ideas until they flee is to base our recommendations and advice around their criteria, what they want. You can think of this as a much more "enlightened" approach. While the hard sell generally requires a certain kind of personality (e.g. high charisma, thick skin, etc.) the soft sell is much easier. It involves first asking them about their wants and needs. On one end of the spectrum, a soft sell persuader will ask them about their wants and needs until they get enough information. Then they leverage, or "match" what they want with what the persuader has. The more effectively you can do this, the more easily you can persuade nearly everybody you meet, so long as you have whatever they are looking for.

What If There's No Match?

There's an idea in persuasion that you can convince people to do things against their will. Think of a poor, unassertive customer who meekly walks onto a car lot. The super charismatic sales person walks up, and doesn't even ask what they want. They show them a few cars, then take them inside. After an hour of hammering them, the poor customer walks away the proud owner of a \$50,000 SUV. Was he persuaded against his will? Not really. Most people don't have much of a will. The idea of doing something against somebody's will requires they have an idea in mind of what they want when they first walk on the car lot. If the car shopper was specifically looking for a pink station wagon, then selling them anything other than that would be persuading them against their will. But remember the hard sell is based on might makes right, so another way to

describe it would be whoever has the strongest will wins.

But if they *sort of* want a pink car, and they end up buying a blue car, were they really persuaded against their will? Maybe, maybe not. It all depends on the idea of criteria. Think of the last time you went to get something to eat, either at a fast food restaurant or at a regular restaurant, but when the time came to choose, you couldn't decide. This is very common, and it happens to most of us, most of the time. You have one level of criteria (hunger for a certain kind of food, that's why you chose that particular restaurant) but as for what do you want **specifically**, you don't really know. Let's call your desire for a certain kind of food your vague criteria. And your eventual choice of what you're going to eat (tacos or burritos, for example) your specific criteria. To the extent that a soft sell persuader can help you move from vague criteria to specific criteria, everybody's happy. Nobody was persuaded against anybody's will, and all wants and needs were respected. If you've ever asked any food service worker for their recommendation, you were effectively asking them to help you move from vague criteria to specific criteria. Because few people ever walk around with specific criteria (we generally wait until the last possible minute) being an effective soft sell persuader will help you in nearly every situation you encounter yourself in.

How to Soft Sell

The first step is to simply find out what they want. Since most people have vague criteria, this is usually pretty easy. Even if it's a social conversation, you can ask about their hobbies, their job, and what they like about it, and then transition this into asking about what they'd like their

future to be. People like talking about their vague criteria, and it feels good to "try on" different specific criteria. Meaning if somebody started asking you about your job, and then started asking you about what kind of job you might like in five years, it would be an enjoyable conversation. You could extrapolate what you like about your current job, and what skills you might learn over the next few years. Having a conversation about different potential futures is an enjoyable thing to do. In fact, that's what we humans like to do best. Dream about a future that is much better than our present, even if we love our present situation. This is precisely why the soft sell, even if you aren't selling anything, is very respectful, very friendly and pleasant.

If you're actually intending on persuading people, it's rather easy, so long as you have several things that might serve as effective specific criteria for their vague criteria. Even if you are with friends and you all have the same vague criteria (go out and have fun on a Friday night) discussing what different specific criteria might fit your collective vague criteria (have fun on Friday night) is something people generally enjoy.

Common Themes

Hopefully you've noticed a couple of common themes between the hard sell and the soft sell. Both require that you have a conversation with them (you being the persuader) about what they want. So long as you are in a position to ask them what their vague criteria is, and then make some suggestions about specific criteria that might fulfill them, you're good. If you're talking to friends and family, everybody can feel involved and get their needs met.

Nobody will feel as though they are being forced to accept unasked for advice. If you are in sales, and you have a good idea of what your customers want, or better, are in a position to ask them and discuss it, you'll also do fairly well. However, this soft sell technique, despite how natural it is (most waiters or waitresses who are asked for recommendations don't need sales training), it does have its limitations. There are certain situations where asking somebody what they want isn't possible or appropriate. Let's look over some of those situations in the next chapter. Then we'll have an idea of all of the different situations we'd like to be more persuasive in, and we'll see how storytelling can be very effective in all of them.

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