



STORY bored

How To Improve Your Presentations Through Storytelling

by
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*“Guess what? I got a fever!
And the only prescription...
is more cowbell!”*



– Bruce Dickinson (SNL)

If

you have seen the movie *Swingers*, you probably can appreciate the many great one-liners in Mikey's quest to forget his recent break-up and move on with his life in Los Angeles. If you haven't seen it, I highly recommend it. It's a classic.

You may remember the scene where Trent is coaching Mikey on how to ask a girl out. It made movie history as being the motivational speech of 1996. For anyone who is fearful of telling their own story the same principle applies:

“You’re so money and you don’t even know it... I don’t want you to be the guy in the PG-13 movie everyone’s really hoping makes it happen. I want you to be like the guy in the rated R movie, you know, the guy you’re not sure whether or not you like yet. You’re not sure where he’s coming from. Okay? You’re a bad man. You’re a bad man, Mikey. You’re a bad man, bad man.”

You have probably noticed that every time you give a presentation your audience is amazingly sensitive. In fact, they pick up on everything you say and do. They watch how you use your hands, they check your grammar, analyze your clothing, study your posture, and they criticize your content. Why?

Here's an interesting thought. When an audience settles into a darkened conference room, its collective **IQ jumps about twenty-five points.**

Think about it. When you go to a movie, a musical, or any other type of performance, don't you feel smarter than what you are watching? For instance... when watching a movie you probably can predict how the movie is going to end 8 out of 10 times.

You know John McClain will live free and die hard or you can predict that Joe Fox and Kathleen Kelly will finally meet outside of AOL. The same holds true for the presentation environment.

The audience feels smarter than you. They know what you are going to do next. Don't be a Joe Fox, be a Cole Sear from *The Sixth Sense*. Be a bit unpredictable.

The lesson for all of us:

Craft your story and presentation so that the audience is left a bit on edge. Keep them surprised and delighted at the same time. So how do you do this? It starts by recognizing the power of story.

THE POWER OF STORY

Were you bored with your last keynote speaker? Did they motivate and change lives? Perhaps, they ended lives. That's why you need to tell stories. You have probably heard the quote: **"Tell me a fact and I'll remember it. Tell the truth and I'll believe it. Tell me a story and I'll put it in my heart forever."** Stories are an incredible tool that is often abused in our culture today. Unfortunately, presenters don't know how to tell or use stories to their advantage. As presenters, here is our biggest challenge: telling an epic story – a story that will surprise, delight, and most importantly – will be memorable.



The greatest lessons come from Hollywood.

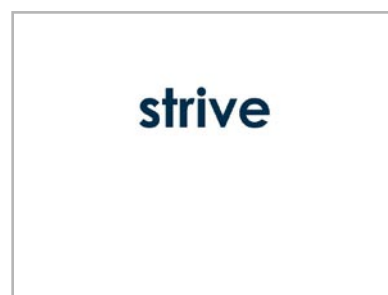
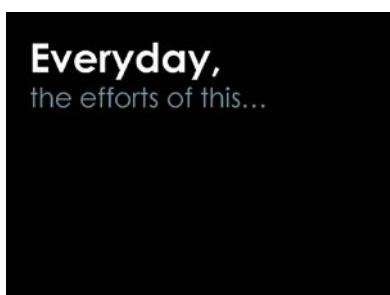
The Story Club

In John Hughes' classic, *The Breakfast Club*, he highlights five high school students, all from different backgrounds, who come together only to discover they have a lot more in common than they imagined. The same holds true with storytelling.

There are many styles, all with a lot in common. In fact, the great Hollywood screenwriter Robert McKee illustrates that there are 25 types of stories. Don't get overwhelmed. I have narrowed it down to three to help you, the presenter. Below are my recommendations the next time you build a presentation introduction.

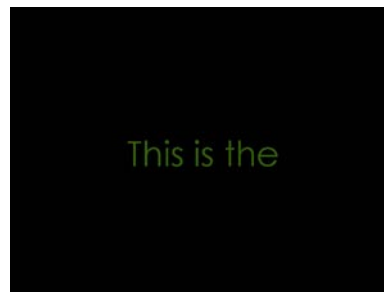
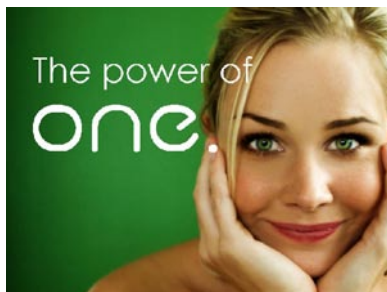
The Rockstar

Think about the classic hero story - a man or woman is given a challenge and then often turns away only to embrace it and save the world. That's the Rockstar – the hero that everyone cheers for with tenacious excitement. You can probably think of a few of these Rockstars with little effort – Rocky Balboa, Louis Skolnick of Lambda Lambda Lambda, and Elle Woods. Here is an excerpt from a presentation introduction.



