

33,212 words

Master Storytelling:
How to Turn Your Experiences into
Stories that Teach, Lead, and Inspire

by Mark Carpenter and Darrell Harmon

A Sneak Peek

Foreword by Ron McMillan	Page 3
Preamble: Whose Line is it?	Page 7
Introduction: Why Stories Rule	Page 8
Chapter One: Stories Matter Because ...	Page 16
Chapter Two: You Can Find Stories ...	Page 29
Chapter Three: Great Stories Include ...	Page 41
Chapter Four: How Can Questions Help?	Page 65
Chapter Five: Use Stories to ...	Page 86
Chapter Six: Finish Your Story by ...	Page 103
Appendix: Story Examples	Page 128
Endnotes (citations and other confessions)	Page 151
Who are These Guys?	Page 154

Foreword

I left my home a week ago and traveled to a city I hadn't heard of until I read my itinerary. I traveled by car, plane, and bus. When I arrived, I was amazed! I was shocked! I fell in love.

Hmmm, perhaps I should add more detail to my story.

I am a well-traveled American. I travel for business and pleasure and have been to more places than most people I know. I consider myself well-informed about people and places. Yet, as I write this story, I am in a city I have never before visited. In fact, I hadn't even heard of this place, nor heard its name spoken. As part of a six-city trip, I arrived this morning and was instantly smitten.

This city lies between two beautiful rivers that meet near the city center and flow on to become a major tributary of the third longest river on Earth. There are 36 bridges in the city, which enable the millions of residents to get around using cars, trucks, trains, buses, and even miles and miles of a new monorail system.

Have you guessed the city yet? I bet you haven't.

There are thousands of high-rises and marvelous, new business buildings. They have high-tech companies, heavy manufacturing, even huge car manufacturing centers that make Fords, Hondas, Toyotas, and many other brands.

Everywhere there is evidence of great wealth. International companies have invested billions in advertisements, showrooms, and stores, including Gucci, BMW, and Tiffani's. I walked a downtown intersection crammed with thousands of people that

surpasses New York's Times Square or London's Piccadilly Circus in terms of hustle and bustle, vibrant shoppers, giant video screens, and pulsating music.

Also, this city is populated by over 53 significant minority groups.

I was amazed. Why had I never heard of this place before? Do you know where I am now? Need more clues?

In a verdant tangle of exotic trees and flowers is a fabulous park that has an incredible zoo with local, well-cared-for animals, some of which I've never heard of nor even seen pictures of before. Thrilling!

Okay, if this doesn't give it away, then you're probably like me: a well-informed, slightly arrogant, but still curious explorer who is surprised by learning something new about a topic I previously thought I was proficient in.

I discovered that (depending on which Internet site you care to believe) this is the most populous city in the world! (It may be second to Mexico City, depending on where you draw the city limits.)

How could I not know about this wonderful city before now? This is absolutely thrilling! I have discovered a fabulous new city to explore! Exciting!

Now, how about we take this little travel story and apply it to you and your life? Perhaps there are some exciting, profitable discoveries waiting for you.

Consider your expertise and experience. Perhaps you are a trainer, teacher, leader, co-worker, parent, or a volunteer neighborhood dog leavings clean-up person. Think about the roles in your life that require you to interact with others. What if, with all that

knowledge you possess about dealing with others, there were an area of knowledge and skill that you didn't know about—like me and my new favorite city? What if knowing more about this area could dramatically and powerfully increase your effectiveness with others? Would you want to know about it? Understand it? Use it to improve your outcomes and relationships?

I predict that this book, *Master Storytelling: How to Turn Your Experiences into Stories that Teach, Lead and Inspire*, will surprise you like the unknown city surprised me. I suspect you know a lot about storytelling. You've heard stories and told them your whole life. Get ready for an amazing surprise!

Mark Carpenter and Darrell Harmon have discovered how this well-recognized form of communication can be deeply utilized to improve your interactions in powerful ways. Through the effective use of well-prepared stories, data dumps or boring meetings can be turned into inspiring, memorable, motivating experiences. But the authors don't stop at announcing you "oughta wanna" tell stories; they teach you how. Mark and Darrell take you through a step-by-step process that helps you create focused stories that work.

