

# STORY TELLING

— FOR —

# BUSINESS

HOW TO TELL STORIES THAT  
CONNECT, CAPTIVATE,  
AND CONVINC

PHILIPP HUMM

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**PHILIPP HUMM**

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# PRAISE

*“The storytelling handbook every leader, seller, and speaker needs.”*

– Verity Price, 2021 World Champion of Public Speaking

*“Most storytelling books overcomplicate things. Philipp strips away the fluff and gives you a powerful toolkit you can use right away.”*

– Esther Hubois, Regional Vice President at Salesforce

*“This isn’t just a book about storytelling—it’s a manual for becoming unforgettable. Practical, relatable, and packed with tools you can use right away.”*

– Mark Hunter, author of *High-Profit Prospecting*

*“You could take an improv class, dive into 100 storytelling books, or hire a coach. Or, you could read this book and get everything in one place. Philipp simplifies business storytelling, making it practical, engaging, and effective. Read it, apply it, and share it with anyone looking to elevate their career.”*

– Andrew Sykes, Adjunct Professor at Kellogg School of Management, CEO at Habits at Work

*“Philipp has cracked the code on storytelling. His simple, actionable advice makes it easy to apply for any professional.”*

– Leon Mishkis, COO at NewtonX

*“This book makes storytelling simple, powerful, and impossible to ignore.”*

– Gilbert Eijkelenboom, author of *People Skills for Analytical Thinkers*

*“This book played its tricks—it made me curious, made me laugh, and kept me turning pages. That’s when I realized: Philipp hadn’t just written about storytelling; he’d woven the techniques into the book itself. I had no choice but to finish it. And now? I tell unforgettable stories.”*

— Eric Edmeades, Founder and CEO of WILDFIT

*To my sister, Fabienne, whose kindness, presence, and unwavering energy inspire me every single day.*





# START HERE

*The most powerful person in the world is the storyteller.*

– Steve Jobs



May 2020.

I'm sitting on the couch in my apartment in Amsterdam, staring at my laptop. The screen is paused on a video of a sheep that thinks it's a dog.

For the last two hours, I've been mindlessly clicking through random animal videos, trying to escape reality.

That morning, my boss had told me I was being laid off. Three months into the pandemic, Uber had decided to cut 30 percent of its workforce, and, just like that, my job as a product manager was gone.

I still remember sitting there, stunned. Uber wasn't just a job—it was my social life, and my identity.

To avoid feeling the weight of it, I turned to the internet. But no matter how many videos I watched, I couldn't shake the sadness.

Then, in the middle of yet another video, one of those ads popped up.

Usually, I would click away from these, but something made me keep watching.

A few seconds turned into a minute. A minute turned into two. Before I knew it, 27 minutes had passed.

*27 minutes? I'd just watched an entire ad. How on Earth did that happen?*

Curious, I replayed it. I wanted to understand how this video had held my full attention.

It was by Scott Harrison, the CEO of Charity: Water.

It wasn't the product that had kept me hooked. It was the stories.

In those 27 minutes, Scott shared stories—about his wild childhood, his turning point, and the lives that had been transformed by his nonprofit.

Now, back then, storytelling wasn't exactly in my DNA. I was the guy who'd start a story but then, a few seconds later, say, "Long story short..." and share three dry bullet points to summarize it.

My six-year-old nephew could tell better stories than me.

But that video? It planted a seed.

*I thought, Wow, if storytelling can do this to me, imagine what it could do to my life. How I could connect to the people around me. How I could bring my ideas to life. How I could inspire the people around me. I need to learn this.*

After a quick online search, I signed up for a three-day business storytelling workshop in the Netherlands.

Two months later, I found myself in a large training room, eager to crack the code of great storytelling.

During the second half of the first day, the instructor leaned forward and said, "Now you'll learn the most powerful story structure on the planet."

He paused for dramatic effect. The room leaned in.

Then he said, "The Hero's Journey. It's used in every great Hollywood movie. It has 17 steps."

*Wait—17 steps?* I looked around the room, hoping someone else was as confused as me.

*Have these people ever been in a real meeting? I've sat through plenty, and I can guarantee no one is going to let me tell a 17-step story. How is this supposed to work in an actual business setting?*

That was one moment, but throughout the entire course, there were many more moments where they taught things that were interesting but just not practical for business.

*Who's going to tell a 10-minute life-changing story during a team meeting?*

That's when I thought, *What if there's a better way?*

Something simpler, more practical—something leaders, salespeople, or anyone could use to tell ridiculously good stories without overcomplicating it.

Over the next few years, I went all in.

I devoured more than 40 books on storytelling, spent \$27,000 on courses, and interviewed more than 130 executives about how they used stories in their day-to-day work.

By the end, I had 141 pages of notes and a new approach to storytelling—one that worked in the fast-paced, no-nonsense world of business.

Fast forward to today.

I've published two award-winning bestsellers, *The StorySelling Method* and *Public Speaking with Confidence*, trained teams at companies like Google, Visa, ASICS, Salesforce, American Express, and MetLife, and helped thousands of professionals become more impactful communicators.

I'm distilling everything I've learned over the past years into this book.

Each story I hear brings me back to why I started this journey.

So many people struggle to make their ideas stick. They talk, but they're not heard. They try to lead, but no one follows. They have dreams, but no way to bring others along with them.

I care about storytelling because I've seen it unlock potential that people didn't even know they had.

By the time you finish, you'll have everything you need to become a magnetic storyteller—the kind of person whose words inspire action, spark change, and are remembered long after the meeting ends.

Here's how you'll get there.

*Storytelling for Business* is broken down into two parts.

### **Part 1: Master the Fundamentals (Chapters 1–5)**

We'll start with the building blocks of storytelling: how to structure your stories, how to spice them up, what types of stories you can tell at work, and how to actually weave them into your conversation.

### **Part 2: Turn Pro (Chapters 6–8)**

Once you've nailed the basics, you'll uncover more advanced storytelling techniques: how to build unshakable confidence to tell stories at any opportunity; how to have hundreds of stories ready to go; and how to tell insanely good stories.

This book is a practical, clear, and actionable guide for the busy professional who wants to turn ideas into impact.

Are you ready to unleash the storyteller within you?

Let's get started.



# PART 1

# MASTER THE FUNDAMENTALS

In part 1, we'll lay the groundwork for becoming an effective storyteller.

Here's what we'll cover.

- *Chapter 1 – What Is Storytelling:* Understand the core elements of a story and why stories are such a powerful tool.
- *Chapter 2 – Structure Stories:* Learn the simple four-step framework you can use to structure your stories.
- *Chapter 3 – Enhance Stories:* Uncover the techniques for turning any moment into a captivating story.
- *Chapter 4 – Find Stories:* Discover the four most relevant story types in business.
- *Chapter 5 – Tell Stories:* Find out how to weave stories into your conversations.

Once you've mastered those fundamentals, you'll know exactly how to use stories strategically in all your meetings and presentations.





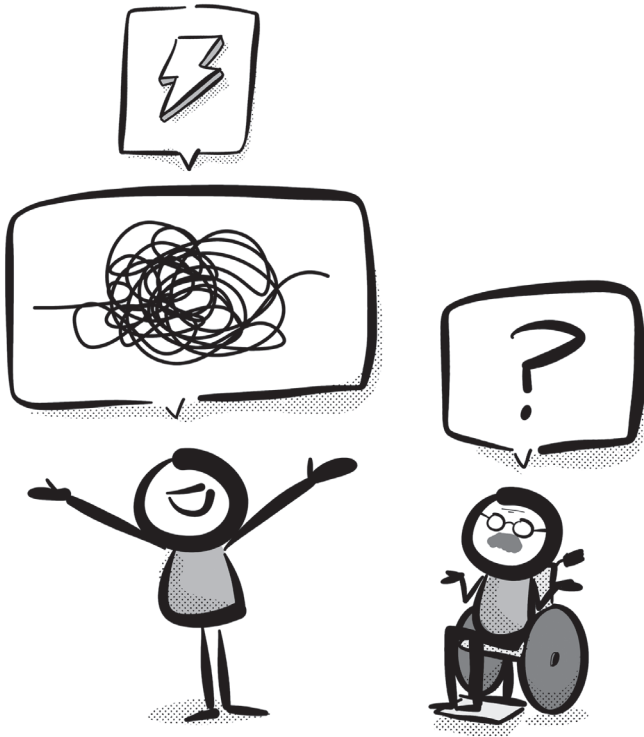
# CHAPTER 1

# WHAT IS

# STORYTELLING?

*“The cat sat on the mat” is not the beginning of a story,  
but “the cat sat on the dog’s mat” is.*

— John Le Carré, British novelist



After I took that first course in the Netherlands, I went all in on storytelling.

I was obsessed. It felt like I'd stumbled onto a hidden superpower that could unlock doors I hadn't known existed.

A few months in, I announced to the world (okay, to LinkedIn) that I was now a business storytelling coach.

Back then, I knew embarrassingly little about storytelling. But I figured that, if I put it out there for everyone to see, I'd have no choice but to make it happen.

Proud of my decision, I shared the news with my grandparents one afternoon over coffee.

I said, "Opa, I've decided to become a storytelling coach."

My grandfather, who was 92, leaned back in his chair and asked, "Philipp, what on earth is a storytelling coach?"

I confidently replied, "I help professionals tell better stories."

But from the look on his face, I could tell that wasn't enough for him. "But... what is a story?"

That question caught me by surprise.

Trying to sound like I knew what I was doing, I recited the definition I'd memorized from the dictionary: "A story is an account of incidents or events."

The second the words left my mouth, I knew I'd messed up. Opa just stared at me, confused.

And I couldn't blame him—it was 100 percent my fault. I'd failed to explain something as basic as what a story is.

As I left, I thought, *Damn. I wanna be a storytelling coach, and I can't even explain what a story is.*

That moment forced me to rethink everything and simplify the way I approached storytelling—not just for my Opa but

for anyone who's ever felt confused, stuck, or overwhelmed when trying to tell a story.

## So, What is a Story?

Here's how I'd actually define a good story.

A good story is about a **moment** when a **person** faces a **challenge** that **changes** how they think, feel, or act.

Let's break that down.

**Moment:** A good story centers on a specific moment or moments in time. It's not just a series of high-level events—it's about key moments where something significant happens.

**Person:** A good story is about people. In business, we often talk about companies, products, or processes, but the truth is that humans care about other humans. It's easier to connect with someone's personal journey than with a company's profit statement.

**Challenge:** A good story involves some conflict that shakes things up. This is where the story gets interesting—it's the moment when something unexpected or difficult happens. Too many business stories focus only on the good stuff, but the heart of a story comes from the conflict. Those challenges don't have to be gigantic, external challenges like a car accident. Often, they'll instead be smaller, internal challenges like a moment of self-doubt or fear.

**Change:** Finally, a good story shows how the person changes throughout the story. Maybe they learn something new, shift their thinking, or improve a relationship. The change is what makes the story stick—it's what inspires people to make changes in their lives.

Now that you (and my Opa) have a clearer idea of what a story is, let's look at an example together.

Here's a story from Steve Jobs in which he talks about an encounter he had with the cofounder of Hewlett-Packard.

“When I was twelve years old, I called up Bill Hewlett (co-founder of Hewlett-Packard).

He lived in Palo Alto, and his number was still in a phonebook.

He even answered the phone himself.

I said, ‘Hi, I’m Steve Jobs. I’m twelve years old, I’m a student in high school, and I want to build a frequency counter. I was wondering if you had any spare parts I could have?’

A bit overwhelmed, he laughed.

But then he gave me the spare parts to build this frequency counter.

That summer, he even gave me a job at Hewlett-Packard, working on the assembly line, putting nuts and bolts together on frequency counters.

He got me a job in the place that built them.

I was in heaven.

I’ve never found anyone who said no or hung up the phone when I called. I just asked.

Most people never pick up the phone and call. Most people never ask, and that’s what separates the people who do things from the people who just dream about them.

You’ve got to act, and you’ve got to be willing to fail.”

Here's what makes this a great story.

- *Moment:* The story revolves around a single, clear moment—12-year-old Steve Jobs picking up the phone and calling Bill Hewlett.
- *Person:* The story focuses on young Steve. Instead of being about the company or technology, it's about a curious, courageous kid.
- *Challenge:* The challenge here is that Jobs needs spare parts for his frequency counter, and takes an unconventional approach to get those.
- *Change:* Jobs learns the lesson that you should take the initiative. From that moment onward, he felt encouraged to “just ask for it.”

#### Watch the video

Would you like to see Steve Jobs' story on video? I've saved the live recording of that story and another ten stories of some of the most talented storytellers in business in a central place.

Visit [power-of-storytelling.com/bonus](http://power-of-storytelling.com/bonus) or scan the QR code to check them out now.



## Why Storytelling Matters

Now that you've got a good idea of what a story is, let's look at why it matters.

Why do some of the most successful leaders, sellers, and entrepreneurs choose to share a story instead of just sharing facts?

## 1. Stories are more memorable

In 1969, two professors at Stanford University, Gordon Bower and Michael Clark<sup>1</sup>, wanted to answer a simple question:

What's the most effective way to remember information?

To find out, they invited 48 students to participate in an experiment.

They split the students into two groups and gave both groups the same challenge: memorize ten lists of unrelated words. The words were random, like dog, book, and sky.

But here's where it gets interesting. The first group had to memorize the lists just as they were, using traditional methods like repetition—much like the way we usually try to cram for an exam or prepare for a presentation.

The second group got to do something a little more fun. Instead of memorizing the lists, they were asked to create stories that connected the words. For example, if their words were *dog*, *book*, and *sky*, they might come up with a story like, "The dog sat next to the boy as he read his book under the bright-blue sky."

After both groups learned their words, the professors tested them to see how many they could actually remember.

Here's what they found.

The students who used traditional memorization techniques remembered only 13 percent of the words. But the students who created stories? They remembered 93 percent of the words. That's over seven times more than the other group! Nearly all the words stuck with the storytelling group, while the control group could barely recall more than a few.

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1 Gordon H. Bower and Michael C. Clark, "Narrative Stories as Mediators for Serial Learning."

In business, we often feel the need to pack as much information as possible into a single presentation, hoping our audience will remember everything we say.

But how successful is that strategy, really?

Think about it for a second. Recall a random meeting you had last week. How much do you actually remember?

If you're like most people, 99 percent of the content is gone. And when you forget, you're far less likely to act on the ideas.

But it doesn't have to be this way. If you want people to remember what you say and, more importantly, act on it, weave your message into stories.

## **2. Stories build trust**

In 2004, Dr. Paul Zak, a neuroscientist, set out to understand how stories affect our brains.

For that, he set up an experiment<sup>2</sup> in which they showed volunteers a video about a father and his two-year-old son.

The first group was shown a video that followed a typical story structure with a clear conflict. It started sweetly. Father and son were enjoying a normal day together, like any family. But then, the father revealed that his son was dying of brain cancer.

The second group was shown a different version. It simply showed father and son spending time together at the zoo. There was no mention of illness, and no challenge, just pleasant moments.

After watching the videos, Zak and his team measured the levels of oxytocin in the participants' blood. Oxytocin is a brain chemical, also known as the "love hormone," which boosts feelings of closeness, empathy, and trust with others.

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2 [https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_stories\\_change\\_brain](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_stories_change_brain)



They found that the group who had watched the version with the cancer story showed a massive increase in oxytocin, which was flooding their brains with feelings of empathy and connection.

At the same time, the group that had watched the version without the cancer story didn't see any change in their oxytocin levels.

