

THE

---

StoryJam<sup>TM</sup>

---

Teller's Guide  
By

i.d.e.a.s.®

© 2006 Integrity Arts and Technologies Inc.  
All rights reserved.

## Introduction



**innovation**

Stories are the native language of the human species. Human's evolved from social primates and it was our enhanced ability to use symbolic references that became an essential survival advantage for us. To make sense of our universe, we tell ourselves stories. We tell big ones about gravity and strong and weak nuclear force and we tell small ones about how much fun it's going to be at the beach-or the dentist today. Stories are a bit paradoxical as they are certainly "made up" but always precede what we experience as "real." Simply put, stories are not only everywhere, they are also everything.



**design**

Every person, every product, every brand, every organization has a collection of stories that are told in the human mind or *that person, that brand, that organization* simply doesn't exist. When a story is not deliberately told, the human minds in the audience make up their own stories in order to organize reality and fill in the gap. When this happens, each person's story and experience can be quite different. Recent psychological research has demonstrated that people *act on, react to, and respond to* the unintentional story as if it were "the truth." The consequences of this are obvious. Without a deliberately codified and articulated story, there is no "true north."



**entertainment**

In his essay "How a Business is Like a Story", Author and Storyteller Richard Stone notes that *"Fundamentally, every business is a stage for the enactment of human myths. At the heart of every such pursuit is something essential and innate to the human spirit-the need to create a story with a satisfying ending. Look under the surface of any organization and you will find the classical story structure that has been the foundation of most yarns and tales of adventure since the beginning of human communication. This structure is present in an organization's birth, usually showing up as a heroic journey pitting one person's vision against seemingly insurmountable odds in the marketplace. When businesses falter and even fail, often the more salient truth is that they and their employees lose touch with the guidance and inspiration provided by the abiding story that informed the founder's original leap of faith to brave the odds and create the company in the first place. In this vacuum, a new, equally powerful story that galvanizes the company has failed to emerge, leaving the organization to float as though it were cast to sea without a rudder or a sail."*



**art**

In the collection of interlocking tales that comprise the daily operation of any business or organization, you can be a master-storyteller yourself. By deftly navigating your audience to the key facts, behaviors and metaphor within the legacy of organizational tales and by adding your own, you'll be helping to assure that the evolution of your organizational story stays rich and powerful.



**storytelling**

What makes a story, a story? A deep answer would take many volumes and could be debated or as many years as there are storytellers lives. To make stories useful, the following is a good basic model.

### NOTICE

The contents of this document constitute proprietary information of Integrity Arts & Technology, Inc. Any party accepting this document acknowledges that it contains proprietary information and agrees that it shall not be duplicated in whole or in part, nor disclosed to others, without the express prior written consent of Integrity Arts & Technology, Inc. © Integrity Arts & Technology, Inc. Page 2 of 7

## Elements of Story



**innovation**

### **1. Character**

Stories have to be about *someone*. Imagine a story without strong characters. There might be plenty of descriptive language and even some carefully plotted structure but you would lose interest immediately and the story would never work. Strong characters are the heart of a good story. They must be real enough to evoke a connection in the mind of the audience (even if they are completely un-real in fact as in an animated film). In addition to being plausible (within the context of the story), characters have to have enough heart to connect emotionally with an audience. They can be “good”, “evil”, heartwarming, disgusting or hysterical. They can be anything but boring. Strong characters have something unique and fascinating to capture our attention but they also have to have something in common with us to hold our interest. Great characters come to life because the audience can see some of themselves showing through.



**design**

### **2. Voice**

Stories are always *told* even if they’re written down, shown on movie screens, written in blogs or incorporated into fine art. Because they are told, there must always be a teller and the unique qualities, point of view and perspectives of that teller give stories their voice. Voice is what makes a story work with a specific audience in a specific context. It is the psychological “sound” of the story and reflects the embellishments and editing of the teller-which in turn reflect the teller’s life experience and perceptions.



**entertainment**

### **3. Setting**

Setting provides a story with place. It gives us the four dimensions (3 physical and one temporal) that allow an audience to begin to make pictures in their mind. Strong characters interacting with each other in limbo would not be very compelling. Place information also gives us a lot of metadata about the story (backstory). By clearly placing us on a specific spatial and temporal “stage”, a good storyteller lets us fill in a good deal of supporting information ourselves, allowing the teller to concentrate on the essential details of the tale.