Their book teaches you the skill of turning life experiences into stories that teach, lead, and inspire. It isn't about simply relating an experience; it's crafting your experiences into effective stories that move other people to action.

I enthusiastically recommend this book to you. It will make an important difference.

And, just in case you haven't yet figured it out, my "unknown city" is Chongqing, the most populous city in China with over 33 million people. Be sure to Google "red panda" and "white tigers."

Ron McMillan, four-time *New York Times* best-selling author, including *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High*

Whose Line is it?

It's a little tricky to co-author a book and make the voice sound consistent. Mark and Darrell each wrote different sections of this book and then added to the other's sections. We then discussed everything and came to agreement on all of it, so we speak with a single voice. Whatever Darrell says, Mark says. Whatever Mark says, Darrell says.

When we share a personal experience (and, of course, we share *lots* of them), we simply say, "I ..." and then tell the story. We didn't think it was important to identify who was speaking. We'll let you guess. We chose this convention primarily for ease in reading. (You're welcome.) We didn't want to use clunky verbiage like, "When one of us was ..." or "Mark/Darrell had an experience" Our focus is on the story, because the hero is the story, not the storyteller.

Ready? Here's the first one ...

Introduction: Why Stories Rule

I once worked for a small survey company that was trying to grow into an organizational development consultancy, but we were having a hard time getting traction. Each time we administered a customized survey measuring, say, employee engagement, we would deliver the results to the executive team of the client organization. We provided reports with bounteous color-coded charts and graphs, slicing and dicing the data from an assortment of perspectives. We then finished triumphantly with a flourish of recommendations. (If you've worked in a corporation of any size, this ritual should sound familiar.) But all too often, after the presentation, the executive team members would thank us for our work and then rush off to another meeting (or so they said).

Hmmm, this isn't working.

So, one day, back at the office, several of us played the role of executive team for a mock presentation done by two of our best consultants. They knew the numbers inside and out. They could tell us if a score in the 75th percentile was acceptable or portended the imminent exit of key employees. Our "executive team" was to assess the effectiveness of the presentation and see if we could find ways to increase up-selling opportunities.

As I sat through the presentation, I became increasingly bored – and concerned. While my colleagues did a stellar job of reporting the survey findings, they did nothing to help me want to care about the results. These were bright, motivated (even animated) people, but the more they talked, the less I wanted to listen.

The problem was not their intellect or their understanding of survey numbers, or even their earnestness. It was their approach presenting the numbers. They seemed to think that if they thoroughly explained how skillfully they had surveyed the employees and how excited they were about what the numbers told them, I'd want to hire them to do follow-up work. I should see what they saw and care about what they cared about in the numbers.

But I didn't.

It then dawned on me that what we needed – both the presenters and the audience – was an entirely different approach, one that would allow the consultants to share their insights in a way that made sense to the audience and addressed *their* needs. Instead of just reporting the findings and giving some interpretation of how good or bad they were, we needed to talk to our clients in terms of daily life within their organization. We needed to paint a picture of the frustration their employees felt after six months on the job when the thrill of their new role had worn off and it was now the same old, same old, day in and day out. They weren't learning anything new and were

starting to go numb between the ears. We needed to tell our clients why marketing team members and accounting staff had such vastly different scores on finding meaning in their work, and what that meant for retention. We needed to vividly portray what their employees were trying to say through the survey's five-point scale. But all the presenters did was report 4.7, 3.2, 4.3, and 2.9. So what?

They needed to tell us the *story* of the numbers.

I realized that our clients weren't just paying us to run a survey and then give them an expert's view of the numbers. They wanted our color commentary in addition to our colored charts. They wanted to know what the numbers had to say about the things they, as leaders, cared about most: Are their employees going to stick around another year or are they updating their resumes? How could they unleash their employees' passion for their work? What could they do to stimulate more innovative ideas to keep their organization competitive? Where were our answers to *those* questions?

In answering those questions, we needed to give the employees a voice. Of course, we wouldn't name specific people, but we could create archetypes of the different "employees" we were seeing in the numbers: those who were happy, those who wished things would change, and those who were on the doorstep heading out of the building. We should amalgamate the data, then shape the results into narratives that would represent the employees' feedback and speak to the executives.

We should tell their stories.