Zak found that stories can literally change the brain chemistry of their listeners.

In business, you'll often encounter people who are skeptical or resistant to change. Instead of trying to persuade them with arguments, try telling a story. The appropriate story will help you lower their guard, and thus make them more open to your suggestion.

### **3. Stories increase the value of your offer**

In July 2009, *New York Times* journalists Rob Walker and Josh Glenn conducted a fascinating experiment<sup>3</sup>. They bought 100 random objects at thrift stores and garage sales. The items were ordinary—things like a bottle opener, a toy horse, a wooden mallet, a thermometer, and a nutcracker. Insignificant stuff you'd find in any basement.

But then, they did something that had never been done before. They asked a group of volunteers to write short, fictional stories about each item. They then listed the objects on eBay. But instead of providing a plain product description, they included a story for each item.

All 100 items were originally purchased for \$129 in total.

How much do you think they sold for?

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3 <https://significantobjects.com/>

They sold for \$3,613.

That's roughly a 2,700 percent increase in value, just from including a short story.

This experiment shows that stories can increase the perceived value of any product. Whether you're selling an idea, a product, or a service, weaving it into a compelling story can elevate its worth in the minds of your audience.

Now that you've got a good sense of what storytelling is and why it matters, let's uncover ways to actually craft your stories.

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## Summary

- A good story is about a moment when a person faces a challenge that changes how they think, feel, or act.
- In business, storytelling helps you to be remembered, build trust, and increase the value of your offer.

## Challenge

- **Goal:** Choose a work-related challenge.
- **Instructions:**
  - List three work challenges you've faced—ideally ones you've overcome.
  - Pick the one you find most engaging.
  - You will use this challenge in the next chapter to craft a full story around it.
- **Tips:** Your challenge can be big or small—anything from missing a deadline to handling a tough conversation or tackling a demanding project.
- **Resources:** Feel free to use the workbook to complete this exercise. Visit [www.power-of-storytelling.com/bonus](http://www.power-of-storytelling.com/bonus) to access the workbook.

# CHAPTER 2

# STRUCTURE STORIES

*In the first act, you get your hero up a tree. The second act, you throw rocks at him. For the third act, you let him down.*

— George Abbott,  
American theater producer and director



Once I understood what a story was, I was excited to try them out in an actual meeting.

So, I sat down and spent an entire day crafting what I believed was a masterpiece.

*This is it, I thought. The buyer is going to be blown away. Once he hears my story, he'll whip out his credit card on the spot.*

The next day, I hopped on the call, ready to deliver my big story.

For the first few minutes of the conversation, I just spoke normally. And seeing the buyer nod along, I felt it was going well.

But at one point, I decided to launch into my story.

The moment I wrapped up my story, he gave me a polite smile and said, "Ah, well... thanks for sharing. We'll be in touch."

And just like that, he was gone.

I sat there, staring at my screen, thinking, *What just happened? That story was amazing... why did he not love it?*

Still puzzled, I called my sister later that evening. My sister had been in sales for over a decade. So, I asked, "What do you think went wrong?"

She asked me to repeat the story I had shared, but interrupted me a few minutes in. "Philipp, your stories are way too long and dramatic. This isn't a TED Talk. It's a casual conversation."

And she was right. My story was much too big. It was too far out: insufficiently relevant for that audience.

But that's what I had learned. Most of the structures they teach in courses and books are great for big stages but pretty useless for quick anecdotes at work.

**The best professional stories are concise—typically between 30 and 90 seconds, depending on the context.**

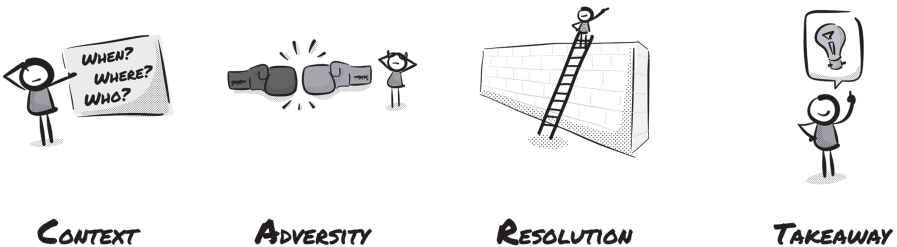
You need a simple but effective story structure.

So, I went back to the drawing board.

I studied every storytelling structure I could find, tested them in real conversations, and pulled out the elements that actually worked.

Eventually, I created a simple structure consisting of four steps: **CART**.

Think of your story structure like a cart in the supermarket. It holds together all the awesome elements (ingredients) of your story.



That structure has transformed the way I tell stories and has helped thousands of my clients tell short, and relatable, but also impactful stories.

In this chapter, you'll discover how to use that structure to turn any moment into a clear, engaging story.

## Step 1: Context

The first step is to set the scene and give just enough context. When and where does the story take place? Who is the main character, and what do they want?

### Example:

“A couple of months ago, I was asked to give a presentation skills training to a group of vice presidents at a large bank in London. This was a huge opportunity, as that one workshop could lead to dozens of training sessions for every department.”

That’s it. Who, when, where, and what. Giving this quick context helps people immediately understand the situation. When your audience hears details like time, location, and character, they assume it’s a real story. If you start vaguely, like, “There was a manager who wanted to make a change,” it may well sound made up.

A common mistake professionals make is giving too much context. They talk about all the technical details of the product, their full list of responsibilities, or even the 60 years of the company’s history. Don’t do that. Keep the context brief, so you can move quickly to the most important part: the adversity.

## Step 2: Adversity

Next, introduce the adversity. What obstacle or problem does the main character face? It could be a tough decision, an emotional struggle, a physical difficulty, or a conflict in a relationship—anything that feels meaningful to them.

**Example:**

“On that day, I arrived at the conference room and opened the door. To my surprise, all the vice presidents were already seated at a long table, heads buried in their laptops, fingers flying across keyboards.

‘Good morning! How’s everyone doing?’ I asked, forcing a smile.

A couple of people nodded. One muttered, ‘Good.’ Not a single head lifted.

I tried some small talk, but every response was short. I thought, *Oh man, this is going to be a long day. Should I make the presentation more serious? Match their vibe?*”

Adversity is usually the longest and most crucial part of any story. So, take time to explain the struggle, show what’s at risk, and how it makes the main character feel.

—*But Philipp, can’t I just talk about the good things I did? Do I need adversity?*

Yes, you need adversity. This is the one step you can’t skip. A big reason business stories are often so boring is that the storyteller focuses too much on the good stuff (the impressive work they’ve done and how great they are) and skips over the bad stuff (the problems they faced). If you want to connect with people, you need to touch them emotionally.

**Step 3: Resolution**

Now it’s time to explain how the main character responds to the adversity. What actions do they take, and where does that lead? How does the story turn out at the end?



**Example:**

“But then I thought: *forget it. I’ll do the opposite.* So, I hopped online and found the most absurd images I could find: dolphins, dinosaurs, and a giant slice of pizza.

‘Okay, laptops closed,’ I announced, my tone lighter. The room finally looked up, eyebrows raised.

I picked one of the VPs, handed him a clicker, and said, ‘You’re up! Give us a one-minute speech on this.’ The screen lit up with a photo of a T-Rex riding a skateboard.

He stared at me like I’d lost my mind. The whole room went silent. But then, to everyone’s surprise, he laughed and went for it. After he gave his one-minute speech, the others followed. Within minutes, the room was roaring with laughter.

After the workshop, one of the VPs came up to me and said, ‘I thought you were crazy, but this was not only the most fun—but it was the most useful workshop I’ve ever attended.’”

So, what does the character do to overcome the adversity, and how does it turn out at the end? What is the result? What has changed?

Maybe you increased revenue by 30 percent, maybe you fixed a broken system, or maybe you turned around a difficult relationship.

A common mistake is to depict a resolution that seems too easy or too standard. People say, “I talked to the team, and now the problem is solved.” The better way is to share something more creative or out of the box. Maybe, to solve the problem, you interviewed 100 people within the company, you told the CEO that she was wrong, or you picked up the phone for a full week

to understand the customers' problems. Focus on the actions that are more distinctive.

Up to this point, the story is interesting, but your listeners don't know why you're telling them that story. That's when you move into the last step.

## Step 4: Takeaway

Share the lesson or insight you gained from the experience. What did you (or the main character) learn?

### Example:

"What I learned from that experience is that, when you're met with seriousness, lean into humor. A little fun can create the connection you need to move forward."

I'd encourage you to focus on only one takeaway. I know in business, we're often tempted to share as much as possible: "Here are my ten takeaways." But that's a risky strategy. If you give people ten takeaways, it's pretty likely that they won't remember a single one of them.

The better approach is to share one takeaway that they'll remember for the rest of their lives.

And one more thing. Avoid saying things like, "The moral of the story is ..." or "You should take away ..." Why? Because it can sound like you're preaching. Instead, say something like, "What I learned from that experience is..." It's more subtle and inviting.

Now that we've covered the full four steps, let's take a look at them in action. This example comes from Sarah Willingham, a British entrepreneur, serial investor, founder and CEO of Nightcap.

**1. Context:** “So, in my mid-twenties, I was running acquisitions for Pizza Express and walked into a meeting room.”

**2. Adversity:** “I was two minutes late for the meeting, and the person on the opposite side of the table, the lawyer, looked up and said, ‘Oh, thank goodness for that. Mine’s, uh, white with one sugar, please.’”

**3. Resolution:** “So I thought, *Okay, this is a moment.* I walked around to the coffee, made him his coffee, put the coffee in front of him and said, ‘Would anybody else like a coffee?’ Nobody said anything; nobody wanted one. I made myself a coffee and then sat back down again opposite him. And as he looked up, I watched the color drain from his face as he realized this enormous assumption that he’d made.”

**4. Takeaway:** “It was such a beautiful moment in my career when I realized that the people on the other side of the table had completely misjudged me. What I thought was my weakness turned out to be my superpower. Guess who walked out with the deal?”

Can you see how the story structure plays out in that example? What I love about that story is that Sarah doesn’t waste any time. She immediately pulls us into the story and keeps us hooked throughout.

—*But Philipp, do I always need those four steps to tell a good story?*

No, you don’t always need the four-step structure to tell a powerful story. I use CART for roughly 80 percent of my stories. For the remaining 20 percent, I use a simpler version: CAT—Context, Adversity, and Takeaway. This skips Step 3 (Resolution). To remember both structures, just picture a CAT in the CART.

So, when should you use CAT? There are two moments where CAT works especially well.

### **1. When There Is No Resolution**

In business, challenges arise that threaten the status quo. Maybe it's a new competitor with a breakthrough product, an error in production, or a frustrated customer. Often, these issues don't have a resolution yet, but you want to create a sense of urgency, to encourage action. This is a perfect moment for a CAT story.

#### **Example:**

"Yesterday, I was in an electronics store trying out the latest model of the new Sound of Silence headphones. As soon as I put them on, every sound around me vanished. Their noise cancellation is better than anything I've ever experienced. And worst of all, they're \$20 cheaper than ours. If we don't respond to this now, we're in trouble."

### **2. When You Want to Share a Quick Takeaway**

Sometimes you want to share a quick lesson without sharing a full story. But you also want to make sure that the story sticks. CAT is perfect for delivering a memorable takeaway in a few lines.

**Example:**

“When I started my business in February, I sent 20 LinkedIn messages, convinced that people would jump at the chance of working with me. Three days later, not a single reply. Frustrated, I told a friend, ‘This isn’t working!’ He burst out laughing. ‘Dude, 20 messages? I usually send 200 before expecting a single response.’

A little embarrassed, I realized he was right. We’re often doing the right thing, but we don’t see the results because we quit too soon. Stay consistent, increase your volume, and the results will follow.”

*—But what if my story has more than four steps? It’s far more complicated, with lots of ups and downs. What should I do?*

The best stories at work are between 30 and 90 seconds long. That’s rarely enough time for a complex story with lots of twists. So, instead of telling a story that is too complex, I’d suggest you focus on one or two meaningful moments. You can actually write down the *full* story with many twists and turns but then think which moment is most useful to get your point across.

**AI Guide**

Crafting a great story used to take hours, even days. But with AI, you can create high-quality stories in a fraction of the time. Since AI evolves constantly, I’ve created a dedicated guide on my website to keep you updated with the latest tips and techniques for using AI effectively in storytelling.



Visit [www.power-of-storytelling.com/bonus](http://www.power-of-storytelling.com/bonus) to access the free guide or scan the QR code.

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## Summary

- Instead of using a more complex story structure, use the simple four-step CART structure:
  - C – Context: Set the scene with who, when, and where.
  - A – Adversity: Describe the challenge or problem.
  - R – Resolution: Show how the challenge was handled and the story turned out.
  - T – Takeaway: Share the key lesson or insight.
- For stories that don't have a resolution or when you just want to deliver a quick takeaway, you can use CAT (Context, Adversity, Takeaway).

## Challenge

- **Goal:** Structure your story.
- **Instructions:** Use the challenge you identified in the last chapter and structure it according to the four-step story structure (Context, Adversity, Resolution, and Takeaway)
- **Tips:** It should be enough to write down the main bullet points of the story instead of writing down every single sentence, but do what feels right to you.
- **Resources:** Use the workbook to complete the challenge. Visit [www.power-of-storytelling.com/bonus](http://www.power-of-storytelling.com/bonus) to access the workbook.



# CHAPTER 3

## ENHANCE STORIES

*My task that I'm trying to achieve is by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel, but it is before all else to make you see.*

— Joseph Conrad, Polish-British novelist and story writer





After I started using my new storytelling structure, my stories improved. They were shorter and clearer, and they had a solid foundation.

They were good, but not wow. That changed one day in September 2022. On that one day, I joined a free storytelling masterclass. I wasn't expecting much. Most of these events are a waste of time, recycling the same advice repeatedly. But this one was different. Within the first few minutes, the speaker launched into a story about spilling coffee on his shirt.

I know, *exciting stuff*, right?

But the way he shared the story was beyond anything I'd ever seen. From the first sentence, he had me hooked. It wasn't just words; it was an experience. I could see the coffee splashing, feel the embarrassment, and hear the awkward laughter in the room.

He described the moment so vividly, it felt as if it was happening to me. I was on the edge of my seat, desperate to find out what happened next.

But it wasn't the story itself that captivated me. It was the way he told it.

That storyteller didn't need big, dramatic stories. He could take the smallest, most mundane moments and turn them into an incredible story.

And I wanted to understand how he did it.

So, I re-watched the recording. I studied every pause, every change in his tone, every bit of detail he used. And, as I dissected his approach, I saw the patterns. It was like unlocking a secret recipe.

Let me share a powerful analogy I heard from Eric Edmeades to help you understand what great storytelling is really about.

Imagine watching a war movie. It opens with an epic helicopter shot. From above, you see the entire battlefield—tanks rolling forward, soldiers forming ranks, and smoke rising in the distance. It's captivating for a moment, but then you start wondering, *Okay, but what's actually happening?*

And then, the real story begins. The camera dives into the trenches. Suddenly, you're in the thick of it. Bombs are exploding nearby, mud is flying, and you see the fear and grit etched into the soldiers' faces. You feel the emotions of the moment.

Now, how does this connect to storytelling?

Most people stay stuck in the helicopter view. They hover above the story, offering summaries like, "Our team faced a tough challenge" or "We wanted to improve customer satisfaction."