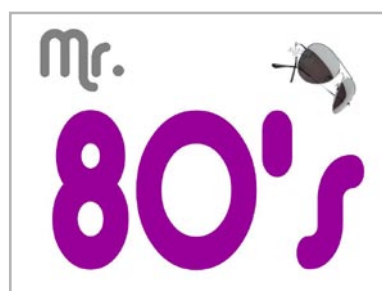
The Maverick

Mavericks are those stories of individuals who literally change the world. They are the dreamers who stand up against all odds to impact lives, to make a difference, to change the world. This list of individuals includes names like MLK, JFK, Mother Teresa, and Gandhi. They are the rulebreakers – the men and women who changed this planet.



The Sherlock

This is the classic problem/solution approach. Typically containing two characters, this approach is ideal for business presentations. Think Disney. Better yet, how about the Fighting Rancho Carne Toros and the East Compton Clovers from *Bring It On*. One team competed the right way – hard work and diligence. The other did it the wrong way – hiring a choreographer to learn “*Spirit Fingers*” and a secondhand routine to the once popular “*Get Ready for This*” by 2Unlimited.



SuperGood: Make Your Story McLovin

Here are three R's that I have created that illustrate how you can make your next presentation *SuperGood*. Using these approaches will even make Fogell stand out from a crowd.

Repeat

Stories have always existed, will always be around, and they will be repeated over and over again. This is because they contain nuggets of wisdom that people cherish, crave to hear, and be reminded of on a daily, weekly, month, or annual basis. Think about it.

They are just retold

There are really no new stories.

by different people in different ways. Just look around you... Frodo, Luke Skywalker, William Wallace - all of these heroes faced the same challenges. Their stories just have a different twist or storyline. Thus, stories will always exist. Period.

Not only are stories repeated but great stories contain repetition.

Most SNL fans remember Chris Farley's infamous character, Matt Foley: the motivational speaker who lived in a van down by the river. The script is a perfect example of the beauty of repetition.



*"Well, you'll have plenty of time to live in a **van down by the river** when you're.. [tries to be clever] ..living in a **van down by the river!** Now, you kids are probably asking yourself, "Hey, Matt, how can we get back on the right track?!" Well, as I see it, there is only one solution! And that is for me to get my gear, move it on into here, 'cause I'm gonna **bunk with you, buddy!** We're gonna be **buddies!** We're gonna be **pals!** [picks Brian up] We're gonna **wrassle** around! [puts Brian down] Ol' Matt's gonna be your **shadow!** [motions] Here's Matt, here's you! There's Matt, there's you! [trips and falls flat on the coffee table, sending it crashing to the floor] Whoops-a-daisy! [stands up] We're gonna have to clean that up later! Me and my **buddies!** My **pals!** My **amigos!** I'm gonna go get my gear! [heads for the door]"*

Such a simple a script, but the concept of *friends, buddies, and down by the river* are what make it so memorable.

There
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stories.

Reveal

When exiting a local grocery store one evening, I saw a great bumper sticker on a car parked next to mine. It simply stated: *"The shortest distance between two people is a story."* That's powerful stuff!

Remember these two items the next time you start constructing a story. This is an approach that is encouraged by CEO of *Parade* magazine, Walter Anderson. Great stories are built off these main principles. Your story needs to have:

- 1) **Tension** - You need to create a problem. There needs to be some type of dramatic hook.
- 2) **Discovery** - This is the reason why you are telling the story. What is everything leading up to?

In essence, it's all about the power of the anecdote – leading from one point to the next. Keep in mind,

the best anecdotes are the most **simple.**

Here's a classic quote and example from the movie *Elf*:

Buddy the Elf: *"I passed through the seven levels of the Candy Cane forest, through the sea of swirly twirly gum drops, and then I walked through the Lincoln Tunnel."*

It's amazingly captivating. The story builds from one point to the next. It doesn't hurt that the character of Buddy is easy to love. After all, he would like to do nothing more than build snow angels for two hours and then snuggle.

