

# **Narrative Techniques For Leaders**

## **Learning To Craft & Perform The Springboard Story**

**Communicating a complex idea  
and sparking people into action**

**Participant Handouts**

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# Engaging People to Change

## Exercise #1

### Clarifying What Is The Change Idea

A. Specify the domain in which you want to make a change:

Your organization..... Your community.....  
Your family..... Your town.....  
Your country ..... Your planet .....  
Other .....

B. Write down: what is wrong with this domain?

C. Write down: what the domain would look like if the change was successfully made?

#### Note for participants:

- *Research indicates that one of the most difficult aspects of crafting a story to spark change is in getting clear on the change idea. If the change idea isn't clear, it is hard to craft a story that will communicate that idea clearly.*
- *If you are having difficulty crafting a story to spark change, go back and check whether your change idea is clear.*

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## Exercise #2

### Understanding The People You Are To Lead

Write down the story of a key person who does not want this change to happen, explaining why he/she doesn't want to change as persuasively and coherently as possible..

What are his/her reasons for not wanting the change?

How did he/she come to hold these views?

End the story as follows: "And that's why this person does not want to change."

#### Note for participants:

- a. *The exercise is intended to give you practice getting inside the subjective world of the person you are trying to change.*
- b. *Although you will not know all the details of that person, try to imagine or intuit what must be going on in that person's mind for them to adopt the point of view that they do.*

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## Exercise #3

### Telling The Story of the People You Are To Lead

- A. Get into groups of three and select the change idea of one of the three participants.
- B. That person will tell the story of the person who does not want to change in the **third person**. It will end: “That’s why the person does not want to change.)
- C. The second person in the group then tells the same story of the person who does not want to change in the **first person**. It will end. “That’s why I don’t want to change.”
- D. The third person will tell the same story of the person who does not want to change, but this time in the **second person**. It will end. “And that’s why you don’t want to change.”

#### Note for participants:

*The exercise is intended*

- *to give you further practice getting inside the subjective world of the person you are trying to change.*
- *to give you practice in listening to a story*
- *to give you practice in telling a story.*

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# Engaging People to Change

## Template

### Crafting the Springboard Story

1. What is the **specific change** in the organization or community or group that you hope to spark with the story?
  - *What will be the situation as a result of the change?*
  - *What is the purpose in getting the change?*
  - *What route is planned to get to the changed situation?*
2. Think of an **incident** (either inside or outside your organization, community or group) where the change was in whole or in part successfully implemented?  
*Describe it briefly.*
3. Who is the **single protagonist** in the story?
4. What is the **date** and **place** where the **single protagonist** began the story?  
*e.g. "In July 2003, in London, Tony Smith..."*
5. Is the single protagonist **typical** of your specific audience?  
If not, can the story be told from the point of view of such a protagonist?
6. Does the story **fully embody the change idea**? If not, can it be extrapolated so that it does fully embody the change idea?
7. Does the story make clear **what would have happened without the change idea**?
8. Has the story been **stripped of any unnecessary detail**?  
Are there any scenes with more than two characters?
9. Does the story have an **authentically happy ending**? Can it be told so that it does have such an ending?
10. Does the story **link to the purpose** to be achieved in telling it?  
*"What if...?" or: "Just imagine...." or: "Just think...."*

## Eight High-Value Narrative Patterns

If your objective is:	You will need a story that:	In telling it, you will need to:	Your story will inspire such phrases as:
<b>Sparking action (a springboard story)</b>	Describes how a successful change was implemented in the past, but allows listeners to imagine how it might work in their situation.	Avoid excessive detail that will take the audience's mind off its own challenge.	"Just imagine..." "What if..."
<b>Communicating who you are</b>	Provides audience-engaging drama and reveals some strength or vulnerability from your past.	Provide meaningful details but also make sure the audience has the time and inclination to hear your story.	"I didn't know <i>that</i> about him!" "Now I see what she's driving at!"
<b>Transmitting values</b>	Feels familiar to the audience and will prompt discussion about the issues raised by the value being promoted.	Use believable (though perhaps hypothetical) characters and situations, and never forget that the story must be consistent with your own actions.	"That's so right!" "Why don't we do that <i>all</i> the time!"
<b>Communicating who the firm is - branding</b>	Is usually told by the product or service itself, or by customer word-of-mouth or by a credible third party.	Be sure that the firm is actually delivering on the brand promise.	"Wow!" "I'm going to tell my friends about this!"
<b>Fostering collaboration</b>	Movingly recounts a situation that listeners have also experienced and that prompts them to share their own stories about the topic.	<i>Ensure that a set agenda doesn't squelch this swapping of stories—and that you have an action plan ready to tap the energy unleashed by this narrative chain reaction.</i>	"That reminds me of the time that I..." "Hey, I've got a story like that."
<b>Taming the grapevine</b>	Highlights, often through the use of gentle humor, some aspect of a rumor that reveals it to be untrue or unreasonable.	Avoid the temptation to be mean-spirited—and be sure that the rumor is indeed false!	"No kidding!" "I'd never thought about it like <i>that</i> before!"
<b>Sharing knowledge</b>	Focuses on mistakes made and shows, in some detail, how they were corrected, with an explanation of why the solution worked.	Solicit alternative—and possibly better—solutions.	"There but for the grace of God..." "Gosh! We'd better watch out for that in future!"
<b>Leading people into the future</b>	Evokes the future you want to create without providing excessive detail that will only turn out to be wrong.	Be sure of your storytelling skills. (Otherwise, use a story in which the past can serve as a springboard to the future.)	"When do we start?" "Let's do it!"

**From The Leader's Guide to Storytelling (Jossey-Bass, 2006)**

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## Notes

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