That's fine for a moment—it sets the stage. But if you never zoom in, your audience will lose interest. Great stories zoom into the trenches. They show the action. They share the exact words of the angry customer, paint a vivid picture of exhausted faces during a late-night session, and bring to life the joy of finally solving the problem.

**The best stories don't just summarize events. They transport their listeners into the vivid moment of the story, making them feel like they're experiencing the moment first-hand.**

The good news is, it's easy. All you need to do is relive the moment and describe what was happening as if you were back in it.

Actually, let's try it now. Think of a moment at work from this past week that stood out.

Maybe it was a meaningful conversation, an unexpected challenge, or a breakthrough realization. Now, picture it clearly in your mind.

Ask yourself:

- Where am I?
- What am I doing?
- What am I thinking?
- What am I feeling?
- What am I hearing?

Whatever details come to mind, those are the ones to include in your story. These specifics bring your audience into the trenches with you, turning your story from a dry summary into an unforgettable experience.

But let's break down the essentials of any moment.

## 1. Where Are You? (Location)

We've introduced the location in the first step of CART (Context), but let's expand here.

Beyond stating the city or country, say where you (or the main character) are.

**Examples:**

- "Chicago, two weeks ago. I'm sitting on the couch in my living room."
- "I'm standing outside the conference room, taking a deep breath."

When you tell your audience where you are, a picture starts forming in their heads. They hear "living room" or "conference room," and they instantly start imagining it. It doesn't matter if it's their living room or a conference room they remember—as long as they have a clear picture.

Sometimes, people think they need to describe the location in great detail, like: “The conference room had a big wooden table, a shiny whiteboard, and a super-modern screen,” or “My living room was painted in light gray.”

Please don’t do that. Going into those details can make your story feel staged or fake and wastes time on details that aren’t important.

## 2. What Are You Doing? (Action)

Now, let’s describe the action. What are you (or another character) doing at this moment? Walking, talking, driving, arguing, standing, reading, or typing. What action is unfolding at that moment?

### Examples:

- “I am sitting at my desk, staring at my computer, when a notification pops up: ‘Urgent’.”
- “I’m at the airport security check, putting my bags into the bins.”

These actions help your audience to visualize the scene and give momentum to the story. Your audience will immediately know that you’re not wasting their time. Instead, you’re taking them straight into the action.

You can share what you’re doing, by simply stating action “I am” or “I was,” followed by the action.

—*Does it matter which tense (present or past) I use for my story?*

In *big* storytelling (e.g., in theaters or stages), the present tense is often used because it makes the story feel like it’s unfolding in real time. It pulls the audience into the moment and helps them experience the story as if they were there.

In business storytelling, there's no strict rule. Both work. It really comes down to your preferences. I'd recommend trying telling your story in both present and past tense. Speak it out loud each way and see which feels more natural to you. Ultimately, go with the version that sounds more authentic to you.

### 3. What Are You Thinking? (Thoughts)

We have thousands of thoughts every day.

Our minds are constantly jumping around:

- *I hope they'll like me.*
- *Oh no, that probably sounded weird.*
- *I can't wait to try this out!*

Our brains constantly bounce between fears, worries, dreams, hopes, and plans. To make your story more interesting, share some of those thoughts with your audience.

Ask yourself: What were you (or the main character) thinking in that important moment? What popped into your mind when that unexpected thing happened?

Here's how thoughts can change a story.

On the left, the story is told **WITHOUT** sharing the thoughts, and on the right it is told **WITH** sharing the thoughts:

**Examples:**

<b>WITHOUT Thoughts</b>	<b>WITH Thoughts</b>
"I was excited to lead the team meeting."	"I thought, <i>Alright, this is it. My time to shine.</i> "
"I was frustrated when the project faced delays."	"I thought, <i>What the hell. Again? How does that keep happening?</i> "
"I felt a little nervous before the big presentation."	"I felt like, <i>Oh boy, here we go again. They'll probably tear my presentation apart!</i> "

Did you notice how much more engaging the right column is?

A common mistake is that people share a version of the thoughts that sounds too professional. They say something like, "I thought, *This presents a supreme opportunity to transform my life.*"

Do you actually think like that? Probably not, right?

Most of our thoughts are quite different to that. They are a bit chaotic and irrational, and sometimes downright neurotic. But those are the exact thoughts that will make your story interesting.

**When you share the thoughts, give your audience the raw, messy, unpolished version.**

By sharing those unfiltered thoughts, you make your story instantly more relatable. We've all had wild, ridiculous inner monologues and we can relate to someone sharing theirs. Plus, they're a wonderful opportunity to add emotion, surprise, and even humor to your story.

## 4. What Are You Feeling? (Emotions)

The best stories are emotional. They make their listeners feel the emotions of the story.

One way to make the story more emotional is to do what you learned in the previous step: share your unfiltered thoughts. Another way is to share what you felt in the moment.

You could simply name the emotion directly. “I was terrified” or “I felt relieved.”

It’s clear and effective, but this is not always the most vivid way to do it.

**A more powerful way is to show the emotion instead of just telling it.**

Show your audience the emotion through your actions, expressions, and dialogue.

**Examples:**

TELL The Emotion	SHOW The Emotion
“I felt relieved.”	“I exhaled deeply, leaning back in my chair, closing my eyes for a few seconds.”
“He was anxious about the meeting.”	“He glanced at the clock every few seconds as he rehearsed his opening line.”
“She was grateful for the team's support.”	“She smiled warmly, nodding at each person around the table.”

See the difference? The examples on the right are more visual. They help to picture the emotions.

However, one thing to be careful about is not to make it sound too scripted or dramatic. If you say something like, “Her eyes locked on to the task list, lips pressed together in focus, and she rolled up her sleeves like she was ready for battle,” it can feel too much like a theatrical performance.

If you’re not sure if it sounds *too much*, just ask yourself, “Would I speak like that if I was just telling a friend about my day?” If not, you may want to make it slightly less dramatic. That way you’ll ensure that it still sounds authentic.

## **5. What Are You Hearing? (Dialogue)**

Many of your stories will involve more than one character—maybe a coworker, a client, or a family member. You can make your story instantly more interesting by sharing what that other character said at the important moment. What were their exact words?



**Examples:**

WITHOUT Dialogue	WITH Dialogue
“The director was impressed by our presentation.”	“The director smiled and said, ‘Now that’s what I was hoping to see. Great work, team!’”
“The client was frustrated with the delays.”	“The client shook his head and said, ‘I don’t want another update. I want results. When can you actually deliver?’”
“The CFO was skeptical about the budget proposal.”	“The CFO raised an eyebrow and asked, ‘And where exactly do you think we’re getting that kind of money?’”

See the difference? Dialogue is such an easy but powerful tool with which to bring momentum into your story and make it feel as if it is unfolding in real time.

A common mistake in writing dialogue is similar to what we see with thoughts (Step 3); people say something like “The CEO said, ‘You prepared a very thorough presentation that included everything we discussed before, and I wanted to congratulate you on the satisfactory work.’” They share dialogue that sounds far too long, boring, or formal. Dialogue like that is not memorable.

**Quote the character in a way that is concise and catchy.**

So, how could the previous example sound? “The CEO said, ‘Now, that’s what we needed. Impressive work, guys!’”

—*But Philipp, can I just make up stuff to make it more interesting?*

Your story should always have a core truth.

The key elements—like the adversity, resolution, or main characters—should be real. You shouldn't make those up. A good rule of thumb is to imagine someone who was actually there when the story happened. If they heard you tell it, would they think, *Wait a second, that's not what happened at all*, or would they nod along, thinking, *Yeah, that's pretty much how it went?*

If it's the latter, you're getting it right.

With that said, storytelling is an art, and you have some creative freedom to make it more engaging. Here are a few acceptable tweaks.

- *Dialogue*: It's fine to make it more concise or memorable, as long as it reflects the essence of what was said. If you don't remember exactly what someone said, choose words that capture the tone and intent of the moment.
- *Thoughts*: Here you can exaggerate a bit to make it more emotional or funnier. Sharing your crazy thoughts can definitely get a few laughs.
- *Events*: You can simplify the story by removing characters that are not essential to the story or removing moments or events that overcomplicate the story.

The goal isn't to fabricate—it's to present the truth in a way that's clear, compelling, and connects with your audience.

—*What about the other senses, like smell, taste, and touch?*

In storytelling, people often suggest using all the senses to immerse your listener in the experience. While this might work for novels, it can feel odd in business storytelling.

Imagine hearing, “As I walked into the room, I noticed the fresh smell of lavender,” or “I felt the hard plastic of my computer mouse.” These details add no value to your story and will probably distract from your main message.

—*Where within the four steps should you zoom into the vivid moment (aka go into the trenches)?*

That varies, depending on the story, but you definitely want to zoom in during the adversity and, ideally, the resolution.

During adversity, consider sharing the thoughts racing through your mind or capturing the intense conversation as it unfolds. For example, instead of saying, “I was nervous,” you might say, “I thought, *Oh man, I’m not ready for this.*”

In the resolution, dialogue can bring the outcome to life. For example, instead of saying, “Our customer was pleased,” say, “Two weeks later, I got a call from our customer Joan, who said, ‘Thanks so much. Your product has made our lives easier!’”

## **Bringing It Together**

Now that you know how to bring your listeners into the vivid moment of the story, let’s look at how this plays out in a real story.

This example is from Bob Iger, the CEO of Disney. He shares a key moment from an encounter with Steve Jobs just before Disney bought Pixar. Jobs was CEO of Pixar, and Disney was interested in acquiring it.

As you read, look for how Iger pulls us into the scene. Afterward, we’ll break down what makes this story so effective.

“We were announcing the acquisition of Pixar. We were assembled in a conference room, waiting for the announcement, when Steve showed up at the door, pointed his finger at me, and said, ‘Can we go for a walk?’

I thought, *This can’t be good. He must want to get out of the deal, or he wants more money or something. Why else would he want to go for a walk with me on the brink of this major announcement?*

We went for a walk around the Pixar campus and sat down on a bench. He put his arm behind me on the bench, and I thought, *This is very interesting.* I wasn’t close with him at this point.

Steve then said, ‘I’m going to tell you something that only my doctor and my wife know. You can’t tell anyone else. My cancer has come back.’

I asked, ‘Why are you telling me this?’

He replied, ‘I’m giving you a chance to get out of the deal.’

I looked at my watch—time was ticking. We had scheduled a press conference to go live and we’d announce the acquisition in less than an hour. I thought, *What am I going to do?*

I asked him to tell me more. He explained that he had a 50-50 chance of living for five years and that it had metastasized to his liver. I asked for more, and he said, ‘My son is in high school and will graduate in four years. I will be at his graduation.’

I thought, *Wow. His determination to live was so powerful and deeply meaningful.* I could tell he was emotional about it.

I said, ‘Look, I have no idea what my legal responsibilities are here. You have my word, I won’t tell anyone. I don’t know the right corporate response, but my sense is that we should go through with this. I’m not going to back out, but I appreciate the opportunity.’”

Did you catch some of the storytelling techniques Iger used? Let's break down a few key ones.

- *Location*: Throughout the entire story, we know exactly where the story takes place (e.g., "We went for a walk around the Pixar campus and sat down on a bench.")
- *Action*: Instead of general statements, Iger describes actions specifically (e.g., "Steve showed up at the door, pointed his finger at me, and said, 'Can we go for a walk?'"")
- *Thoughts*: There are several moments where Iger lets us know what is going on in his mind (e.g., "I thought, *This can't be good. He must want to get out of the deal, or he wants more money or something.*")
- *Emotions*: Although it's an emotional story, Iger doesn't explicitly share his emotions. His style of storytelling focuses on sharing thoughts rather than stating the emotion.
- *Dialogue*: The story is packed with powerful dialogue (e.g., "Steve then said, 'I'm going to tell you something that only my doctor and my wife know'.")

I know we're talking about techniques, but in the end, Bob is just reliving the moment. He describes what was unfolding in front of his eyes.

And you can do the same. If you just focus on reliving the moment, and describe what happened in that moment, you'll already tell better stories than 90 percent of people.

Some of you might be thinking, *Okay, this is great, but what else? How can I make my stories even better?*

If that's you, don't worry—I've got you covered. For those of you who love digging deeper and would like to perfect your

stories, I've included Chapter 8: Enhance Stories (Advanced) at the end of the book. That's where you'll find a handful of advanced techniques to take your storytelling from great to pro.

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## Summary

- Instead of talking at a high level (aka the helicopter viewpoint), take your listeners into the vivid moment of the story (aka the trenches).
- Don't think in storytelling techniques, but relive the moment of the story, describing what happened in that specific instance.
- Share the location, action, thoughts, emotions, and dialogue to bring your audience into each scene, making them feel like they're right there with you.

## Challenge

- **Goal:** Refine your story.
- **Instructions:** Take the story you structured in the previous challenge and think about how you can enhance it by bringing us into one or two vivid moments.
- **Tips:** Don't worry if you can't include every storytelling technique in your story. Often, using only one or two of the techniques is enough.
- **Resources:** Use the workbook to complete the Challenge. Go to [www.power-of-storytelling.com/bonus](http://www.power-of-storytelling.com/bonus) to access the workbook.

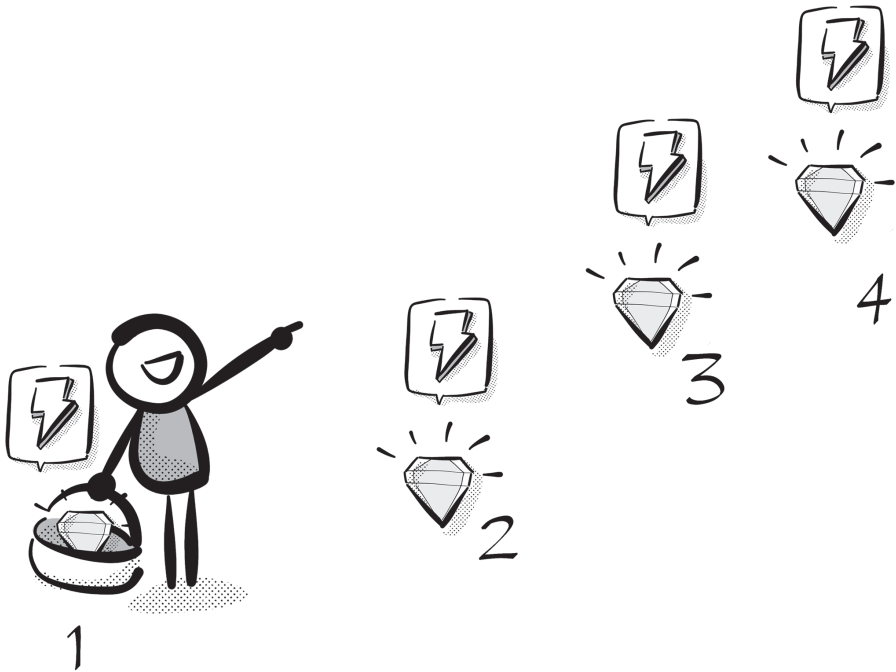


# CHAPTER 4

## FIND STORIES

*Inside each of us is a natural-born storyteller, waiting to be released.*

— Robin Moore, author of *The Green Berets*





After learning how to craft a great story, I started wondering—what’s next? What else does a professional need to know to truly unlock the power of storytelling?

To find out, I went to the source.

I asked my LinkedIn network and my newsletter subscribers one simple question: “What’s holding you back from telling more stories at work?”

Here are the options I gave them.

- “I’m unsure how to organize or structure my stories.”
- “I don’t know how to make the story engaging or interesting.”
- “I don’t know what stories I could share at work.”
- “I don’t feel confident sharing stories at work.”

