

Making Your Message Memorable

Communicating Through Stories

**Deborah Shouse, Ron Zoglin, and
Susan Fenner, Ph.D.**

A Crisp Fifty-Minute™ Series Book

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Learning Objectives For:

MAKING YOUR MESSAGE MEMORABLE

The objectives for *Making Your Message Memorable* are listed below. They have been developed to guide the user to the core issues covered in this book.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS BOOK ARE TO HELP THE USER:

- 1) Understand the ways that storytelling makes an effective business communication tool in the workplace
- 2) Explore the elements of story development as they apply to a business setting
- 3) Learn how to take a story from rough draft to refined form
- 4) Master delivery techniques to help storytellers build connections with the audience

ASSESSING PROGRESS

NETg has developed a Crisp Series **assessment** that covers the fundamental information presented in this book. A 25-item, multiple-choice and true/false questionnaire allows the reader to evaluate his or her comprehension of the subject matter. To download the assessment and answer key, go to www.courseilt.com and search on the book title, or call 1-800-442-7477.

Assessments should not be used in any employee selection process.

About the Authors

Deborah Shouse is a writer, speaker, editor and creativity catalyst. Her work has appeared in periodicals such as *Reader's Digest*, *Newsweek*, *Woman's Day*, *Hemispheres*, *Family Circle*, and *Ms.* She is the co-author of the books *Antiquing For Dummies* (IDG Books) and *Working Woman's Communications Survival Guide* (Prentice Hall) and the author of several business books. She and her partner Ron Zoglin do keynote presentations and workshops in storytelling.

Ron Zoglin is a writer, professional storyteller, and co-owner of Brookside Antiques in Kansas City, Missouri. Antiques dovetail into Ron's passion for storytelling. As a professional storyteller, Ron has performed for businesses, universities, and international conferences. He is the voice on the audiotape, *Even Mystics Have Bills to Pay* and *The Adventures of the Little Green Dragon*. Ron feels that stories add a warmth and meaning that complement and enhance life in this technological age.

Susan Fenner Ph.D. is the Manager of Education and Professional Development at the International Association of Administrative Professionals (IAAP) headquartered in Kansas City, Missouri. She edited the *Complete Office Handbook* published by Random House, and has written many articles on workplace skills and developed interactive training sessions used throughout North America. Her goal in life is to help people and organizations develop potential. Storytelling is one medium she frequently uses to illustrate points and reach audiences.

How to Use This Book

This *Fifty-Minute™ Series Book* is a unique, user-friendly product. As you read through the material, you will quickly experience the interactive nature of the book. There are numerous exercises, real-world case studies, and examples that invite your opinion, as well as checklists, tips, and concise summaries that reinforce your understanding of the concepts presented.

A Crisp Learning *Fifty-Minute™ Book* can be used in a variety of ways. Individual self-study is one of the most common. However, many organizations use *Fifty-Minute* books for pre-study before a classroom training session. Other organizations use the books as a part of a systemwide learning program—supported by video and other media based on the content in the books. Still others work with Crisp Learning to customize the material to meet their specific needs and reflect their culture. Regardless of how it is used, we hope you will join the more than 20 million satisfied learners worldwide who have completed a *Fifty-Minute Book*.

Preface

Today is a challenging time for businesses. It is no longer possible to do “business as usual” and survive. Companies have become global, customers are more demanding, and technology is creating constant change. New companies start up daily, established companies are sold or restructured, entire industries can disappear overnight as economies fluctuate or products become obsolete. Every employee, every employer, every company, and every industry is looking for a competitive edge.

That’s where storytelling comes in. We tend to think of a story as something told to small children to relax them before bedtime. In fact, this is an *example* of storytelling, but a story is much more. Storytelling is a simple and effective business tool everyone from management to maintenance, from service to sales, can use.

Are you surprised? Are you thinking, “No way!”? Are you wondering how something so elementary can benefit multimillion-dollar organizations? Then read on, because this book is written for every person who works in a company and wants to:

- Be more productive
- Reach more people (customers, co-workers, even stockholders) on a personal and emotional level
- Be seen as an effective communicator and workplace leader
- Get ahead and be recognized, admired, and heard

Storytelling is becoming an increasingly important component of business communication. A growing number of corporations see storytelling as an effective tool for communication and knowledge management. Eastman Chemical, IBM, Walt Disney Imagineering, Ernst & Young, Hewlett-Packard, and Capital One are among the many companies training employees to apply storytelling to business concerns.