Storytelling is *sense-making*. It goes well beyond just reporting facts. Stories connect the dots and help us understand the importance of the facts, how those facts affect us.

Stories involve people and situations we can relate to, so we understand *and feel* the meaning of the experience we're reporting. When we relate to a story, we insert ourselves into it and it comes to life for us. Facts and figures then take on color, contour, and significance. As actor and author Alan Alda points out, "We listen better to a story. We get involved when we hear a story." That's sense-making.

The epiphany I had about our executive presentations illustrates a challenge most of us have in our lives: How do we move others to meaningful action? How do we sell our ideas, whether we're in the classroom, the boardroom, or the break room? Whether we're trying to illustrate the need for safety compliance, demonstrate the value of an idea we want backing for, or show a prospective employer that we're the perfect candidate for the job, how do we convince others to buy into our ideas? How do we connect our ideas to their needs in a way that is meaningful and impactful to them? This is where stories can make the difference.

Whether we realize it or not, stories are an integral part of our human experience.

Consider this: Humans have only used written communication for about 10,000 years

(give or take a century). But as a species, we've been telling each other stories from the very beginning, and we continue to use them for an array of purposes.

There are many different kinds of stories: fairy tales (the "Once upon a time ..." kind), movies and novels of different genres, professional presentations, stand-up routines, political and marketing pitches (often unintentionally similar to stand-up routines in their effect if not their intent), and others. They differ in their forms and communication media, but they typically share some common objectives: to inform, convey values, entertain, make a point and, above all, *move us*. To do that, they often have some sort of storyline – set-up, action, conclusion – and they have interesting, relatable characters.

Here's an example:

An 80-year-old woman gets arrested for shoplifting. When she goes before the judge he asks her, "Ma'am, what did you steal?"

She replies: "A can of peaches."

The judge asks, "Why did you steal a can of peaches?"

"Because I was hungry, Your Honor," the woman replies.

“Well, ma’am,” the judge asks, “just how many peaches were in that can?”

“Only six, Your Honor,” she replies pitifully.

“Six peaches, huh?” the judge repeats. He then says, “All right, for stealing six peaches I sentence you to six days in jail.”

Before the judge could finish pronouncing the punishment, however, the old woman’s husband speaks up and asks the judge if he could say something.

“Yes, sir,” the judge says. “What is it?”

The husband says, “She also stole a can of peas.”

But seriously, folks . . .

While jokes are fun, we would argue that some of the best uses of stories are to *teach*, *lead*, and *inspire*. This book is our attempt to help you do that better, whatever your role, whatever your situation.

There are many ways we typically try to teach, lead, and inspire: We share data (looots of data), pour enthusiasm into rah-rah pep talks, create campaign slogans (with swag for emphasis), shout dire warnings, show flashy-splashy graphics, etc. — all to get our

message across. While those can have some impact, stories are an often-underutilized tool that can add power to our efforts. But we're not talking about creating epic movies, YouTube videos, hilarious stand-up bits, or best-selling novels. We think there's great power in using your everyday experiences to drive home the points you're trying to make in brief but well-crafted stories. Your anecdotes can lead others to take action.

A Sneak Peek

In the following pages we'll share ideas, examples, recommendations, and practice suggestions for honing your storytelling skills. We'll give you insights into why our brains light up when we hear a great story. We'll also show you practical ways to take slices of your "ordinary" life (as if there were such a thing) and transform them into a memorable and persuasive tool for moving others willingly to purposeful action. Whether you're a natural storyteller or have never considered stories as a tool you could use, you'll find helpful information in this book. We believe that the simple skills of storytelling will be a revelation—and maybe a revolution—in your life.

Each chapter will conclude with a *summary of main points* and an *application section*.

You'll be collecting useful ideas throughout the chapter, and by the end you'll be itching to put them to good use. So, grab your favorite writing utensil (paper and pen, laptop, tablet, or quill and parchment) and get ready to capture insights, bolts of inspiration, and application ideas. You also have the option of using our

specially-crafted “story catcher” found at www.MasterStorytellingBook.com. We’ll unleash your storytelling superpower bit by bit as you make your way through the book. The story catcher will help you catch ideas as they pop into your head, then lead you through the process of turning your real-life experiences into stories that teach, lead, and inspire.

We’re glad you’ve chosen to take this journey with us. Let’s get started.