After three days, I had 127 responses.

Here’s what they said.

**37 percent of respondents—the largest group—chose “I don’t know what stories I could share at work.”**

It was the biggest roadblock preventing professionals from using storytelling to its full potential.

That’s when I realized: if they didn’t know what stories to tell, they were missing out on one of the most powerful tools with which to connect, teach, and inspire.

From that moment, I made it my mission to solve this problem—not by flooding people with endless types of stories, but by keeping it simple.

After working with thousands of professionals, I distilled it down to the four most relevant story types in business.

I call them the **4 C's of Business Storytelling**:

- Connection Stories
- Capturing Stories
- Coaching Stories
- Convincing Stories

Let's look into them.

## 1. Connection Stories

**Situation:** You're meeting a coworker, customer, or new contact and want to break the ice, set a friendly tone, and build rapport before talking about business.

**Complication:** You bring up the classic trio: weather, traffic, and weekend plans. It's safe, predictable, but also about as riveting as a tax seminar on a Friday afternoon. Your relationship stays at the same level as before the small talk.

**Solution:** Anytime someone asks you, "How are you?" (or similar), you may want to share a quick, relatable story about something interesting that's happened to you recently. Pick a moment that reveals more about who you are and that invites the other person to tell you something about themselves.

### Example 1:

Storyteller: Sophia Meyer, marketing specialist at an insurance company

**Coworker:** “Hi, how was your weekend?”

**Sophia:** “Really fun! Actually, I participated in a pottery class for the first time. I was in that studio, covered in clay, hands slipping on a spinning wheel. I wish I could say I created this masterpiece, but my ‘bowl’ looked more like a squashed pancake. Anyway, what about you? Have you started any new hobbies in the last year?”

### Example 2:

Storyteller: Philipp Humm (me)

**Customer:** “Hi, how are you?”

**Philipp:** “I’m good! I had this beautiful moment this morning. After two weeks of giving workshops in India, I walked into my apartment, hopped on my couch, and let out a big sigh. I was just so relieved to be back to my four walls, my routine, and even my coffee mug. Anyway, what about you? When was the last time you got back from a bigger trip, and what was the first thing you did?”

## How to Find Connection Stories

1. *Think of a moment:* Reflect on the last few days. What stood out? It doesn’t have to be life-changing—just something relatable that gives a glimpse into your world. Maybe your pet (or kid or partner) did something funny. Maybe you went to a restaurant you absolutely loved. Or maybe you played some fun board games with friends.

2. *Think of a question:* Your story isn't just about you—it's about making the other person comfortable about telling you a story in return. So, think of a question that invites the other person to reflect on a similar experience. For example: "What about you? When was the last time you ...?"

## 2. Capturing Stories

**Situation:** You're giving a presentation. Maybe it's a team update, a quarterly review, or a proposal for a big project—and this time, you want to nail it.

**Complication:** But five minutes in, you glance around the room, and it's not looking good. Half the room looks like they're waiting for a dentist's appointment, and you're only halfway through slide three.

**Solution:** To avoid this, start your presentation with a short, personal story that grabs their attention and cuts through the monotony of the corporate slides.

### Example 1:

Storyteller: Samantha Lee, project manager at a design agency

Situation: Opening a team meeting on improving processes.

“Two weeks ago, I was trying to assemble a bookshelf. The instructions were... let’s just say, less than helpful. Three hours in, I looked at the shelf, and it was just very wobbly, barely holding together. When I saw it, I thought, *What the hell is this?*”

Upset, I looked into the instructions, only to realize I had skipped step one entirely. It was so freaking painful. I spent the entire evening fixing the mess that I’d created.

Anyway, it made me think: How often do we rush into projects without a clear plan? Today, I want to talk about how we can plan better so we’re not stuck fixing wobbly shelves down the line.”

**Example 2:**

Storyteller: Raymond Hernandez, head of customer support at a software start-up

Situation: Kicking off a presentation on improving customer satisfaction.

“Last weekend, I was at home, ordering a pizza. The moment I hit the order button, I realized that I had chosen the wrong toppings—anchovies. Yikes. I hate anchovies more than anything in this world.

Anyway, so, I call them up, thinking, *No big deal.*

The guy answers, and I explain the situation. He pauses for a moment, and then says, ‘Sorry, there’s nothing we can do.’

I blink. ‘Wait? What? You haven’t even started making it!’

‘Yeah, well... it’s our policy. No changes after the order’s placed.’

I noticed my head getting red. To avoid saying something I’d regret, I hung up.

But after a few seconds, it got me thinking—where in our business have we got too rigid? Are there moments where we could make a customer’s day with minimal effort?

That’s what I want to talk about today—how we can create those small, thoughtful moments that leave a lasting impact.”

## How to Find Capturing Stories

1. *Think of the topic:* Start by identifying the theme or focus of your presentation. What's the main idea you want to talk about? Common topics include time management, collaboration, teamwork, innovation, resilience, etc.
2. *Think of personal moments:* Reflect on your own life for moments that taught you something about this theme. These could be small, relatable experiences that connect to your audience's day-to-day lives. For example:
  - *Collaboration:* Planning a family vacation and navigating everyone's opinions.
  - *Innovation:* The time you tried a bold recipe that turned into a kitchen disaster.
  - *Resilience:* Your child (or nephew or niece) not giving up after losing a game.

## 3. Coaching Stories

**Situation:** It's your weekly one-on-one with a coworker, and they've come to you for guidance. You share your best advice: "Do XYZ; it'll change your life." They nod, thank you, and leave.

**Complication:** Fast-forward a week. You ask, "So, did you try that XYZ thing we talked about?" And they say, "Oh... uh... yeah, about that. I kind of... forgot." You're thinking, *What the...? How did you forget that?*

**Solution:** Instead of just giving advice, tell a story that underlines the principle you want them to understand. Pick a moment from your past where you learned that lesson. Coaching stories help your listeners learn from your experience.

**Example 1:**

Storyteller: Eric Mann, strategy and planning lead at a construction company

Point: Focus on what matters the most.

“My first year as an analyst, I was obsessed with to-do lists. I’d just read *Getting Things Done* and thought, *This is it—the secret to being unstoppable*. So, I wrote down every to-do. Every email, every tiny task, every thought.

One day, I walked into the office in London, sat down with my coffee, and dove straight into my list. Emails? Sent. Reports? Filed. Chat messages? Answered. Boom, boom, boom. By 6 p.m., I had crossed off eighteen out of twenty items. I felt like a productivity god.

And then my manager walked over. He leaned on my desk and asked, ‘Hey, Eric, where do we stand on the project?’

I held my breath and glanced at the screen. And there they were, the two unchecked items on my list. The project tasks. The two things that actually mattered.

‘I’ll send it over soon,’ I said, trying to sound confident. But I wasn’t ready.

So, that night, I stayed at my desk, grinding until 2 a.m. to finish what I should’ve been working on all day. I showed up to work the next morning like a zombie.

As I was drinking my third coffee that day, I was wondering, *What just happened?*

That’s when I realized: I wasn’t productive—I was just busy. I had spent all my energy on the easy, low-hanging tasks but didn’t actually move the needle.

From that day on, I made a rule: every morning, I ask myself, ‘What are the three things I need to do today to



actually make progress?’ I tackle those before anything else.

So, let me ask you: Are you just crossing things off, or are you actually moving the needle?”

### **Example 2:**

Storyteller: Mark Hunter, author of *High-Profit Prospecting*

Point: He uses this story to show the value of not backing down too quickly.

“A few years ago, I was in the office when I got a call from the CEO of an industrial goods company. The first thing he said was, ‘Mark, your fees are too high. How much will you lower them?’ My stomach tightened.

Just a week earlier, my VP of Sales told me the deal was done. Clearly, it wasn’t.

I took a deep breath and said, ‘We won’t lower our fees. If you want to pay less, we’ll have to reduce the value. By the way, how much business do you expect to lose to your competitor next year?’

There was this long pause—it felt like he’d hung up. Finally, the CEO said, ‘Mark, you weren’t our first choice. But a few days ago, I asked your competitor the same question. They immediately gave us a 30 percent discount without any negotiation. That’s when I realized—I don’t want someone who gives in so easily to train my sales team. I want someone like you.’

The same day, we got the deal. That client was one of our largest accounts of that year. That moment taught me: Don’t give in too quickly—patience pays off.”

## How to Find Coaching Stories

1. *Think of an insight:* Start by pinpointing the lesson or insight you want your coworker to truly understand (e.g., “Underpromise and overdeliver”; “If you don’t measure it, you can’t improve it.”)
2. *Think of a moment:* Dig into your own experiences to find a story about a way you learned that lesson. Is there a moment in your past when you faced a challenge that helped you realize that point?

## 4. Convincing Stories

**Situation:** You’ve got a brilliant idea for a new project, system, or way of working. You’ve mapped out all the details and can’t wait to share it with your coworkers.

**Complication:** You present your idea enthusiastically, only to be met with polite nods and, “Thanks, but we’re focused on other priorities.” Meanwhile, you’re screaming inside, *Priorities! This is the priority!*

**Solution:** Don’t just talk about the features and logic; show them why your idea matters by telling a story. Focus on a real moment that highlights the pain of the current way of working. Make them see and feel the frustration or inefficiency first-hand, then hint at how your idea solves it.

**Example 1:**

**Storyteller:** Kate Fisher, HR director at athletic apparel company

**Point:** The company should shift to a different performance appraisal system.

“Last month, I walked into James’ office and saw him hunched over his desk, head in one hand, the other furiously clicking his mouse. He didn’t even notice me at first.

‘How is the performance review going?’ I asked.

He said, ‘Kate, it was brutal. I spent almost the entire day explaining the difference between *exceeds expectations* and *highly meets expectations*. It felt like splitting hairs’

He paused, then added, ‘By the end of the review, people in my team were just stuck on, ‘*Why wasn’t I in a higher category?*’ They weren’t focused on what really mattered: how to improve. Instead of coaching them, I feel like I just defended labels.’

Listening to James, I could feel how painful that was. Our five-category system wasn’t helping anyone. It was draining our managers, frustrating our employees, and turning what should’ve been productive conversations into stressful debates.

I realized that something had to change. After looking at the research, we found a simpler solution: a two-category system—*Meets Expectations* and *Does Not Meet Expectations*. No endless debates, no nitpicking. It keeps the focus where it belongs—on growth and improvement.”

**Example 2:**

**Storyteller:** Soojin Kim, marketing manager at a software company

**Point:** The company should shift to creating customer-focused content.

“Last week, I sat in on a customer focus group. One participant stood out—a small-business owner from DC named Jen. She was this tiny lady, but her feedback was quite juicy.

She held up one of our brochures and said, ‘Honestly, this doesn’t tell me anything I care about. It’s just a list of features.’

Curious, I asked her to elaborate.

‘When I’m looking for a solution, I’m asking myself, “Will this save me time? Will it save me money? Will it make my life easier?” And this doesn’t answer any of that.’

Jen’s words stuck with me. And she wasn’t alone. Throughout the day, I heard the same message repeated in different ways. Our content isn’t connecting. We’re talking about ourselves instead of addressing what our customers actually care about.

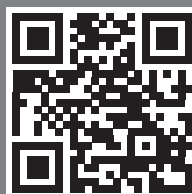
That’s why I’m proposing we take a bold step beyond traditional content and launch an AI-powered recommendation engine. This tool will analyze each customer’s needs and instantly deliver tailored solutions, resources, and case studies. That tool will give Jen and customers like her exactly what they need, when they need it.”

## How to Find Convincing Stories

1. *Think of the pain:* Start by identifying the frustration or inefficiency your idea solves. What's the problem you're addressing?
2. *Think of a moment:* Reflect on a real situation where you (or someone else) experienced that frustration first-hand. What emotions did they feel? What happens if nothing changes?

### Find Stories Workbook

Would you like more guidance to help you develop the four fundamental stories? I've created a workbook that will help you develop plenty of story ideas. Go to [www.power-of-storytelling.com/bonus](http://www.power-of-storytelling.com/bonus) and download the workbook for free.



The 4 C's will help you prepare the kinds of stories that matter the most in the professional setting.

If you want to start using stories right away, focus on these types. Ideally, prepare a few variations for each type, so you'll soon have a pool of five to ten go-to stories.

That strategy will definitely help you achieve wonderful results. But if you want to take it further, making stories a fundamental part of every conversation, you may need a few more stories. That's what we will focus on in Chapter 7, *Have an Abundance of Stories*, where you'll discover how to build a library of hundreds of stories.

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## Summary

There are four story types that every professional needs to master: The 4 C's of Business Storytelling.

- 1. Connection Stories:** Tell a quick, relatable story to break the ice and build rapport.
- 2. Capturing Stories:** Start a presentation with an engaging anecdote related to the topic to grab attention.
- 3. Coaching Stories:** Share an experience from your past that helps your coworkers understand and remember the lesson or insight.
- 4. Convincing Stories:** Describe a moment that highlights the pain of the current approach and explains why change is needed.

## Challenge

- **Goal:** Identify a story for one of the 4 C's of Business Storytelling.
- **Instructions:**
  - Pick one of the four story types.
  - Reflect on your experiences and think of a story for that type.
  - Jot down a summary of the story.
- **Tips:** Ideally, pick a story type that you can try out in one of your upcoming meetings.
- **Resources:** Use the workbook to complete the exercise. Go to [www.power-of-storytelling.com/bonus](http://www.power-of-storytelling.com/bonus) to access the workbook.

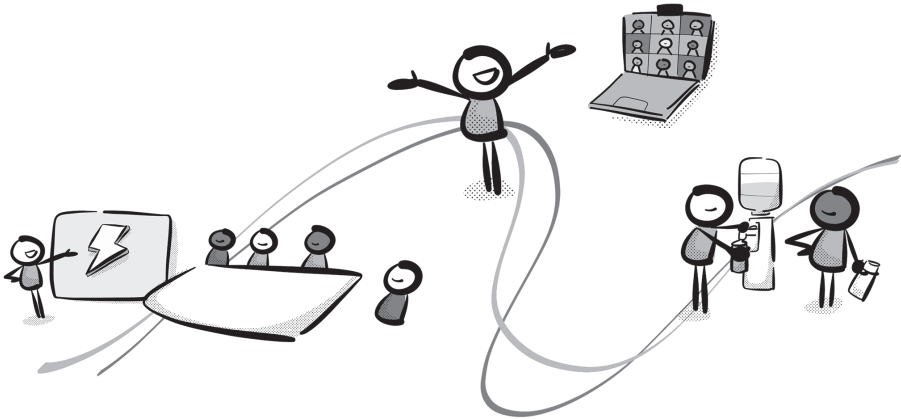


# CHAPTER 5

# TELL STORIES

*Great stories happen to those who can tell them.*

— Ira Glass, host of *This American Life*





In July 2023, I hopped on a coaching call with Marcela, a product manager from San Francisco. She'd been working on using stories to bring her stakeholders along.

Not wasting any time, she said, "Hey, Philipp, I just tried using a story in a call... and it sucked. It was really bad."

I asked, "Why do you think it went badly?"

She sighed. "I don't know. I did everything I learned."

I could hear the frustration in her voice. So, I said, "Do you have a recording of the call?"

"Yeah, I do."

A few minutes later, we were watching it together. And that's when I noticed something fascinating. When she was just talking normally—wow, she had great energy. She was charismatic, engaging, and totally herself. You could see she was enjoying the conversation. But then, she started telling her story, and everything changed.