In today’s fast-moving environment, where you often have only minutes to connect, using stories helps you make a memorable impression quickly and you become a more unrivaled communicator.

This shouldn't be hard because you are a natural storyteller. To tell good stories:

- You do not need to have a great voice
- You do not need a large vocabulary
- You do not have to be a trained or dynamic speaker
- You do not have to live an extraordinary and action-packed life (but it is okay if you do)
- You do not need to have formal leadership status

You just need to be natural, open, and willing to communicate honestly. If you are willing to give it a try, this book will show you the way. We would love to hear about your story successes. Share how, when, and where you used a personal story at work. Send us an e-mail at ideas@TheCreativityConnection.com.



Deborah Shouse



Ron Zoglin



Susan Fenner

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Introduction

Gather around and listen closely. You are going to hear a story that can change your life. This story holds secrets such as how to get others to pay attention to you, how to stand out at work, and how to be more successful and have more fun. It all begins with...

Once upon a time...

Henry wanted to be the best supervisor in the company. But he did not know where to start. So he decided to introduce himself to his new work team by telling a story about his Uncle Jack. It went like this:

I really loved my Uncle Jack. He was a successful soybean farmer in Iowa and always spent time with me during my summer visits. One August when I was there, he was gearing up for a big harvest. He expected a good crop and was sure he'd finally make some money after a few lean years. But something unexpected happened. His neighbor Bill Tucker suddenly died, leaving behind a wife, four small children, and a field of beans that needed to go to market. The boys were too young and the wife was too distraught to harvest. So Uncle Jack set his work aside and began reaping the Tuckers' crop. He worried his own crop wouldn't get to market. But he knew Bill's family really needed him.

Then a funny thing happened. Next thing he knew, all the neighbors were working in the field, helping out. And they didn't stop with Tucker's field; they went on to harvest Uncle Jack's field, and then the next farm, and the next, until everyone's crop was taken to town. It became the largest harvest in southeast Iowa and was the beginning of a regional farming co-op still in existence today.

Imagine hearing that story from a new supervisor. What message would you receive? Why was this story a better introduction to the real Henry than a list of departmental goals and objectives? What do you think happened as a result of Henry's story?

Storytelling as a Career Builder

Besides garnering a positive reception from those you supervise, as Henry's story did, a good story can help you attract the positive attention of your own supervisor. And these are just two ways that stories can help you build your career. The right story at the right time can also:

- ▶ Increase your visibility
- ▶ Define your abilities, experiences, and uniqueness
- ▶ Make your message memorable
- ▶ Provide instant connection with others
- ▶ Help you establish and keep relationships



The BUILDing Blocks of Storytelling Success

The good news is you do not need any special training to tell your own stories. Telling personal stories helps you BUILD confidence, social skills, and business acumen. All you need are awareness, good listening skills, a sense of humor, and permission from yourself to:

Be who you are. You do not need to:

- Be an actor
- Have a great voice
- Lead a glamorous and star-studded life

Understand that the best stories:

- Relate to many people in the audience
- Show you are human
- Have an element of surprise or humor

Inspect what you say throughout the day, noticing how you already use stories:

- At lunch with friends
- While telling friends or family about your day
- When complaining
- For problem solving

Let yourself practice your own stories in family and social settings and allow yourself to:

- Be natural
- Put yourself into the story
- Learn your own strong points

Discover story resources by:

- Exploring the Internet
- Watching TV and listening to the radio
- Reading books and magazines
- Observing human interactions and activities

Storytelling is an art form that is as individual as the tellers and the stories themselves. There is always a new story waiting to make its debut. Each story is novel and relevant to the person who creates it and shares it with others. Even the same story told by different people can be a “new story.” As you work your way through this book, you are sure to discover stories within yourself just waiting to be told. Let’s see how you might apply them in the workplace.

