

HOLLYWOOD STORYTELLING SECRETS

6 LESSONS FROM HOLLYWOOD STORY GURUS



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Hollywood Storytelling Secrets for Business Owners



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HOLLYWOOD STORYTELLING SECRETS FOR BUSINESS OWNERS

“STORYTELLING IS THE MOST POWERFUL WAY TO PUT IDEAS INTO THE WORLD TODAY.” ROBERT MCKEE

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHAT MAKES A STORY IRRESISTIBLE TO AN AUDIENCE?

- Have you ever felt your message did not resonate well with a particular audience?
- Do you know where to source emotionally engaging stories you can tell to touch, influence and inspire?

If you've ever asked yourself one of those questions, you are not alone. I've been there, several times on my journey. Perhaps, I should say, we're both climbing the same mountain, though we may be on different slopes. It may feel challenging, yet, I know there are great rewards and benefits in learning about storytelling.

My journey to this mountain has been a very unusual one! I grew up in a culture that is steeped in folklore, but I hated storytelling while growing up in rural Africa. Why did I hate storytelling so much?

I was part of a generation of boys that embraced science obsessively and hated the arts compulsively. As a result of that, I was completely lost, yet surrounded by a rich culture in which storytelling thrived as the leading form of instruction, validation and appreciation.

It took me over two decades to regain my story consciousness. While living in Singapore a few years after college, I decided to pick up storytelling for my own selfish reasons. I wanted to become the “Mr. Singapore of Public Speaking.” A wise old professor told me, “Gideon, if you want to be the best speaker in the land, you must first be the best storyteller in the heartlands.”

I took her advice seriously. I started studying the craft obsessively. Within a few years, I had attained and surpassed my initial goal. Storytelling also helped me to pay my bills while at graduate school in the USA. Looking back, it’s been 12 years and 3 months since I started this journey.

With several speaking awards (thanks to storytelling) in Asia and America, countless hours of studying and getting coached by master business storytellers from 7 countries, I believe I have a modest understanding of this craft. I have spoken on this topic in 19 countries worldwide and in 15 states in the US.

Yet, I am humbled by the Hollywood story masters. They are the best in the game. My hope is that you take away at least one idea that you can implement from this mini-study to enrich your appreciation of storytelling as an **Asset for Professional Success**. Stories are assets for professional success because they help us in 5 ways:

Attention-getter: *stories enable us to command attention in a world full of noise*

Spotlight significance: *a single story can highlight and frame our understanding*

Stimulate or inspire action: *an inspirational story moves or stimulates us to take action*

Emo-du-tain: *a single story can emotionally engage, educate and entertain an audience*

Trust-builder: *with a story you can trigger likability, credibility and memorability*

The secrets and lessons below are drawn from 4 Hollywood master storytellers. Call them living legends, if you may. If someone had a Mt. Rushmore for distinguished Hollywood storytellers, I believe each of them would feature there like a giant. My goal of sharing this is simple.

In a small way, I want to take the mystery and misery out of the process of crafting an engaging story by learning from the best in the game. Hollywood storytellers make a living at telling stories that are captured on screen. They either tell or refine stories as consultants?

The sheer volume of stories that they handle reflects their ability to show us how to climb this mountain. The fact that the end product of their work often captures the imagination of the whole world is testament in itself. Think of the cultural impact of some movies such as the Titanic, Star Wars, Batman, and Superman.

Below are the summaries of some key lessons from these current Hollywood icons. Hopefully, this will speed up your pace of story learning and mastery. Let their brilliance inspire your valiance.

Using these insights, you can craft better stories that leave indelible footprints on the minds of your audiences. It is your life, your story, so take ownership and tell the world who you are. You never know how far your story would go. You never know whom your story will touch, encourage or inspire.

Remember to remain true to yourself. Whatever you learn from these legends, use it cautiously. Mastery is not born. It is only attained through learning and practice.