It was like someone flipped a switch. The easy, natural flow disappeared. She slipped into what I call "performer mode." Suddenly, her voice took on this overly polished, motivational speaker tone. Sure, the story itself was solid—well-crafted, and perfectly structured—but it didn't feel real. It felt staged.

And it wasn't just me who noticed. I watched her counterparts on the video call. They were nodding along at first, but as soon as her "performer mode" kicked in, their attention drifted. I noticed the light change on their faces—classic signs they were clicking into different screens.

This isn't an isolated case. I've watched thousands of stories, and I see the same mistake over and over. The moment people start their story, they change the way they speak.

**The best storytellers don't do that. They sound exactly the same when they speak "normally" as they do when they share a story. They weave their stories into their conversations.**

In this chapter, you'll learn how to prepare and deliver your stories so they feel natural, authentic, and genuinely engaging.

## Step 1: Practice Story

Beginner storytellers often feel the urge to memorize their story word for word. While that's better than completely winging it, it's not the best approach. Memorizing every single word can make you sound too polished, stiff, or even robotic. Moreover, when you're focused on recalling the exact wording, it's harder to stay present and connect with your audience.

**The better approach is to focus on internalization, not memorization.**

Internalizing your story means understanding it so well that you can share it naturally, without relying on perfect phrasing. When you know your key points, you can let the words flow organically, creating a conversation rather than a performance.

Here's how you can internalize your story.

### Relive the Moment

We've quickly talked about this in Chapter 3 ("Enhance Stories"), but let's go a bit deeper.

Instead of reciting your story like a script, focus on reliving it. Reconnect with the emotions, visuals, and energy of the moment.

Here's how.

- **Close Your Eyes:** Find a quiet place, close your eyes, and take a deep breath.

- **Visualize the Scene:** Imagine where the story took place. What do you do, see, think, feel, or hear? What's happening around you?
- **Speak It Out Loud:** Describe the moment that is unfolding in front of your eyes. Don't worry about perfect wording; just share whatever comes up.

For most stories, reliving the story will be enough. I do that for 90 percent of my stories.

But occasionally, there are stories that you really want to master, especially when it's the story for a highly important meeting. For those, you may want to use the next strategy.

## Practice at Different Lengths

Instead of telling your story in the same way every time, practice different versions of the same story: a longer version, medium version, and a shorter version of the same story.

Here are the three versions I typically use to internalize a story.

### 1. The Two-Minute Story

- **Set the Timer:** Set your timer for two minutes.
- **Tell the Story:** Share a fuller version, going deeper into some of the visuals, actions, and emotions. Two minutes sounds like a lot, but stay focused—include only what makes the story interesting.
- **Reflect:** Which parts felt more important than others? Which moments were less relevant? Mentally note what you could trim next time.

### 2. The One-Minute Story

- **Set the Timer:** Reset your timer to one minute.

- **Tell the Story:** This time, reduce the number of details and focus the story on its most important moments. Capture the essence without getting too deep.
- **Reflect:** What worked in this version? Which details felt essential? Think about how this version differs from the two-minute one in focus and clarity, but also entertainment.

### 3. The 30-Second Story

- **Set the Timer:** Set your timer to 30 seconds.
- **Tell the Story:** This is the “elevator pitch” version. Go straight to the core and describe the adversity, then wrap up with a quick resolution.
- **Reflect:** Did you capture the essence? Does this version feel complete, or do you think it needs more details?

Practicing different versions of your story helps you focus on what truly matters. You’ll identify the core elements, making it easier to adapt the story to different situations and audiences.

For example, in a board meeting, where time is limited, you might use the 30-second version to keep things concise. In a team meeting, where building connection and trust is key, you might opt for the two-minute version to provide more depth.

By practicing this way, you won’t just remember the story—you’ll also internalize it. The story becomes second nature. Once you’ve internalized that story, you’re ready to share it in a meeting.

## Step 2: Transition In

So, the moment has arrived. You’re in the meeting, and you’ve spotted the perfect opportunity to tell your story. How do you

transition into it and share it in a way that feels authentic?

One common mistake in storytelling is that people move into their story awkwardly.

Some dive into their story, giving no context. While this approach might work in a TED Talk or keynote speech, it can feel a bit too staged for a casual meeting, and it can leave the audience wondering, “Why are they telling me this?”

Others start their story by putting too much emphasis on the moment they tell the story. They say, “Let me tell you a story,” and then pause to give the audience time to prepare for the *grandiose* story.

While it’s not terrible, it’s not ideal. Why? Because the word “story” can create resistance. Sure, most people love a good story, but some might have a negative connection with stories. They may worry that you’re about to waste their time with a 15-minute fairy tale or that you’re trying to trick them with some manipulation tactic.

So, how do you transition from not telling a story to telling a story without making it awkward?

**Use a short relevance statement that gets them excited or that explains why you’re sharing your story.**

That statement should only take one to three sentences and ideally shouldn’t use the word *story* (aka the s-word). Instead of saying the s-word, say “example,” “moment,” or “situation.” These words are more neutral and keep your audience open to listening.

**Examples of Relevance Statements:**

- *Connection Stories*: “I’m good. I had the most perfect morning...” → Move into your story
- *Capturing Stories*: “Just last week, I had an experience

that completely changed how I think about ...” →  
Move into your story

- *Coaching Stories*: “I faced a similar struggle a couple of years ago. Let me share what it was and what I learned from it.” → Move into your story
- *Convincing Stories*: “Two weeks ago, something happened that made me realize why this change is so critical.” → Move into your story

By framing your story this way, you give your audience a reason to listen to you.

## Step 3: Share Your Story

Now that you’ve opened with a relevance statement, what else can you do to make your story sound natural? Many storytellers, including Marcela (the product manager from San Francisco who I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter) slip into *performer mode* when they tell their stories.

Their tone becomes exaggerated and overly dramatic as if they’re narrating a fairy tale (aka the storytelling voice). Or they become overly formal, speaking slower, more monotonously, or with forced confidence.

But here’s the problem: That performer mode disconnects you from your audience. Instead of drawing people in, it pushes them away.

So, what should you do instead?

It’s simple.

**Tell your story like you’re chatting with a friend.**

Imagine sharing your story over coffee with your friend (or family member or therapist).

How do you speak in that situation?

- You (hopefully) don't use complicated jargon or formal phrases—you just use simple, everyday language.
- You don't obsess about filler words. Neither you nor your friend cares if you say “like,” “um,” or “uh” occasionally.
- You don't rush through the story. You pause when needed, take a breath, and think about what to say next.
- If your friend looks confused, you ask, “Does that make sense?” or “You look confused—should I clarify something?”

Do the same when telling a story at work. This approach turns your story into a shared experience rather than a performance.

One thing that has helped me sound more conversational is recording myself. After I've recorded myself speaking, I ask, “Would I sound like this if I were telling the story to Damian” (my best friend)?

Most of the time, the answer is no. I realize that I still sound a bit too formal or too stiff. I then record that same story a second time, often imagining sitting in a room with my best friend, giving it another try.

With practice, you'll close the gap between the way you speak privately and the way you present publicly. The more conversational you can make it, the more relatable you'll become.

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## Summary

- To practice your stories, focus on internalization, not memorization.
- Relive the moment and practice your story at different lengths—two minutes, one minute, and 30 seconds.
- Share the story naturally, transitioning into the story smoothly and telling it as if you were chatting with a friend.

## Challenge

- **Goal:** Practice your story.
- **Instructions:**
  - Pick one of the stories you prepared in the previous chapters.
  - Practice the story by reliving the moment and describing what you see in the scene.
  - Then, go ahead and practice three versions of that same story—two minutes, one minute, and 30 seconds.





# PART 2

## TURN PRO

Well done for working your way through the foundations for telling great stories. By applying those, you'll already tell better stories than 90 percent of people. That's more than enough for most business situations.

But for those of you aiming to be in the top 1 percent, Part 2 will give you the tools you need. This is where you go from being a great storyteller to a magnetic one.

Here's what you'll master.

- *Chapter 6 – Build Confidence:* Discover how to build the unshakable confidence to tell stories at any opportunity.
- *Chapter 7 – Have an Abundance of Stories:* You'll learn how to identify hundreds of stories from your past, spot new stories as they happen, and capture them so they're never forgotten.
- *Chapter 8 – Enhance Stories (Advanced):* Pick up advanced techniques to spice up your stories.

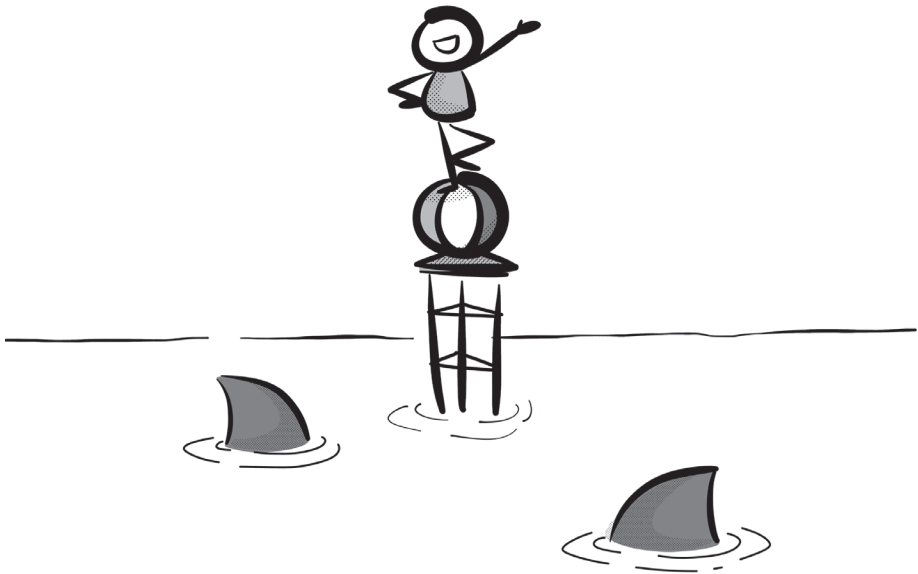


# CHAPTER 6

## **BUILD CONFIDENCE**

*Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear, not absence of fear.*

— Mark Twain



The fundamentals you've mastered in Part 1 are powerful.

For the first three years on my storytelling journey, I used those techniques in all my presentations and meetings, and the results were phenomenal. People were hooked throughout and I got wonderful feedback.

But there was this nagging feeling I couldn't quite shake. It felt like there was still something missing, and I couldn't put my finger on it.

I only saw the problem in September 2023.

I was asked to give a virtual storytelling workshop for sales professionals at a medical equipment manufacturer in Germany. By then, I had delivered hundreds of workshops.

Yet, as the start time approached, my familiar inner critic crept in. *Who am I to be giving this workshop? What if they think I'm faking it? What if they don't like it?*

To calm my nerves, I launched into my pre-workshop confidence routine—a carefully curated sequence of hacks of power poses, affirmations, and visualizations.

*It was the perfect warm-up routine.*

As the workshop was beginning, everything seemed fine. The introduction went smoothly, and people nodded along. I thought, *Okay, this is going well.*

But then it happened. After 15 minutes, a senior sales guy interrupted me mid-sentence:

*"That might work in the US, but here in Germany? No way. My customer would walk out."*

On the outside, I smiled, thanked him, and responded. But inside? My confidence was shattered.

*Oh, no. Is he right? Is this not working here? Am I wasting their time?*

From that point on, I wasn't leading the workshop anymore. I was chasing their approval.

My brain split in two—one part trying to deliver the session, the other obsessively analyzing every muted microphone, every flicker of disinterest.

By the time the workshop ended, I was drained—not from the delivery, but from the internal battle I'd been fighting the whole time. *Why did that one comment throw me off so much? Why couldn't I bounce back?*

That day, I didn't have an answer. But a few months later, I found it.

I was listening to a podcast by the founders of the public speaking program Ultraspeaking, Tristan de Montebello and Michael Gendler; they shared a profound insight.

**True confidence is about trusting your ability to handle whatever arises at the moment.**

At that moment, everything clicked. I'd been focused on the wrong things to build confidence. Sure, power poses, affirmations, and visualizations can help. I still use them today. But they were just Band-Aids. They gave me a quick boost, but deep down, they didn't solve the real problem.

The real problem was that I had a fear of things going wrong. And it's not just me. Most people are scared of making mistakes. Our brains make us believe that, when we make a mistake, the group (our tribe) will like us less. When they like us less, they might reject us from the group, which back in the old days would have threatened our survival. We obviously don't encounter those life-or-death situations, for the most part, but our brains still make us think that way.

If you want to become the most confident speaker and storyteller possible, you have to learn how to be okay when things change or go wrong.

In this chapter, I'll show you how to build unshakable confidence—the kind that doesn't just survive challenges but thrives in them.

## 1. Improvising Stories

The most effective way to build confidence is to improvise. Improvising means giving a speech or telling a story on a random topic without any preparation. No script, no notes, just you figuring it out on the spot.

Why does it matter?

Because improv is the ultimate training ground for learning how to stay present, handle the unexpected, and find creative solutions in real time. When you improvise, you will mess up.

Maybe you forget a detail, mix up facts, or say something absurd.

But instead of freezing, you'll learn to handle anything that comes up.

So, how can you improvise more?

### Four Improv Games

Here are four powerful games you can practice anytime by yourself. Each is simple, fun, and designed to build your storytelling confidence.

#### 1. Simple Timer

- **Goal:** Get comfortable telling stories on the spot.
- **Instructions:**
  - Pick a random topic (find a list of random topics after the four games).

- Set a timer for one to two minutes.
- Improvise a story about the topic.
- **Tip:** Use the storytelling techniques you've learned before, sharing the vivid moment(s) of the story.

## 2. Story Roulette

- **Goal:** Learn to weave unrelated ideas into a cohesive story.
- **Instructions:**
  - Pick a random topic (find a list of random topics after the four games).
  - Open any page of any book and pick five random words.
  - Set a timer to one to two minutes.
  - Improvise a story about the topic, incorporating all five random words.
- **Tips:** When you struggle to connect a random word to your story, you can use it metaphorically. For example, if you can't tie *crocodile* into your story about teamwork, say: "Teamwork is like a crocodile. It's invisible until it's needed, but when it strikes, it's unstoppable."

## 3. Magic Wand

- **Goal:** Turn mundane moments into profound stories.
- **Instructions:**
  - Think of a recent, ordinary moment (e.g., making coffee, waiting in line).
  - Set a timer for one to two minutes.
  - Improvise a story that transforms that ordinary moment into a captivating story.



- **Tips:** Exaggerate that moment, making the story more visual, emotional, and surprising than it is. Let me give you an example; let's say your ordinary moment is "waiting in line." Here's how you could turn that moment into a profound story: "I check my watch for the fifth time—six minutes. Seriously? Six minutes? I can feel the frustration bubbling up. How can they be this slow? I remind myself, Philipp, come on—use this as a chance to practice mindfulness. So, I take three deep breaths, trying to let it go. Just then, I hear something hit the floor. I glance down—and there it is..."

#### 4. Emotion Swap

- **Goal:** Get comfortable using your full body, voice, and emotions.
- **Instructions:**
  - Pick a random topic (find a list of random topics after the four games).
  - Set a timer to one to two minutes.
  - Improvise a story about the topic, changing your emotion about every 20 seconds. Great emotions to try out: calm, neutral, happy, assertive, passionate, excited, angry, playful, explosive.
- **Tips:** Push yourself to extremes, trying to exaggerate the emotions. These moments help expand what feels comfortable to you.