Good news! **We are all storytellers.**

You have stories. Your parents have stories. Your grandparents have stories. Your company even has a story. You should have plenty to write about, so what are you waiting for? Don't be a *cotton-headed ninnymuggins!* Start writing. Maybe one day you'll have book published about your own story just like Buddy the Elf.





The Brown Bag

Thirteen-year-old Gary woke up with anxiety. Today is the day, he thought. I have to bring it with me. Mom told me it was what I needed, so it must be okay, he assured himself. However, even that small effort of self-assurance was not enough to calm the doubt that plagued his adolescent mind.

Gary quickly got ready, gathered all his schoolbooks, some change for lunch, and “it” – The Brown Bag. “Boy, this is heavy,” he thought. He didn’t remember it being that massive the night before. His mother calmly assured him everything was okay and encouraged him out the door.

Upon arriving at school, Gary became immediately self-conscious. Where are all the other brown bags, he thought? Did I miss something, he wondered? Out of fear of embarrassment, he darted to his destination. Now at his planned location, Gary slowly pushed the door open as he made his way to make his delivery. He was given a task, a task that he was anxious to complete – to drop off the contents of the brown bag. The task was simple, place the item in the brown bag on the table and walk away.

What Gary saw that day was a neatly stacked row of what appeared to be the smallest urine samples of his peers for the school’s annual health examination – each small in size with the name of its owner. What was buried in his brown bag was the large mayonnaise jar his mother provided him the night before with his name in the boldest black font. Gary lifted the behemoth sample from the bag, quickly turned his boldly printed name to face the wall, and walked away in utter horror as his sample glistened in the fluorescent light of the nurse’s waiting room.

He wasn’t intending to outdo his peers, but the size of his contribution was obviously far superior. It communicated passion for the project and diligence with the task. In all seriousness, the perception that day was that Gary approached the task with an extra level of seriousness or maybe a misunderstanding of instructions. Either way, he was judged by the size of his contribution, but that is a story for another day.

An Illustration of Tension and Discovery

Revamp

Storytelling produces results. It will change and grow your business. Here is the bottom line. (Highlight this or write it down somewhere. It's the heart of this chapter):

Stories create emotions. Emotions create motivation. Motivation creates action. Action creates results.

Repeat. Reveal. Revamp. These three R's will change the way you look at storytelling and your presentations moving forward.

An Important Reminder

I came across a great statement several months ago. It is from Ryan Matthews and Watts Wacker in their book, *What's Your Story?* The statement is this:

“Storytelling is the universal human activity. Every society, at every stage of history, has told stories - and listened to them intently, passionately. Stories are how people tell each other who they are, where they came from, how they're unique [and] what they believe. Stories capture their memories of the past and their hopes for the future. Stories are one more thing, too: They are your most powerful, most underutilized tool for competitive advantage.”

Underutilized.

Remember that point. Stories are just that: underutilized in business today. Use them to your advantage so you can get that competitive edge.

Stories *create emotions.*

*Emotions create
motivation.*

Motivation creates

zed.

Action creates

RESULTS

BECOME FRANKEN-FINE

There is a great scene in the movie *Dodgeball* where the self-obsessed Global Gym owner, White Goodman (played by Ben Stiller) is discussing the benefits of Global Gym membership in a television commercial.



Globo Gym Announcer:

"Tired of the same old you? Tired of being out of shape and out of luck with the opposite sex? Tired of being overweight and under-attractive?"

White Goodman: *[finishing a ride on his skis] Yeah! Oh, hello. I'm White Goodman, Owner, Operator, and Founder of Globo Gym America Corp, and I'm here to tell you that you don't have to be stuck with what ya got... Globo Gym employs a highly-trained, quasi-cultural staff of personal alterational specialists. And with our competitively-priced on-site cosmetic surgery, we can turn that **Frankenstein you see in the mirror every morning into a Franken-fine!**"*

Do you want to turn your next presentation into Franken-fine? In the words of White Goldman, *"C'mon down and join the winning team, because here at Globo Gym... We're better than you and we know it!"*

The Big Five

We have now covered the basic ground rules on how to make your presentations and stories powerful. Like Emeril says, *"Let's kick it up a notch."* This is how you get started. According to author, Victoria Schmidt in her book, *Story Structure Architect*, "the first decision to make when creating a great [presentation] is to figure out what your overall Dramatic Throughline is."