Here we go:

CHRISTOPHER VOGLER

The works of Joseph Campbell inspired Christopher Vogler. He is author of “The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers.” As a Hollywood story consultant, he has read over 12,000 stories. He has also taught at the University of Southern California and has consulted for Disney Studios and Fox 2000.

One Big Lesson from Vogler

He uses Campbell’s The Hero’s Journey to troubleshoot and critique missing elements and ingredients in stories before they are produced in screenplays or movies. Vogler teaches that stories ought to be a reflection of our lives because reality creates a deeper connection. Stories can also be a fair? reflection of reality, myths or folktales.

In his book, The Writer’s Journey, and his workshops, Vogler offers insights on how to create a story that is deep and emotionally driven to engage at a human level. He uses the 12 Steps a Hero’s Journey and 8 character archetypes in deepening connection with an audience.

Have you ever gotten misty eyed in a movie?

Hollywood masters know something about emotions. In crafting your stories, strive to steep them in emotions and see what happens. This is what will move your audience. In the process of crafting, ask yourself, which emotion can I bring to the foreground? Beware of emotional connections!

Here is an example for you. During a workshop I conducted this week, *Leading with Story: How Leaders Engage and Persuade in a Complex World*, on 6 April 2015 in Singapore, I gave out white coffee mugs to 6 participants and asked them to write 27-words to sell the mugs on e-bay or any other e-commerce site. The time allowed was 3 minutes. There was nothing extraordinary about the mugs; they all looked the same.

After the allotted time, I asked each participant to read out his or her ad copy. We then voted on the winner based on how emotionally engaging and logical the copy was crafted and the asking price. A gentle man named Jae Won, from Korea was the runaway winner. He had written a moving short story or ad copy in which he depicted the coffee mug as a “dug-out” World War II relic with his grandfather’s name on it. In less than 27 words, he got all of us excited about an ordinary mug. This demonstrates the power of a good story with latent energy and emotions.

By the time Jae Won finished reading his story, nearly everyone was clapping and cheering. It was very short, yet deeply emotional and gripping. My point here is that you don’t need to have a dramatic life to find emotional gems to tell your audience a spellbinding story.

What emotions can you employ in your next story? This has to be a creative choice, not an accident. Please share yours with me by emailing me (gideon@storywarrior.us).

JOHN TRUBY

He is one of the most respected and sought after story consultants in the film industry and he is the author of book, *The Anatomy of Story: 22 Steps to Becoming a Master Storyteller*. John Truby's students have gone on to write some very successful Hollywood movies such as *Shrek* and *Sleepless in Seattle*.

One Big Lesson from Truby

John Truby teaches about the importance of having a concise and compelling *Story Premise*, expressed in High Concept i.e. a catchy one-line description that audiences will understand instantly and look forward to watching or hearing the entire story.

Truby says 9 out of 10 writers fail at the premise. As I see it, this extends to business storytellers as well. So take a good amount of time to identify what your story is about before spending a lot time writing it.

Here are two examples of good premises: Star Wars' premise is, "*When a princess falls into mortal danger, a young man uses his skills as a fighter to save her and defeat the evil forces of a galactic empire.*"

The second example, from the movie *Casablanca*. *A tough American expatriate rediscovers an old flame only to give her up so that he can fight the Nazis*. Thus, a catchy high concept for your story is a significant element of a story's success. It defines what the story is about in a way that is intriguing. In crafting your premise, attempt to include these 3 Cs: concise, compelling and catchy, as in the example above.

ROBERT MCKEE

Widely known as one of the most prolific screenwriting instructors in the world. McKee's former students have won 63 Academy Awards and 164 Emmy Awards. He teaches story structure worldwide in cities across in Europe, North America and Australia. He is author of the book *Story: Substance, Structure and Style*.

One Big Lesson from McKee

McKee teaches that a good story is something the world wants to hear. It must be presented with a fresh and unique perspective that the world has not seen or heard before. He believes writers must shape story around worthy values.