**art**

### **4. Action**

Action pertains to plot. What are these characters going to do in this place and time and why should we care? We see the action dimension of a story delivered through three channels: the character’s words, their physical actions and their thoughts. We get the words directly from the characters themselves and the other two components come via the storyteller. One of the most marvelous qualities of stories is that the action sequences can be changed at will, even violating “time’s arrow” (our real-life perception that time only flows in one direction). Through the thought dimension of characters, we can explore how things “could be” or “might have been” in great detail. The action element in a good story provides the motive force for our journey through it and keeps it from bogging down.



**storytelling**

#### NOTICE

The contents of this document constitute proprietary information of Integrity Arts & Technology, Inc. Any party accepting this document acknowledges that it contains proprietary information and agrees that it shall not be duplicated in whole or in part, nor disclosed to others, without the express prior written consent of Integrity Arts & Technology, Inc. © Integrity Arts & Technology, Inc. Page 3 of 7



**innovation**

### 5. Emotion

Stories, in order to be stories, must be more than recitations of facts. As a matter of fact, some of the best stories don't contain a single, verifiable "fact"! Stories have the ability to get beneath the cognitive radar of an audience and invite them to join in. A fully engaged audience has actually "suspended their disbelief" and made a conscious choice to join the story. This happens largely because of the emotional content of a good story. The emotion in a story doesn't have to be bigger than life. It can be as subtle as a wry grin or a knitted brow. Good stories don't just tell us about people, things and events, they let us feel them as well.



**design**

### 6. Detail

Detail in good storytelling is the "fit and finish" that facilitates understanding for the audience. Stories that are too vague begin to let the emotion, action and character components escape through gaps in the tale. Each component of a good tale must be sufficiently detailed to permit the audience to make the story real-at least as long as the telling lasts. Adding the right amount of detail cues the audience to relax and accept. It also means the teller has done enough homework to really conjure the Character, Setting, Action and Emotion and deliver it in an intentional voice.



**entertainment**

Is this a complete and absolute schema for story-making? Certainly not. These six components however are certainly present in any good story. Looking for these elements in the stories that define an organization can help to clarify culture. Using them in creating stories inside an organizational culture can assure that the story isn't lost in noise or goes without an audience.

### 7. Conflict & Resolution

No story can function without the dynamic of a main character having to overcome a significant obstacle. The element of conflict, whether it's epic (as in a war story) or intimate (as in a story of personal drama) is essential to keeping the audience interested. In a recent biography of the golfer Bobby Jones, the filmmakers had to work for years on the script to find some acceptable conflict-the guy was just too perfect! He had a great childhood, a wonderful marriage, won every tournament he played and everyone liked him. Finally, his illness early in life became the conflict element and the "resolution" was actually his death, having completed his life's dream. Setting up the conflict and using the story-arc to lead an audience through various twists and turns, is what makes them stay with the teller. It's that compulsion to keep reading even though it's 2:00 in the morning.



**art**



**storytelling**

#### NOTICE

## Organizational Uses of Story

Story is such a ubiquitous form that its uses are almost transparent. In an organizational setting, there three particular types of story that stand out.



**innovation**

### **The What If Story**

“What If” tales use the story as a laboratory to test and model different hypothetical futures. They can be about products, processes, people or events. What If stories facilitate a low-risk environment for trial and tend to promote discussion. When used within a deliberate appreciative inquiry practice and in a culture that values diverse thinking, a properly constructed What If story is a powerful R&D tool.



**design**

### **The Hero’s Journey**

The story of a growing, evolving organization has a great deal to do with the archetype of the hero. Like any heroic story, vital organizations are on a heroic journey, requiring bigger and fiercer dragons to slay at every turn. The deeper satisfaction of defeating competitive enemies, attaining audacious goals or creating world-changing results is what really propels companies forward. These are the intrinsic things that truly motivate leaders to suffer sleepless nights and risk the comfort of the known to embrace a future that promises personal and professional rewards at the end of the proverbial rainbow. Often, framing a heroic tale is the leader’s best tool for gaining the followership required to achieve the goal.



**entertainment**

### **The Fable or Teaching-Story**

The original storyteller was probably a hunter-gatherer who used pantomime and vocalizations to depict the story of a hunt. That ancestor of ours probably enjoyed the spotlight but the motivation was more critical: to pass on critical knowledge to the community. When organizations share stories as a conscious and directed endeavor, something powerful happens. The word “narration” is derived from the Latin narrere, meaning “to pass on knowledge.” To create narratives about our professional communities is a way of seeking and passing on knowledge, creating understanding, and coming to know who we are. Companies are communities of practice and teaching-stories can effectively communicate what works, what doesn’t; how success is celebrated and how difficulty is handled; what are the actions and speech that constitute “us” and what could cause ostracism. When a company consciously engages in the use of teaching-stories it can become a “Self-Knowing Organization.” People who carry the organization’s stories in their minds and hearts will assuredly bring a different level of commitment and energy to their daily work, irrespective of their own role.