So what in the world is a Dramatic Throughline? Schmidt states that it is the central question that keeps the audience engaged and the main character moving forward.

Will the main character succeed? Fail? Give up?

Schmidt also outlines that there are 5 Dramatic Throughlines – three that are traditional approaches (Act I, II, III) and two which are nontraditional (no three-act structure). Let's take a look at the five options:

1. The main character succeeds - TRADITIONAL
2. The main character is defeated - TRADITIONAL
3. The main character abandons his or her goal - TRADITIONAL
4. The main character's goal is undefined – NONTRADITIONAL
5. The audience member creates a goal - NONTRADITIONAL

The objective for you is to figure out where your next presentation fits. Is it 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5? Typically, the best approach for a business presentation is #1. It's a traditional approach that means it has the classic beginning, middle, and end. For instance, here are some examples of general "Character Succeeds" throughlines:

Problem – Solution
Mystery – Solution
Conflict – Peace
Danger – Safety
Confusion – Order
Dilemma – Decision
Ignorance – Knowledge
Question – Answer

These scenarios are typical of the business environment, so a storyboard that fits this dynamic should do well for you. I particularly like the classic problem/solution approach (a.k.a. The Sherlock) because most organizations can relate to a simple problem/solution scenario.

Once you determine your throughline, the next step is to layout a theme.

BAM!!!



Developing a Theme

A major component missing from presentations today is the whole idea of “brand.” Sure, branding is an old topic, but people shouldn’t ignore the power of branding their presentation. Instead of “10 Ways to Financial Freedom” why not label your presentation “Freedom”? After all, don’t you want your message to echo throughout your company? Creating a theme or branding it will focus your message into a single core idea that will resonate with your audience and will allow you to reap the rewards.

A theme will get you results.

results.

Every television show has a theme song. Every great movie has a memorable music score. That’s just the audio. The concept of a theme helps create retention. Maybe your business is soaring and sales are skyrocketing. Your presentation theme could then be “Momentum,” based on speed, progress, and growth. You can show clips from the movies *Gone in 60 Seconds* or *The Fast and the Furious*. Perhaps you could giveaway Red Bull or some Matchbox cars during the break. It all captures the idea of energy and momentum.

Here are a few examples:

MERGE



Author and entrepreneur, Todd Albertson and his book, *The Gods of Business*, wanted to illustrate via his presentation how religions intersect with business. The theme: MERGE

DRIVE



Be Someone, a non-profit based in Atlanta, GA works towards helping youth succeed at the game of life by applying principles and philosophies that come from the game of chess. Hence, we developed the theme: DRIVE.

It captured two main elements:

1. Drive is about change. It's about challenging someone to *"take the keys."*
2. Drive is also about ambition. You have to be driven to succeed.

FORWARD



One more example. Ethos3 was working with a CFO at the Anthony Robbins Companies in San Diego, California. He wanted a keynote presentation that would illustrate how financial modeling and strategic planning documents need to not "die" but become a living document to help companies move forward. The theme? You guessed it – FORWARD.

Creating a brand for yourself and your message is probably one of the easiest and most powerful things you can do. Don't be lazy. Brand your presentation.

TELL

YOUR

STORY.

STRENGTH OF A GRIZZLY

Your best defense against presentation hecklers is knowledge.

The good news! At this point, you should know the power of story & how to structure your content. After completing this chapter you should, in the words of Rex from *Napoleon Dynamite*,

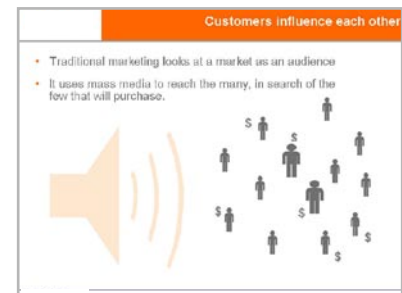
“...be prepared to defend yourself with the *STRENGTH* of a grizzly, the reflexes of a *PUMA*, and the wisdom of a man.”