## List of Random Topics

Here are 52 random topics you can use to practice the games above. Pick a random one (not just one you love) and get started.

Adventure	Elevator ride	Unexpected guest	Secret door
Surprise	Childhood pet	Picnic	Time machine
Rain	Library	Favorite book	Coffee shop
Birthday	Beach	Morning routine	Unexpected call
Lost keys	Dream	Road trip	Night sky
First job	Mountain hike	Forgotten phone	Lost map
Stuck in traffic	Old photograph	Concert	Late-night snack
First car	Grocery store	Accidental text	Magic trick
Snowstorm	Letter from the past	Weekend getaway	Gardening
Campfire	New neighbor	School trip	Antique shop
Missed train	Lemonade stand	Family reunion	First dance
Rollercoaster	Airplane turbulence	Midnight walk	Wrong address
Lost luggage	Painting class	Treasure hunt	New Year's Eve

## Improv Games

Setting a timer and coming up with a random topic can feel like a hassle. That's why I created a free tool to make it ridiculously easy for you to improvise.

Go to [www.power-of-storytelling.com/bonus](http://www.power-of-storytelling.com/bonus) or scan the QR code; you'll find nine improv games to help you build unshakable confidence.



## Tips for Effective Improv

Here are some more powerful tips that I've learned from my improv courses and from Ultraspeaking.

### 1. Stay in Character

You'll mess up. That's guaranteed. But when you mess up, don't stop and don't show your frustration. Don't say, "Ah, shoot. That was terrible." Instead, continue improvising as if this was the best story on this planet. Why does this matter? Because, when you make mistakes in your story in real life, the chances are your audience won't even notice. They only notice when you draw attention to it. Learn how to stay in character.

### 2. Draw from Real Experiences

At the beginning, it might be tempting to make up wild stories every single time. While that's okay when you start, you don't want to do that all the time. Try to challenge yourself to find an actual experience. They don't have to be exact matches to the prompt. If, for example, one prompt is about *apples*, and you have no stories around apples, feel free to share a story about *fruit*. If you can't come up with anything, go a level higher and think of any stories about *food*, *health*, or *nature*.

### 3. Zoom into One Moment

When improvising a story, it's tempting to rush through everything, chronologically. But great storytelling isn't about covering every detail. It's about making moments feel real.

For example, instead of sharing every single activity during a trip abroad, focus on one specific moment—like holding your boarding pass right before departure. Describe the weight of the paper in your hands, the excitement bubbling up, or the nerves about the adventure ahead.

By practicing zooming into one vivid moment, you'll learn to make stories feel alive. This skill is often more powerful than simply structuring a story from start to finish.

### 4. Say "Yes"

When you get a random topic or object, it is easy to discard it and say, "Nah. I don't like that topic. I'll pick a different one." Don't do that. One of the golden rules of improv is that you accept whatever is given to you and build on it. So, even if you don't like the topic or have little to say about it, go with it and improvise a story anyhow. Soon, you'll realize that you can tell a story or give a speech on any topic.

### 5. Have Fun

Storytelling is an art, but it's also play. Don't take yourself too seriously. Laugh at your mistakes, lean into the absurdity, and enjoy the process. Instead of telling yourself, "I want to do this right," tell yourself, "I'm here to have fun." The moment fun becomes your priority, your entire energy changes. It is much easier to feel confident when you're having fun.

Practicing on your own will help you improve significantly. But now let's check how you can increase the stakes and learn to feel even more confident.

## 2. Putting Yourself out There

It's simple: The more stories you tell, the more confident you'll feel.

Every time you tell a story, you're giving your brain another data point: *I can handle this—and whatever else comes up.*

Think of storytelling as a video game.

At first, you face smaller challenges. It's new; you will mess up, but don't beat yourself up. You try again, and with a few repetitions, you'll be ready for the next level. Each time, you gain more "confidence coins" to spend on bigger challenges.

### The Confidence Game

Here's what that progression might look like.

Level	Description	Stakes / Benefit
1	Improvise stories by yourself.	Low stakes, solo practice. Great for getting hundreds of repetitions with no friction.
2	Share a story with a friend.	Low stakes, familiar environment. Helps you get comfortable telling stories in a relaxed way.
3	Share a story with a colleague.	Moderate stakes. Raises the bar by storytelling in a one-on-one professional setting.
4	Share a story in a team meeting.	Higher stakes. Maybe it's part of a presentation or while you are brainstorming a project. Now, you're engaging a group, and honing your ability to hold their attention.
5	Improvise a story in front of a small audience.	Even higher stakes. Improvise a story on the spot at a workshop, a toast, or even a casual event.

6	Deliver a story on a big stage.	The highest stakes. Share a story in front of a big group at a keynote, conference, or the company's all-hands meeting.
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You could progress gradually, leveling up one step at a time. That's what most people do. But you can also skip a few levels, shock your system, and raise your baseline confidence in one bold move.

Let me explain how I raised my baseline confidence.

## Taking Bold Action

In November 2021, I had a wild idea: What if I tried stand-up comedy?

I hadn't read a single book on comedy or taken any classes. I had no clue what comedy was about, but I thought, *Why not? I'll figure it out.*

I searched for open mic nights in Amsterdam, found one, and signed up as a comedian.

Fast-forward three weeks, and there I was, standing in front of 180 strangers, delivering my first ever stand-up routine.

It was, without a doubt, the most terrifying moment of my life. My legs were shaking so badly that I felt like I might collapse.

I wish I could tell you I crushed it, but that wouldn't be true. I wasn't terrible, but I wasn't great either. However, what mattered most was the feeling afterward. Walking off that stage, I thought, *If I can handle that, I can handle anything.*

That single experience changed my perception of fear. My baseline for what I thought was scary had moved up a few levels. I felt much more confident after that one moment.

And you can do the same. You can choose to slowly increase the stakes or put yourself in a really uncomfortable situation.

Either way, every rep will help you feel more comfortable telling stories at any opportunity.

But there is one more thing to be mindful of when it comes to building confidence.

## Post-Story Routine

The moment you finish telling your story is critical. What you do next can either undermine your confidence or strengthen it.

Many people unknowingly sabotage themselves by falling into a trap. The moment the story ends, they look for things they didn't do well.

- *Was that interesting enough?*
- *Did I lose them halfway through?*
- *Why did I stumble on that one part?*

This type of self-criticism is dangerous. Why? Because your brain starts associating storytelling with negative outcomes. You're essentially telling yourself, *that was not good. That was not fun. People didn't react well. Let's not do this again.*

So, the next time you think about telling a story, your brain remembers that negative experience and starts to worry even more, or try to avoid that situation altogether.

Instead of focusing on what went wrong, shift your attention to what you did right. After telling a story, take a moment to reflect. Ask yourself: *What are three things I did well?*

Here are examples to give you an idea:

- *I'm proud I dared to tell a story in the first place.*
- *I'm grateful I kept it conversational. It felt natural.*
- *I'm thankful I brought people vividly into the moment.*

By focusing on the positives, you're training your brain to view storytelling as a rewarding experience. It helps your brain associate storytelling with positive emotions, boosting your confidence and making you eager to try it again. Over time, this builds a powerful feedback loop. Every story you tell boosts your confidence, making the next one even easier.

Confidence isn't built by dwelling on mistakes. It's built by embracing failure and celebrating progress.

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## Summary

- True confidence is about trusting yourself to handle whatever comes up.
- The most powerful tool with which to build storytelling confidence is to improvise stories on the spot, with no script or preparation.
- Once you've got more comfortable improvising, start sharing stories with friends or colleagues, and work your way up to larger audiences.



## Challenge

- **Goal:** Improvise a story.
- **Instructions:**
  - Select one of the four improv exercises from this chapter (Simple Timer, Story Roulette, Magic Wand, or Emotion Swap).
  - Improvise a story.
- **Tips:**
  - Focus on *staying in character*. Keep going, even if you mess up.
  - Don't see it as a chore. This is supposed to be fun. Tell yourself, "I'm here to have fun."
- **Resources:** Use one of the games at [www.power-of-storytelling.com/bonus](http://www.power-of-storytelling.com/bonus) to make it easier and more fun to improvise.

# CHAPTER 7

# HAVE AN ABUNDANCE OF STORIES

*Stories constitute the single most powerful weapon in a leader's arsenal.*

— Dr. Howard Gardner, professor, Harvard University



As I started doing more improv exercises, I saw a major shift in my storytelling skills.

I was feeling good about telling stories. And this time, it wasn't fake confidence, but real, authentic confidence.

In my meetings and presentations, I'd tell a story or two. Sometimes, I'd share a fun anecdote in a video or with friends over coffee.

I thought, *I'm doing great.*

That was until one afternoon when my colleague, Jakob Manthei, made me realize that I was only tapping into a fraction of what was possible.

He had just returned from a five-day public speaking training in Estonia. We were catching up at a small café in Amsterdam.

"So, Jakob, how was the training?" I asked.

He leaned forward, and his face lit up. "Man, it was insane. Every day, we were in the training room until 1 a.m."

I nearly choked on my espresso. "Wait, 1 a.m.? Are you serious? What were you guys doing? Endless exercises? How did you even stay awake?"

Jakob smirked. "That's the crazy part. It wasn't endless exercises. Most of the time, it was just the trainer talking."

I stared at him, confused. "Talking? For hours? That sounds so boring."

"No," Jakob said, shaking his head. "That's the thing. I was completely glued to every word he said. It didn't even feel like time was passing."

"Come on," I said skeptically, "what was so special about this guy?"

Jakob leaned back in his chair as he replayed the experience in his mind.

“You’d ask him a question, and he wouldn’t just give you the answer. He’d tell you a story. Every. Single. Time. And I know it sounds far too much, but it wasn’t. It was mesmerizing. I still remember every single one of his answers. Hands down, the most inspiring event I’ve ever been to.”

Apparently, this trainer wasn’t just telling stories occasionally; he was weaving them into every interaction. And people loved it.

As I was staring into my espresso cup, I realized, *the best storytellers aren’t the ones with a couple of shiny stories. The best storytellers are the ones with the most stories.*

Think about it. If you only have five great stories, your options are limited. There won’t be that many opportunities to tell those. But if you have 20, 50, or even 100 stories, you’ll have a much higher chance of using them throughout every interaction. Whether you’re giving a keynote, leading a team meeting, or chatting with colleagues, you’ll have a story ready to go.

I know those numbers sound overwhelming, but here’s the good news: building a library of stories doesn’t require magic. It’s about consistent small actions that add up. And with today’s AI tools, crafting and refining stories is faster and easier than ever before.

In this chapter, I’ll show you the exact strategies I’ve used to expand my pool of stories from a handful to hundreds.

## **Strategy #1: Identify Past Stories**

You have hundreds of untold stories, whether you realize it or not.

You don't need to have lived a wild, extraordinary life to be a great storyteller. The reason these stories may not stand out to you yet is either because you've forgotten about them or you've never thought to frame them as stories.

Let's change that.

Think of yourself as an archaeologist. Not digging for dinosaur bones but for the hidden stories of your past.

**The best stories come from your emotional *highs* and *lows*. They come from any moments that touched your heart in a meaningful way.**

You can find those highs and lows, using a method I call **Life Map**.

It's a simple, three-step process to uncover the most interesting stories from your past.

## Step 1: Pick a Timeframe and Theme

Finding the right stories starts with narrowing your focus. Without focus, it's easy to get overwhelmed or lost in too many possibilities.

**Four Levels of Timeframes:**

- **Super Broad:** Your entire life.
- **Broad:** A few years (e.g., your time at a company or in a specific role).
- **Narrow:** Three, six, or twelve months (e.g., the past year in your role).
- **Super Narrow:** A single month.

After experimenting with these, I've found that **Super Broad** and **Broad** can feel overwhelming and lead to stories that are too big or remote to be relatable.

**Super Narrow** gives you highly relatable moments, but they might lack the emotional depth, as not every month changes you in a meaningful way.

I found that **Narrow** strikes the perfect balance. It's specific enough to not feel overwhelming, yet broad enough to bring meaningful moments to the surface.

Once you've picked a timeframe, focus on a **theme**. A theme narrows your search even further and makes it easier to spot patterns and moments that stand out.

Here are a few themes to consider.

- Work
- Relationships
- Hobbies
- Personal growth

Sure, you may want to start with work initially, but don't limit yourself to that theme. Personal stories can be just as powerful, when they are tied to a takeaway that resonates with your audience.

To get started with Life Map, here are four tried-and-tested combinations of timeframes and themes that work well.

- Your first year in your new role
- The last six months in your current role
- The most difficult year in your career
- The best year of your career

## Step 2: Identify Highs and Lows

Once you've chosen your timeframe and theme, the next step is to zoom in and pinpoint the moments that stand out—the highs and lows from that period.

## Highs

Those are the moments when things clicked, and you felt proud, validated, or energized.

- A promotion that you worked hard for
- A heartfelt compliment from a coworker
- Closing a deal against all odds

## Lows

Those are the moments when you struggled, made a mistake, or missed an opportunity.

- Missing a critical deadline
- Losing out on a big opportunity, despite your best efforts
- Making a mistake that affected your team

Don't just focus on the most dramatic highs and lows—small moments can often hold the richest stories. A minor setback might have taught you a profound lesson or revealed an insight worth sharing.

## Step 3: Reflect on the Full Story

Remember that your highs and lows are just pieces of a bigger story.

Highs often represent R (Resolution) in a story—they're the wins, the payoffs, and the moments of triumph.

Lows typically represent A (Adversity)—the challenges, the struggles, and the tension that keeps an audience hooked.

But before crafting the full story around those moments, ask yourself, *What did I learn from that high or low?*

This is the T (Takeaway) or lesson from that experience.

Once you've identified the takeaway, ask yourself, *Is it an interesting takeaway? Something worth sharing? Could it inspire, guide, or teach others?*

If the answer is no, skip to the next moment. If the answer is yes, it's time to build the story!

You can use the CART structure you learned in Chapter 2 ("Structure Stories"). As a reminder:

1. **Context:** Where does the story begin?
2. **Adversity:** What's the obstacle?
3. **Resolution** (if applicable): How was the challenge resolved? And how does the story turn out at the end?
4. **Takeaway:** What's the lesson or insight?

Let's go back to my high of announcing my coaching business on LinkedIn (as mentioned in Chapter 1). On that day, I felt really excited to have shared the news with the world. Later, I wanted to see if I could use that as a story going forward.

So, I asked myself, *What did I learn from that experience?*

After a few minutes, I identified a few lessons that could be interesting. One stood out. "Just take the first step."

I thought it was a cool takeaway, so I identified the key parts of the story.

1. **Context:** "November 2020, I had never posted on LinkedIn before."
2. **Adversity:** "Inner struggle, worrying that people would call me out."
3. **Resolution:** "Posted and received tons of encouragement."
4. **Takeaway:** "Just take the first step. It's never as scary as the story in your head."



Here's the full story about that moment.

“It was November 2020. I had taken a few storytelling courses, and I knew—I wanted to be a storytelling coach.

And I decided to announce it on LinkedIn.

Simple, right? Except I'd never posted before. Ever. As I stared at the screen, my mind spiraled. *What if they think I'm a joke?* What if they comment, 'You a storyteller? Wow, didn't see that'?

I spent the whole day writing and deleting drafts. *This sounds stupid. This sounds desperate.* By sunset, I was sitting in a sea of crumpled Post-It notes and half-empty coffee cups, ready to give up.