**art**



**storytelling**

#### NOTICE

The contents of this document constitute proprietary information of Integrity Arts & Technology, Inc. Any party accepting this document acknowledges that it contains proprietary information and agrees that it shall not be duplicated in whole or in part, nor disclosed to others, without the express prior written consent of Integrity Arts & Technology, Inc. © Integrity Arts & Technology, Inc. Page 5 of 7

## Harvesting Techniques



**innovation**

There are specific conditions under which someone will usually be willing to share a story—whether it’s their story or a story about someone else. The practice of “harvesting” stories involves creating those conditions and recording the story for future use.

The first condition a harvester must create is *safety*. The components of safety in this case are mutuality of interest and comfort. People share their stories readily when they feel the listener is genuinely interested in them and in the subject of the tale. Comfort means that the listener has established that both the teller and their story are safe from inappropriate interpretation, repercussion and misappropriation.



**design**

Once safety has been established, the harvester must provide *opportunity*. This includes creating specific time for the story (not trying to squeeze it in between calls or walking to the parking lot), a conducive place for the telling that is relatively free of both physical and psychological “noise” (avoiding crowded, loud or emotionally-charged settings is important).



**entertainment**

*Respect* is the final requirement for eliciting a valuable story. The reciprocal of telling is listening. Listening deeply to a story involves being completely present for the teller. The listener’s responsibility is to stay with the story, not be distracted, especially by their own thoughts and not impose judgment. Telegraphing your presence through facial expression, eye contact, laughter and body-language is essential to the creating of the right relationship between teller and listener.

The harvesting process is complete when the story has been captured through notes, memorization or electronically. It is a good idea to hear a story first before capturing it if possible. Many times however, the spontaneity of a great story doesn’t permit a 2<sup>nd</sup> take. In these circumstances, asking if note-taking or recording is OK with the teller may work. If the situation doesn’t permit it, then deep-listening followed by several opportunities to repeat the story as oral-tradition is the best way to harvest and preserve it.



**art**



**storytelling**

### NOTICE

The contents of this document constitute proprietary information of Integrity Arts & Technology, Inc. Any party accepting this document acknowledges that it contains proprietary information and agrees that it shall not be duplicated in whole or in part, nor disclosed to others, without the express prior written consent of Integrity Arts & Technology, Inc. © Integrity Arts & Technology, Inc. Page 6 of 7

## Telling Techniques



**innovation**

“I can’t tell stories” is almost never the truth. To prove it, simply ask the person why they think they can’t and they’ll promptly tell you a story about it! The casual, one-on-one story is perhaps the easiest to tell but the essential craft is the same in a large group environment. You are probably already an accomplished storyteller but here are some general tips.



**design**

1. **Know your audience!** Telling a story to a group of 9 year olds in rural Scotland is a completely different experience than telling the exact same story to a boardroom full of international executives in Atlanta. Understanding who you are telling to, why they are present and how they view the world will inform your choice of stories and voice.



**entertainment**

2. **Understand the context.** Why are you here? Why is your audience here? Is the room comfortable? Is it quiet or noisy? Is it early in the day right after coffee or are you about to step into the 3PM “drowsy zone”? Running down this checklist will help you connect and engage.

3. **Use material you know well.** Your comfort with the story you choose will enable you to direct while you are performing-embellishing and adjusting pacing, detail and voice to achieve a good result for a specific telling. Also, not everyone can tell every story well. If there is one on your repertoire that really never works, drop it or “give” it to a colleague. You can always replace it with one that fits your style better.



**art**

4. **Open strong, finish stronger.** Once you’ve decided to tell a story, push deeply and quickly into it. Your audience needs to experience your confidence with the tale in order to feel comfortable joining you there. Once you’re on a roll and you know the audience is with you, don’t take anything for granted. Also, sustain the energy of the story to the very end. Don’t return to everyday reality until the story is fully complete.

5. **Process the story while it is fresh.** The Teaching-Story is especially prone to “meaning drift” so try to plan the use of story so that the de-brief is immediately adjacent. Also, remember that debriefing a story is a tremendous chance to solicit stories from the audience that will enrich the entire group experience.



**storytelling**

### NOTICE

The contents of this document constitute proprietary information of Integrity Arts & Technology, Inc. Any party accepting this document acknowledges that it contains proprietary information and agrees that it shall not be duplicated in whole or in part, nor disclosed to others, without the express prior written consent of Integrity Arts & Technology, Inc. © Integrity Arts & Technology, Inc. Page 7 of 7