Practical Application

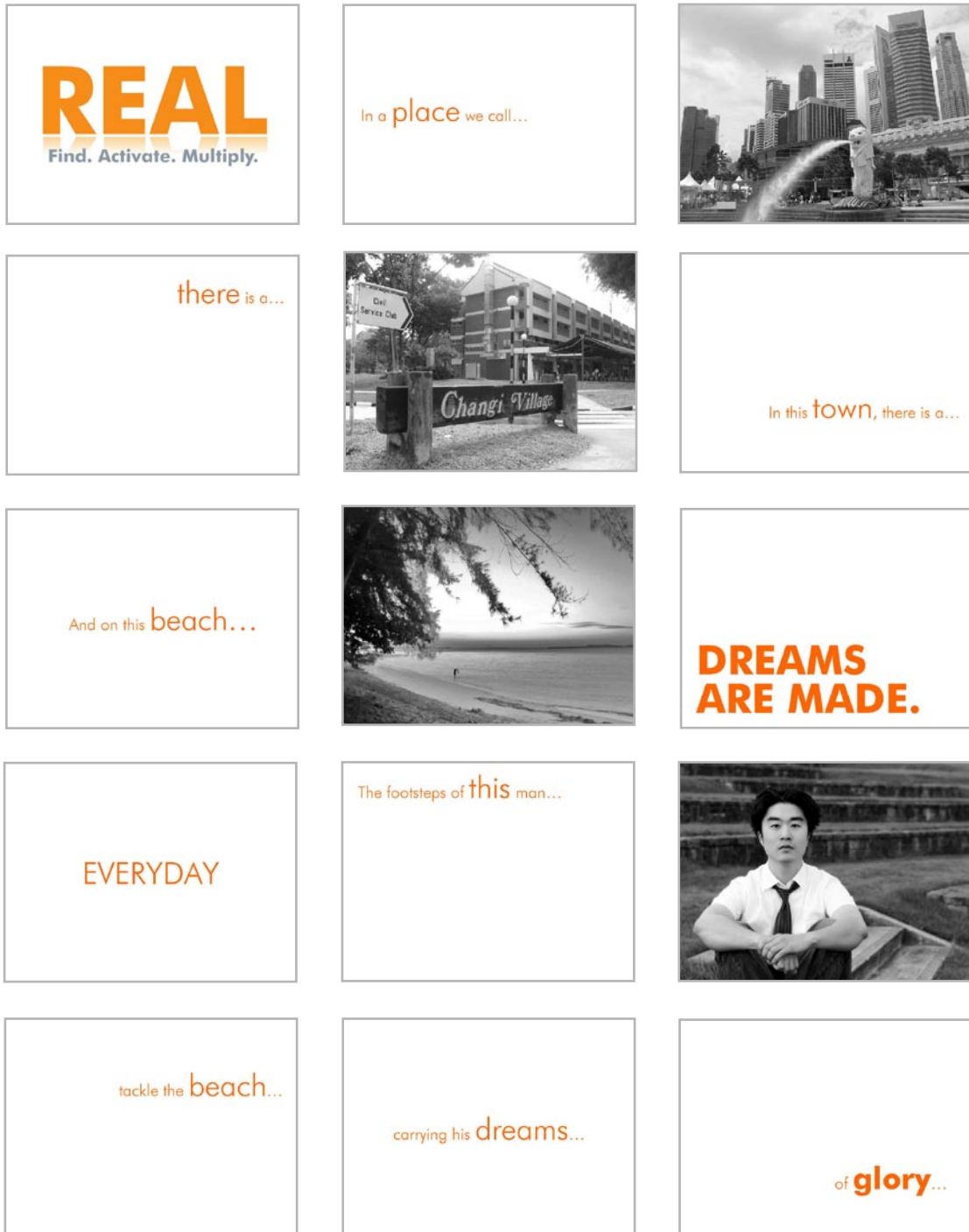
Here is an example of everything we have discussed. It is an excerpt from a piece of work Ethos3 was proud to create. We were working with a Word of Mouth Marketing firm in Singapore. They had a good start with big visuals and minimal text as you can see from the three sample slides below, but they lacked a theme, visually stunning slides and most importantly – a compelling story.

BEFORE



AFTER

As you can see, what they got in return was a strong theme of “REAL” that captured the essence of their message in a powerful story as a preview to their content. What is not showcased is the core of their content, but you get the idea.