PREVIEW

P A R T

1

Storytelling in the Workplace

“*Why storytelling? Nothing else worked. Charts left listeners bemused. Prose remained unread. Dialogue was just too laborious and slow. Time after time, when faced with the task of persuading a group of managers or front-line staff in a large organization to get enthusiastic about a major change, I found that storytelling was the one thing that worked.*”

—Stephen Denning, *The Springboard: How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organizations*

PREVIEW

Nine Ways to Put Stories to Work

While you relax at home after work, your stories can be working overtime. Imagine a supervisor, manager, client, colleague, or vendor retelling someone the story you told about your first day in ninth-grade geometry. Imagine people leaving a meeting with your three-minute story filling them with encouragement, inspiration, and information. That is the kind of memorability stories can bring you. You can gain that memorability by following the simple steps in this book and watching for opportunities to tell your stories.

You can use stories to teach or illustrate just about anything. You can focus stories on:

- **Inspiring people to do their best**—using stories to motivate and encourage
- **Establishing a common language**—creating a meaningful slogan or shared story that provides a competitive edge, such as “Just do it!”
- **Creating community**—sharing a common “story” or vision to develop team spirit
- **Making people stop and think**—allowing them to look into the “what if” future
- **Explaining the benefits of change**—showing what could happen if you change, or what could happen if you do not
- **Learning from the mistakes of others**—avoiding repeating them yourself
- **Defining safety issues**—illustrating what happens when you break company rules

Practice

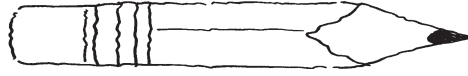
Name four workplace situations where you could use stories.

- 1. _____
 - 2. _____
 - 3. _____
 - 4. _____
-

For inspiration, see the authors' suggestions on page 97.

Now think of your mind as a large television screen. While someone is standing in front of the room, simply urging you to be more productive, the screen is blank. But when someone is telling you the story of a team that used Rollerblades to increase their effectiveness, your mind is rolling with images of team members and what they went through.

It is easier to remember interesting images; it is harder to recall the blank screen. Stories fill up the visual screen, giving people images and examples, making people part of the action. Stories invite people into their own experiences and into yours. Stories are an easy way to stand out in a chaotic and uncertain business environment.



WHAT MAKES A STORY MEMORABLE?

You are a collection of experiences and stories. All your life you have been affected by stories—those told by family, friends, teachers, and people you just happen to meet.

What makes a story work for you? What makes it memorable? By exploring the kinds of stories that influenced, informed, and inspired you, you will be a step closer to creating an impact with your own stories.

Recall a favorite story.

Who told it?

Where were you when it was told?

What effect did it have on you?

What was the purpose of the story?

Why do you remember it—perhaps many years later?

Recall a meeting or group you have attended recently. What stories do you remember from the event?

Meeting type:

Stories you remember:

Information illustrated by the stories:

1. Opening and Closing Meetings

Opening meetings with a story is an effective way to let people “arrive” at the meeting. A story gently invites people into the meeting and gives them something interesting and unexpected to focus on. A closing story gives you a chance to capture the essence of the meeting once more, in a way that is memorable and meaningful.

Choosing a Story

Ask yourself:

1. What tone do I want to set?
2. What point do I want to make?
3. How do I want people to feel after the story?
4. What do I want them to remember?

You can create a story about:

- One of your experiences
- An ordinary person doing something unusual or learning something relevant
- One of the leaders in your company
- A famous person

Use this checklist for your opening story. Ask yourself, will this story:

- Capture people’s attention?
- Take listener’s minds off their undone work and unanswered e-mail?
- Make people feel comfortable and at ease?
- Be interesting and easy to understand?
- Lead into the purpose of the meeting?

Use this checklist for your closing story. Ask yourself, will this story:

- Refer to or add to the purpose of the meeting?
- Be meaningful and interesting, without being too pointed?
- Give people something memorable to take away?
- Be a powerful way to end this meeting?

Opening and closing stories:

- Must relate to the purpose of the meeting
- Must be easy for everyone at the meeting to understand
- May contain jargon or insider acronyms pertinent to your audience

Opening and closing stories need not:

- Take place within the company
- Feature one of the employees as its hero
- Include a joke