Then a thought hit me: *Wait, what if I'm telling myself a bad story?* My heart pounded as I hovered over the 'Post' button. *Screw it,* I thought. *What's the worst that could happen?* And I clicked.

For a moment, I froze, bracing for disaster.

But then the messages started coming in. 'This is awesome!' 'Congrats, dude. This is incredible.' 'Philipp, I'm so glad you found something you love.'

That's when I realized: Don't let fear stop you. Take the first step. It's never as scary as the story in your head.”

I hope this example gave you a good idea of how to turn those highs and lows into a story.

Uncovering the stories from the past is great, but we also want to never miss a good story in the future. Here's how you do that.

## Strategy #2: Spot Future Stories

Our lives are full of stories—but we often overlook them.

The good news? With a little practice, you can train your mind to recognize them as they happen.

And there's one exercise that will make sure you never miss a story again.

### Homework for Life.

I first discovered this exercise when reading Matthew Dicks' book *Storyworthy*<sup>4</sup>; since then, I have been doing that exercise every single day.

Here's how it works.

### Step 1: Ask Yourself a Simple Question

At the end of each day (or the next morning), pause and ask:

**“If I had to tell a story from today, what would it be?”**

Don't overthink it. You're not hunting for grand, life-changing moments. Instead, look for:

- A kind gesture someone showed you
- An unexpected conversation
- A small frustration

Anything that touched your heart.

### Step 2: Write It Down

Once you've found your moment, jot it down in a central place (e.g., Excel, Notion, or a journal), using a simple format.

- **Date:** When it happened

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4 Matthew Dicks, *Storyworthy* (Paperback, 2018)

- **Storyworthy Moment:** A brief summary of what happened and how you felt
- **Lesson:** What you learned from that moment. This is optional, as not every moment will have a meaningful lesson.

Here's a screenshot of my Homework for Life to give you an idea.

Date	Moment	Lesson
01.12.24	Deciding to join Robin for Bachata night and having an incredible time	Sometimes, it's good to let go of discipline and just enjoy
02.12.24	Feeling very connected to Damian after we talked about what bothered us	Don't be afraid to express your feelings in our relationship
03.12.24	Tricking my mind in the "workout lab" to tell myself "this is fun" while "dying"	No activity is stressful by itself—only how you perceive it
04.12.24	Feeling hyped after the Hone workshop, incredibly grateful for this job	My anxiety has largely turned into gratitude
05.12.24	In the sauna with Philipp in Berlin, overwhelmed by so many naked people	I want to feel more comfortable and let go of shame around nudity
06.12.24	Walking in the forest before the Navan workshop, grateful for the beautiful location, perfect timing, and my job	I want to spend more time in nature
07.12.24	Finishing v1 of my new book after hustling like crazy—my mind immediately wanted to jump to the next thing	I want to take more time to celebrate my achievements
08.12.24	Feeling overwhelmed about my 10x goal, but after talking to Alex, realizing making tons of money doesn't have to be stressful	Seeing it as a game makes it fun
09.12.24	Controller in the workshop: "Look, I've been this way for 20 years—I'm not gonna change." I tried to persuade him but handled it poorly	I need to get better at dealing with difficult people

It takes a minute or two to capture that moment. But it will have a huge payoff.

At first, your entries might feel boring. Stuff like: Had lunch with a colleague. Gave a presentation at work. Had a peanut butter sandwich.

But stick with it. Over time, you'll start to notice something magical. You'll see your days differently. You'll realize there are countless small, meaningful moments in your life every single day.

*—Okay, cool. But what do I do once I've gathered a few moments?*

Great question. Capturing moments is just the first step. The next step is to select some of those moments and turn them into actual stories. But don't worry, I'm not asking you to craft a story for every single moment you jot down. Not every day is packed with earth-shattering experiences.

Here's the system I use to turn some of those moments into a story.

- **Set Aside 30 Minutes:** At the end of each week, maybe Friday afternoon, Sunday evening, or whenever works best for you, block out 30 minutes.
- **Review Your Entries:** Go through all the moments you captured that week. Ask yourself if any moment stands out (e.g., was there anything particularly emotional, surprising, or entertaining).
- **Pick One Moment to Develop:** Choose the moment that speaks to you the most—something meaningful, relatable, or memorable.
- **Craft the Story:** Use the structure and story elements you learned in the previous chapter to turn that moment into a full story.

By focusing on one story each week, you'll create a steady flow of well-crafted stories. That's one story per week, 52 stories per year—more than enough to use stories strategically in all of your interactions.

*—But Philipp, a lot of those moments will be from outside of work. Can I share a personal story at work?*

Absolutely. Personal stories are powerful in professional settings, because they help you connect to your listeners on a personal level. Also, they're often more entertaining.

The key is to tie your personal story to a lesson that is relevant to your audience and situation.

For example:

- Your child learning to ride a bike → A story about resilience and pushing through challenges.
- Spraining your ankle while jogging → A story about the importance of patience and self-care.
- Getting stuck in traffic and missing a meeting → A story about the value of having back-up plans.

Let me give you an example of a personal story I use in business.

In October 2024, I went back to Germany to visit my mom. One morning, I was in the kitchen when she asked me, "Could you dig a hole so that we can move the house for the turtles there?" My mom has three turtles, who she loves.

I blinked. "Really? Is that necessary?" I asked, trying to keep the impatience out of my voice. She nodded.

Now, here's the thing. My mom loves to make me do physical work when I'm visiting. Every time I'm home, she comes up with something random that needs immediate attention. "Paint the wall", "clean the fish tank", "do any kind of work outside of the computer."

Reluctantly, I grabbed a shovel and trudged outside.

As I started digging, my frustration bubbled up. *Why am I even doing this?* Each time the shovel hit the dirt, my irritation grew. *This is pointless*, I thought, stabbing the ground harder and harder.

Then, I paused, leaning on the shovel. Catching my breath, I realized, *Wait, Philipp. This isn't about the hole or even the turtles. I'm doing this because I love my mom. Because it matters to her.*

Immediately, I felt my grip around the shovel softening. When I resumed my work, I wasn't just digging anymore. I was helping her. The work felt lighter. The time flew by.

Two hours later, the turtles had a new home.

In business, we're often handed work that seems tedious or pointless. But when we connect the work to the person it will help, the work gains meaning. And when it has meaning, it becomes lighter.

Without Homework for Life, I would have long forgotten about that story.

But with Homework for Life, I'll now remember it for the rest of my life and can use that story strategically in any of my presentations.

## Strategy #3: Save Your Stories

Once you've mapped out a story, the next step is to store it in a Story Bank.

**The Story Bank is a central hub in which you save and organize your stories.**

Think of your story bank as your library, which holds all the meaningful events of your life.

Here's the information I capture for every story:

- **Title:** A short, memorable title
- **Point:** The main takeaway or lesson of the story
- **Use Case:** Situations that the story fits (e.g., team meetings, client pitches, or one-on-one coaching)
- **Theme:** The theme of the story (e.g., resilience, creativity, change)
- **Summary:** A quick outline of the story
- **Rating:** Your rating for how effective or engaging the story is

To show you how this looks in real life, here's how I captured Sarah Wilingham's story (from Chapter 2) in my story bank.

<b>Title</b>	The Coffee Assumption
<b>Point(s)</b>	1. Handling the judgment of others with grace will make you more powerful. 2. Don't let others' assumptions define your value.
<b>Use Case</b>	Meetings and one-on-one coaching sessions to help people deal with biases
<b>Theme</b>	Resilience, Diversity & Inclusion
<b>Summary</b>	Context: Mid-20s, leading acquisitions for Pizza Express, walking into a meeting room. Adversity: Arrives two minutes late, and a lawyer mistakenly asks her to get him coffee, assuming she's an assistant. Resolution: Calmly prepares the coffee, then asks the room if anyone else wants one. She sits down opposite him, watching him as he realizes his mistake. She walks away with the deal. Takeaway: This experience taught her that being underestimated can work in your favor.
<b>Rating</b>	★★★★★

—*So, how should I store my stories?*

The key is to choose a tool that feels natural to you—something you'll actually use and can easily update. All the electronic tools like Notion, Google Docs, Trello, or Evernote are great, because they're accessible from anywhere.

I personally use Notion because it allows me to filter and tag stories. Let's say I'm preparing a keynote for a company and want a story that emphasizes diversity and inclusion. I filter my Story Bank by that theme, and voilà. It shows me all the stories related to that topic. This functionality saves me a lot of time and helps me have the right story for the right moment.

But if you don't care about that functionality and prefer something more tangible, you can also use a physical notebook.



While you might lose some filtering convenience, the act of writing your stories by hand can make them feel more personal and memorable.

Pick a tool that makes it easy to capture your stories. The less friction, the more likely you are to maintain it.

### Story Bank

Do you want to save yourself time and not create a Story Bank from scratch? Go to [www.power-of-storytelling.com/bonus](http://www.power-of-storytelling.com/bonus) and download the Story Bank template for free. The template is available for Notion.



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## Summary

- The best storytellers are the ones with the most stories.
- You can build a library of hundreds of stories, by reflecting on the highs and lows from a specific period in your past and recognizing *storyworthy* moments in your daily life.
- Once you've mapped out a story, save that story in your Story Bank so you never forget about it, and can pull it out strategically.

## Challenge

- **Goal:** Find and craft an additional story.
- **Instructions:**
  - Think of the highs and lows of the first year in your current job.
  - Choose one moment that stands out and craft a story around it.
  - Save it in your Story Bank.

# CHAPTER 8

## ENHANCE STORIES (ADVANCED)

*The most important thing is to create unanswered questions in the audience's mind—what happens next?*

— Jakob Manthei, lead trainer at Power of Storytelling



In August 2024, a friend sent me a message. “Philipp, you have to watch this.”

His message included a link to a TEDx Talk by David J.P. Phillips on the *110 Techniques of Communication and Public Speaking*<sup>5</sup>. Intrigued, I clicked play.

My friend was right. I loved the talk. Phillips is an incredible communicator, someone I truly admire. His talk left me inspired.

*What if I could do something similar for storytelling? Can I uncover every single storytelling technique out there?*

I had to find out.

For a full month, I revisited every book I’d ever read on storytelling, re-watched courses, and went through all my notes from workshops. I wrote down every storytelling technique that came up repeatedly.

By the end of the process, I had boiled it down to 20 techniques that the best storytellers use the most. At first, I felt proud. *20 techniques! That’s incredible.* But then I paused.

*Wait... 20? That’s a lot. Actually, it’s too much.*

I started thinking about the people I work with—busy executives, marketing folks, project managers, and sales professionals. Most of them don’t have the time or headspace to master 20 techniques. They need clarity.

So, I set myself a new goal. Figure out which storytelling techniques actually work best.

Here’s how I did it:

I started by recording a baseline story—a simple, 60-second version without any fancy techniques.

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5 <https://youtu.be/K0pxo-dS9Hc?si=6qv8zcspGsZI3lGk>

Then, I recorded 20 more versions of the same story, adding one technique to each video.

For example:

- One video had the baseline story + humor.
- Another had the baseline story + an anticipation hook.
- And so on.

Once the videos were ready, I launched the experiment. I recruited 1,050 professionals in the United States via the research platform Prolific. Each participant watched just one version of the story and rated it on questions like “How much did the story grab your attention?” or “How much did you enjoy the story?”

A few days later, the results came in.

First, the good news. Every single storytelling technique was rated higher than the baseline story. That was a relief—it means that, no matter which technique you use, it adds value.

But here’s what truly amazed me. Seven techniques consistently outperformed the rest.

You’ve already learned how to structure and enhance your stories. But now, we can take it to the next level. In this chapter, I’ll share the seven advanced techniques that will turn any story into something unforgettable.

## **Technique #1: Anticipation Hook**

Imagine you haven’t eaten the entire day. You’re starving.

But you’re done feeling hungry, so you order from your favorite restaurant. You’re counting down the minutes, checking your phone every few seconds. “Arrrrgh, I’m so hungry. Where’s my food? I want it now!”

That feeling of excitement, that craving, that anticipation is exactly what you want your audience to feel when you tell a story.

An anticipation hook is a simple line that grabs attention and pulls your audience in.

**Examples:**

- “Yesterday, something happened that completely changed the way I see my work.”
- “Everything was going smoothly—until one small mistake turned it all upside down.”
- “I never thought I’d find myself in a situation like this.”

Each of these makes you wonder what happened next. When you pose a question or hint at something intriguing, your audience can’t help but stay engaged—they need to hear the answer.

You can begin your story with a sentence that makes your audience eager to hear more, then you can drop mini-hooks throughout your story to keep your audience listening.

Just be mindful not to overdo it. If you try to build suspense around every single point (e.g., “What happened next was absolutely unbelievable!”), it can feel overdone and lose its impact. Worse, it might come across as insincere or overly dramatic.

The key is to create just enough anticipation to keep your audience engaged without making the story feel forced.

## Technique #2: Stakes

Imagine this: You're in front of an audience, walking across the stage, holding an empty glass. No one pays attention to your glass. It seems like nothing special.

But now, imagine you're walking across that same stage with a full glass of water. And someone says, "If you spill even one drop, your family will die."

Suddenly, your audience is glued to you, holding their breath with every step you take.

That's what stakes do to a story.

**Stakes are what's on the line—what you stand to gain or lose in that moment.**

They create tension, making your audience care deeply about what happens next.

To raise the stakes in your story, focus on three things:

- *Goal*: What are you trying to achieve?
- *Opportunity*: What happens if you succeed?
- *Risk*: What happens if you fail?

### Examples:

- *Goal*: "I was leading my first big project as a new manager. My task was to launch a new internal platform by the end of the quarter."
- *Opportunity*: "If I pulled it off, it would save hours of work for everyone and would make me famous through the entire company. I'd be one of the big guys."
- *Risk*: "But if I missed the deadline, it'd be a disaster. Teams would be stuck with their old, clunky systems,

and I'd lose credibility—not just with my team but with everyone who was trusting me to deliver. I might never recover from that.”

Stakes don't have to be extreme, like life-or-death, but they need to feel meaningful. Help your audience care about the outcome by tying it to emotions they've probably experienced—like the desire to be recognized, the fear of being judged, or the challenge of overcoming self-doubt.

To make it even juicier, tell them how the outcome will affect the lives of other people.

For example, “If I failed, it wouldn't just affect me. It'd also put my team in a bad spot—and my manager, who'd fought to give me this opportunity. It'd damage her reputation. I couldn't let that happen.”

## Technique #3: Plan

Once you've shared your goal, draw your audience in by telling them how you plan to achieve it. What are the actions you want to take to reach the goal?

### Example:

“To meet the deadline, I made a plan. In the first week, I'd interview all the team leads. In the second week, I'd summarize my findings. And in the final week, I'd put everything in this final breathtaking presentation. It was the perfect plan.”

Your audience will naturally wonder, *Will the plan work? Will it all go smoothly? Or will something unexpected throw everything off track?*

But as you might expect, for a story to be compelling, the plan shouldn't go exactly as expected. Imagine a movie where the

hero has a perfect plan, executes it flawlessly, and succeeds without a hitch. That would be incredibly boring, right? It would be much more interesting if, not long into the movie, the entire plan falls apart. Now the audience can't wait to find out how the hero actually reaches their goal.

## Technique #4: Character Quirks

You've probably heard stories in which people launch into the story, describing their character with tons of detail. "I was sixteen years old, had braces, messy hair, and wore band shirts. I listened to Britney Spears."

Cool. Do those details actually matter later in the story? Usually, they don't.