Epic DNA

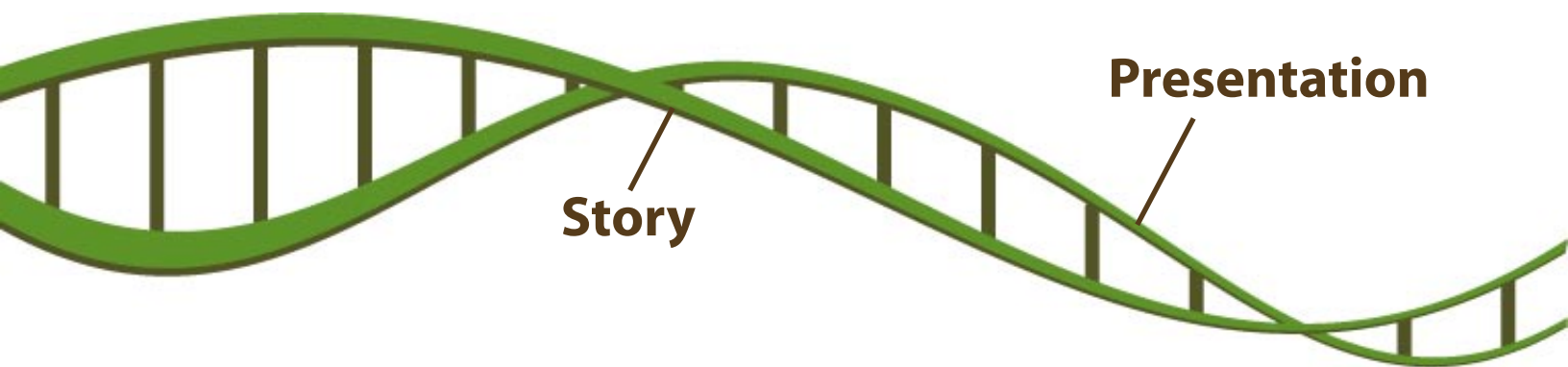
Now, it's time to get left-brained. This is the analytical approach to everything up to this point.

An epic presentation needs a story.

The Spice Girls said it perfectly: it's all about *"two becoming one."*

The dictionary defines DNA like this: *an extremely long macromolecule that is the main component of chromosomes and is the material that transfers genetic characteristics in all life forms, constructed of two nucleotide strands coiled around each other in a ladderlike arrangement with the sidepieces composed of alternating phosphate and deoxyribose units and the rungs composed of the purine and pyrimidine bases adenine, guanine, cytosine, and thymine: the genetic information of DNA is encoded in the sequence of the bases and is transcribed as the strands unwind and replicate.*

Confused? Don't worry. You don't necessarily need to dredge up those foul memories of your 7th grade biology class. You just need to know that presentations and stories are one. You can't have them separate. They are intertwined just like your own DNA.



A presentation without a compelling story is like every other presentation you have seen and heard - BORING. On the other hand, a story without a presentation is a Kumbaya moment while roasting wienies and marshmallows. You need both to be epic.

No Points for Second Place

Some final words of wisdom. You spent an entire year slaving behind your desk, you were responsive via your Blackberry 24/7, and you stayed late Monday through Friday to prove to yourself (and your boss) that you've got what it takes to move up in the organization. This is you and it is a depiction of everyone else who is hungry to succeed in today's competitive environment.

However, how many times have you seen this all fall apart within just a few minutes for some unprepared individual? I'm sure it has been more than once, and it was probably during this individual's presentation.

Don't be the next **victim.**

How you summarize your work will make or break you. Take a lesson from Viper in the movie, *Top Gun*: **"There are no points for second place."**

Here's how you can secure the top position you were targeting all year with your next presentation:



Acceptance

Acknowledge that your presentation is your make or break moment. Everything you do all year boils down to that one moment. Don't fizzle out in zero hour. Stay committed all the way through. If you hate public speaking – practice. If you hate your slides – get design help. Put your best foot forward. You owe it to yourself.

Disturbance

Get disturbed. It's only when you get disturbed that you will challenge yourself to take it up a notch. Push yourself to the next level. Don't settle on your presentation. If you're unhappy with any element of your presentation then fix it.

Transcendence

According to the dictionary, transcendence is defined as: *Surpassing others; preeminent or supreme*. If you build, design, and deliver the presentation like you know you should, you will transcend all others - getting you to the place you know you deserve.

There are no points for second place. Don't forget it.

In the famous words of Doug Heffernan from *King of Queens* – **“you’re electric.”** You have all the all the ability buried within you. You just need to harness it, develop it, and showcase it. You now have the tools and knowledge to pimp your story, so make it happen. Start implementing these principles today. Just as the Blue Oyster Cult did in the famous SNL skit, add more [cowbell] to your presentations. Go tell a story – today!



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