One way to decide if the value is worthy is to ask the question "is this worth living for?" Such values should not be set in mere subjective or transient contemporary views of society. Writers and storytellers therefore, should use stories to show respect, and not disdain for their audiences by sharing values that are core to

humanity. They can touch the hearts and minds of their audiences, without compromising their own personality and authenticity.

McKee says values must be at the core of a story. A value such as love is worth living or dying for, however society's erosion of values has led to an erosion of story. This has come about because of the disintegration of the family, moral confusion, and relativism? Will readers understand what this means?

If you want your stories to be remembered for a long time, tell stories with values that defy the passage of time. Such values are noble values across cultures, such as: loyalty, honesty, trustworthiness, and ethical conduct.

MICHAEL HAGUE

Hague is known as a script consultant, author and lecturer. His works with A-List actors such as Will Smith, Julia Roberts, Jennifer Lopez, Charlize Theron and Morgan Freeman. As an author, he is most famous for his book, *Selling your Story in 60 Seconds: The Guaranteed Way to Get Your Screenplay or Novel Read*.

First Big Lesson:

Michael Hague teaches the importance of having a "story goal" i.e. what moves, fuels or drives the story forward. The easier it is to visualize a goal, the better it is for the reader or audience. It builds expectations in the minds of the audience as they try to conjure pictures of what the main character will go through or look like.

Some compelling goals have to do with:

- *an escape from a dangerous situation*
- *to stop something from happening*
- *to deliver something of value to where it's needed*
- *to retrieve something of value and return it to the right people (rescue stories)*
- *5 to win something (a contest, game, love, respect, etc.*

In selecting your business stories, choose stories that will enable your audience to picture what will likely happen. That creates a bit of suspense. Let's say the goal is escape, the audience will be wondering what kind of escape will it be? Is it an escape from jail, from an abusive relationship or an escape from Guantanamo Bay? That gets the audience hooked on finding out what happens next.

Second Big Lesson:

Hague also argues that the most successful Hollywood screenplays tend to have 5 turning points. As the name implies, turning points change the cause of the story by adding a new twist, focus, a complication or a different kind of energy or emotion to the story. Here are the turning points:

Act 1 Opportunity- this has to do with change of plans

Act 2 – has to do with the point of no return i.e. the point at which a major setback threatens the process and puts everything in a balance,

Act 3 Climaxes – this is the height of the story, from here it goes into denouement.

As you select, craft and polish your business stories, think of how to embed some of these turning points that alter the energy level or emotional focus to your story.

This is what gets the audience glued; a little mystery or a bit of suspense.

Remember this: if you can't connect, you can't persuade. I believe if attention is the new economy, then storytelling is the gold standard.

Ready to Take Action?

I can help you identify the most fascinating stories that you need to generate more word of mouth marketing. Do you know that word of mouth marketing is one of the most effective ways to grow your business today?

According to Nielsen, 92% of consumers believe in recommendations from friends and family. **Email me now at gideon@storywarrior.us to set up your Free 30-minutes Signature Audit via Skype call.**

Give me 30 Minutes and I 'll show you how to amplify your story with **4 Elements from Neuroscience** that will help engage, connect, and convert more clients.

About the Author – Gideon F. For-mukwai

Gideon For-mukwai helps entrepreneurs tell captivating signature stories to inspire



more followers, volunteers for important causes, raise more money for causes, generate higher profits, and above all gain greater visibility, likeability and credibility (trust) in the marketplace.

As a battle-tested storyteller who has used the craft to win many speaking awards in Singapore and the US, he believes a good story your swan song. It is capable of helping you get: attention, show significance of events, stimulate interest in issues, emotionally engage and educate and last but not least build trust.

For 10 years, he has presented programmes in 18 countries worldwide. He is the creator of the Story DNA Method that combines elements of neuroscience with dramatic art to create compelling business narratives.

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