Here's the thing. Your audience doesn't need your exact version of a teenager. If you simply say, "I was sixteen," they'll already picture their version of that teenager. Whether that's someone with braces or someone with a trucker cap, it doesn't matter.

What matters is that they can picture someone.

So, if surface details don't matter, what does?

You want to share quirks—specific, revealing details that show what kind of person the character is. But instead of telling the audience, show them through actions or habits.

A simple, proven method I learned from the Ultraspeaking program is to describe a character with, "**I was the type of person who ...**" or a variation of that statement.

### Examples:

- Instead of saying, "I was a nervous wreck," say, "I was the type of person who rehearsed saying hi to the cashier before walking into a store."



- Instead of saying, “I was super cautious,” say, “I was someone who made pros and cons lists for which cereal to buy.”
- Instead of saying, “I was disorganized,” say, “I once locked myself out of the apartment five times in one week.”

See the difference? These quirks give a glimpse into the characters’ unique personalities.

So, the next time you introduce a character (especially yourself), skip the generic details and dive straight into the quirks that make them unforgettable.

## **Technique #5: Time Constraint**

This technique requires a minimal change but can make any story more exciting.

Share any sort of time constraint with your audience, telling them that you (or the main character) had far too little time to complete this massive task.

### **Examples:**

- “I had five minutes to convince the panel, or the deal was off the table.”
- “The presentation was in 30 minutes, and my laptop wouldn’t turn on.”
- “If I didn’t get to the station by 5:00, I’d miss my train—and my chance to close the deal.”

A time constraint makes everything feel more intense. It amplifies emotions and makes even mundane events feel more dramatic. When your audience knows time is running out,

they'll stay on the edge of their seats to find out what happens next.

## Technique #6: Surprise

I've seen it happen again and again: an average story landing extremely well because of one thing...

Let me show you what that is.

Imagine you lived in the countryside. Every day, you drive the same route to work. Along the way, you pass field after field of grazing cows. You don't even notice them. You're just on autopilot. But one day, something different happens. On that same route, you spot a pink cow.

"What the ...!" you say. "I've never seen anything like that." You arrive at work, and you tell everyone about it. You remember that moment for the rest of your life.

That is the power of surprise.

We are amazing at spotting patterns. As soon as something feels predictable, we zone out. When your audience knows exactly where your story is going, their minds wander. *Hmm ... should I order pizza tonight? Or maybe sushi?*

**To keep your audience engaged, you need to surprise them. You need to break their expectations. You need to have some sort of "pink cow" in your story.**

Surprises can take many forms.

- *An unusual event:* Something happens no one expected (e.g., your client asking you to go on a five-day camping trip).
- *An unexpected reaction:* A character responds in a way that feels out of the ordinary (e.g., your manager asking you, "What the hell was that?").

- *An extreme action:* A character does something that the average person wouldn't do (e.g., you were asked to call ten people. To make sure you did it right, you called 150 people).

Let me share a story that shows the power of the unexpected. The story is from Nordstrom<sup>6</sup>, the US clothing retailer that is famous for its exceptional customer service.

“Back in 1978, Craig Trounce was working as a store associate at Nordstrom in Fairbanks, Alaska. One day, he noticed something odd. A man was rolling a pair of tires into the store.

Confused, Craig walked up and asked if he could help. The man replied, ‘Yes, I want to return these tires.’

Craig explained, ‘Sir, we’re a clothing retailer. We don’t sell tires.’

But the man insisted, ‘No, no. I bought these tires in this exact building.’ It turned out he’d bought the tires from an earlier tenant in the same building.

Craig was initially overwhelmed, thinking, *Should I tell him that we can’t help him?*

But then he decided to do what felt right.

He called a local tire company to estimate the value of the tires. He then took them and gave the man a refund. He gave a refund for a product that Nordstrom didn’t even have.

That’s what it means to put the customer first.”

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6 <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/ep-14-the-tire-story-is-true/id1607184755?i=1000574615025>

Did you notice at which moment the story went in a different direction to what you had expected?

One moment was when the customer rolled the tires into the store. You don't see that too often, right? The second moment was when Craig gave a refund for a product they didn't have.

When you surprise your audience, you bring them back into the moment and keep them on the edge of their seats.

Surprise is also the foundation for the next and last technique.

## Technique #7: Humor

Humor is a powerful tool in storytelling. The moment you make someone laugh, their brain releases all sorts of chemicals that make them feel good, more connected, and more receptive to your ideas.

*—But Philipp, I'm not a comedian. I'm not funny. I can't do this.*

Hey, I'm German. We Germans are not really known to be the funniest people on Earth. But even I mastered a few techniques that anyone can use to add humor to their stories. Also, the bar for humor is so freaking low. In business, people don't expect to laugh when you give a presentation or tell them a story. So, even the smallest light-hearted moment can make you stand out.

No stand-up routines are required here, just small, clever tweaks. Let's explore five practical ways to weave humor into your stories.

### 1. Lists

Lists are a classic way to add humor. They start with the expected and end with the unexpected. They create a rhythm: predictable, predictable... surprise!

This type of humor tricks your audience into thinking they know where the list is going—but then you break that expectation.

**Example:**

- *Original:* “In the room, there were pens, notebooks, and water bottles.”
- *With Humor:* “In the room, there were pens, notebooks, and the shattered dreams of every presenter who had come before me.”

Lists work because they combine the logical with the illogical, catching people off guard.

You can start with two ordinary items that make sense together, but then throw in something wildly unexpected.

## 2. Exaggeration

Exaggeration is all about taking something ordinary and blowing it up to a surprising, comical level.

**Example:**

- *Original:* “The room was hot.”
- *With Humor:* “The room was so hot, I could’ve baked cookies on the desk, and they’d have come out crispy.”

It’s not about making up wild, unbelievable lies. Instead, it’s about stretching the truth to a playful extreme that feels absurd yet oddly possible.

You can start with a relatable detail, but then make it much bigger (smaller, faster, or whatever).

### 3. Definition

Definitions take something familiar and describe it in an unexpected, often playful way. Instead of explaining what it is, you describe how that object feels or acts, giving it almost human-like traits.

**Example:**

- *Original:* “A smartphone.”
- *With Humor:* “The thing that dings just as I’m about to focus on something important.”

Definitions work because they highlight the quirks or absurdities we all recognize but rarely articulate. You can pick something mundane (like a chair, a laptop, or a coffee mug) and think about their quirky qualities. Then, describe it in a way your audience wouldn’t expect.

### 4. Comparisons

Comparisons tie an ordinary situation to an extreme, exaggerated, or surprising image to make it more memorable and entertaining.

**Example:**

- *Original:* “I ran late for the meeting.”
- *With Humor:* “I burst into the meeting like a caffeinated squirrel.”

They usually come in two main forms:

1. *Metaphors:* Describing one thing as another (e.g., “Her voice was music to my ears”).
2. *Similes:* Comparing one thing to another using *like* or *as* (e.g., “He ran as fast as a cheetah”).

To add humor, take a basic action or situation in your story (e.g., “I was nervous before the presentation”) and exaggerate it in a way that’s oddly relatable (e.g., “I felt like a balloon about to pop”).

The best comparisons are instantly visual—if it’s too obscure, it won’t land.

## 5. Funny Character Traits

This is similar to what you learned in Technique #4 (Character Quirks), but this time your goal is to share funny traits. That can be an exaggerated, quirky, or unexpected behavior that is funny to share.

Instead of telling people who you are, you show them through a humorous example.

### Example:

- *Original:* “I am curious.”
- *With Humor:* “If there’s a ‘Do Not Touch’ sign, you can bet I’m already touching it.”

Funny traits work because they make any character feel real and relatable.

You can pick a simple trait—like being ambitious, clumsy, or overly prepared—and think of a specific behavior that illustrates it in an exaggerated way.

Humor is a powerful tool, but don’t overdo it.

Humor is like seasoning in your food. Yes, you want it. It makes it much tastier. But too much overpowers the dish. Sprinkle humor lightly to enhance your story. The goal of storytelling isn’t just to make people laugh. It’s also to inspire, connect to, or persuade the people around you.

*—I understand the seven techniques. Should I just pack as many techniques as possible into every story?*

Not exactly. I tested this during a second experiment. There, I created three videos that crammed as many techniques as possible into a single story.

Guess what? They didn't perform better. They scored lower than the videos that used just two or three techniques. More isn't always better.

In business, the goal is to tell a relatable, visual, and meaningful story. It is not to overwhelm your audience with every storytelling tool in your arsenal.

For shorter stories, I advise focusing on bringing your audience into the vivid moment (as we covered in Chapter 4) and spice it up with one or two of the techniques that you learned in this chapter.

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## Summary

- There are seven advanced storytelling techniques that are the most effective ones: Anticipation Hook, Stakes, Plan, Character Quirks, Time Constraint, Surprise, and Humor.
- Overloading your story with *all* the techniques is not needed or advisable in business storytelling. Focus on the foundation, and then sprinkle one or two techniques from this chapter into your story.



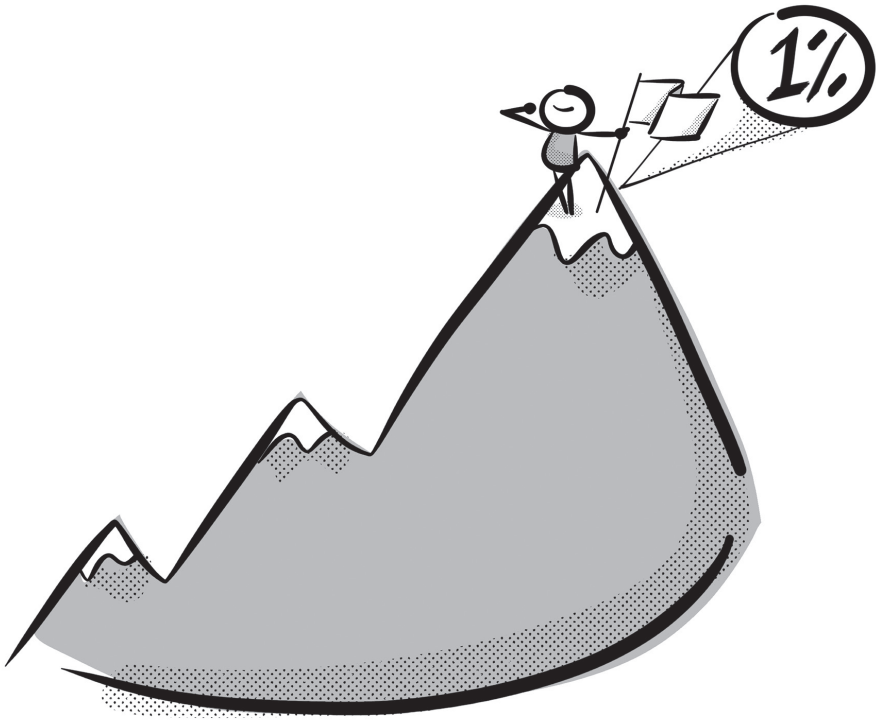
## Challenge

- **Goal:** Refine your story.
- **Instructions:**
  - Pick a story you've worked on before.
  - Pick any two techniques from this chapter and spice up your story.
- **Tips:** Share a version without the techniques and a version with the techniques with a friend, and ask them which story resonated more.

# FINAL WORDS

*There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.*

— Maya Angelou, poet, memoirist, and civil rights activist



November 2024, Amsterdam.

I'm strolling through a buzzing food market, weaving between families, tourists, and locals with their bikes. I'm here for my usual Saturday ritual: stocking up on fruits for the week.

But as I head toward the fruit stall, something catches my nose—the rich, caramelized sweetness of freshly made stroopwafel.

If you've never ever had one, imagine a warm, golden waffle cookie filled with caramel syrup.

The scent hooks me instantly. My mission shifts. Fruit can wait. I follow the smell like a moth to a flame, weaving through the crowd until I spot the stall.

As I stand in line, I feel a tap on my shoulder.

"Philipp? What a coincidence!"

I turn around, startled, to see a tall, smiling guy who looks vaguely familiar.

"Sorry, remind me, who are you?"

"Daan." He grins. "I was in your storytelling workshop three years ago."

"Oh, right! Daan!" I say. "Good to see you! How have you been?"

He laughs. "Man, I still remember the story you shared at the start of the workshop. I've actually shared your story with a few friends."

I stare at him, trying to process what he was saying.

"Really? Which story was it?"

"Yeah. It was the one with the avocado and your nephew. It was brilliant."

We chat for longer before he waves goodbye and disappears into the crowd.

I stand there, holding my warm stroopwafel, stunned. The caramel syrup is melting, sticking to my fingers, but I barely notice. My mind is spinning.

*Three years!*

Three years since I told that story, and here it is, still alive—carried on by someone else, shared with people I’d never met, creating ripples far beyond anything I could have imagined.

### **This is the power of storytelling.**

Stories aren’t just words. They’re seeds. When you share one, you plant it in someone else’s mind, where it can grow, change, and inspire in ways you may never witness.

And as I stand there, I also think about you, reading this book, the stories you’ll tell, and the lives you’ll touch. If one simple story can stay with someone for three years, imagine the legacy you’ll build with the stories you tell over a lifetime.

### **Storytelling isn’t just a skill. It’s a gift.**

And now, you have everything you need to share that gift with the world.

By the time you’ve reached this page, you:

- Can effortlessly structure any story using the four-step CART structure
- Have the ability to turn any moment into a captivating story, by zooming into the moment (aka the trenches)
- Know exactly which stories resonate the most in a professional setting (aka the 4 C’s of Business Storytelling)
- Understand how to practice your stories until they feel natural and authentic

- Can weave stories seamlessly into conversations

And most importantly, you've built the unshakable confidence to share stories at any opportunity.

I hope this book has inspired you to go out and tell your stories, big or small, bold or quiet. The next story you tell might be the one story that will change your life, or someone else's life. It might turn around a difficult relationship, help you land your dream job, or inspire someone else to take action.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you for trusting me on this exciting journey.

Much love,

Philipp Humm

*P.S.: If you've found this book helpful, would you do me a small favor and leave an honest review on Amazon? Your words could be the spark that helps someone transform their storytelling skills. Thanks for your support!*

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I'd love to hear from you!

Every single message I get from my readers fills me with joy.

So, if you have a question, want to share a success story, or just want to say hi, send me a connection request or drop me a message.

You can find me on:



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a book about storytelling is its own story—a journey full of twists, turns, and unexpected moments of inspiration. And like any great story, it wasn't something I created alone.

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Finally, to you, the reader—thank you for picking up this book. Your curiosity and passion for storytelling are what made this journey worthwhile. I can't wait to see you unleash the power of storytelling.





# WHO'S PHILIPP?



**Philipp Humm** is on a mission to help professionals around the world unlock their full potential through confident, authentic, and impactful communication.

He's worked with thousands of sellers, leaders, and other professionals from global organizations like Google, Visa, Salesforce, Oracle, MetLife, Samsonite, E.ON, and many more.

Before stepping onto stages, Philipp spent nearly a decade at Uber, Bain & Company, and Blackstone, learning first-hand what it takes to communicate effectively in high-pressure environments. While earning his MBA at Columbia University in New York, he fell in love with performance arts—acting, improvisation, and storytelling—which sparked the passion that fuels his work today.

When he's not helping others craft their stories, you can find Philipp sharing his own stories at open mic nights in Amsterdam, spinning around the dance floor at Brazilian Zouk parties, or trying to calm his monkey mind through hours of meditation.

