

Communications Capacity-Building Program

Make Them Feel It: Storytelling That Moves People to Act

Led by Chip Culpepper, Principal Owner & Chief Creative Officer of mhp.si

Visit the program homepage for:

Upcoming Webinar Info & Registration

1:1 Consultations Requests

Webinar Resource Library

Feedback survey & request for future topics

<https://mhp.si/wff-comm-cap-program/>

Upcoming Webinar

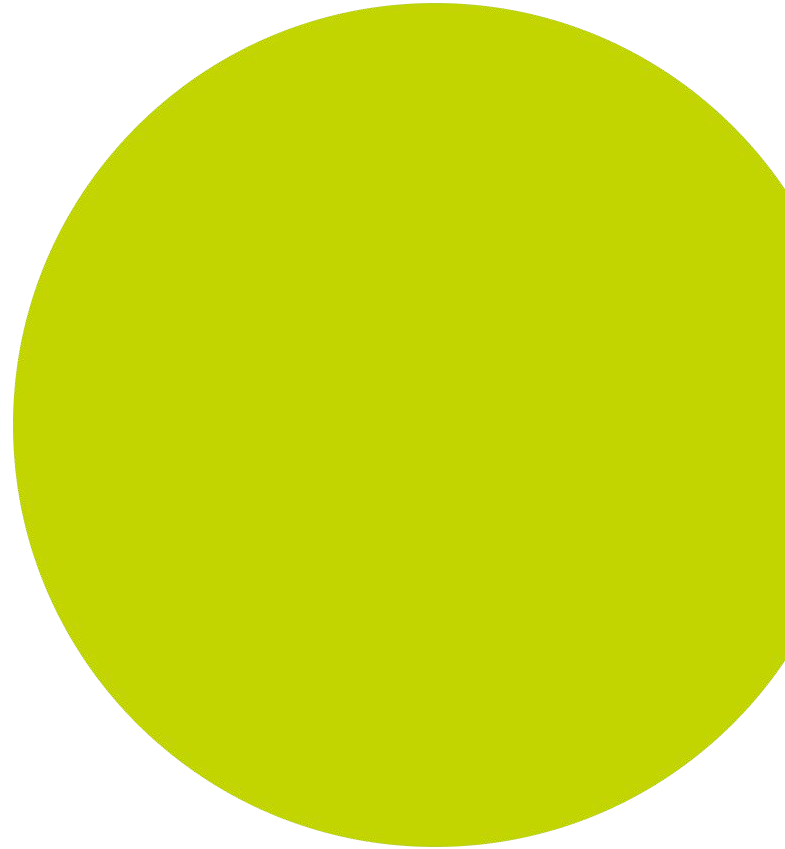
Better Together: Building Strong Grassroots Partnerships

Wednesday, June 17 • 11:00 am – 12:00 pm

Make Them Feel It:

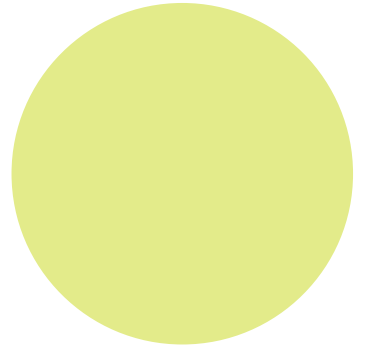
Storytelling Moves
People to Action

May 20, 2026

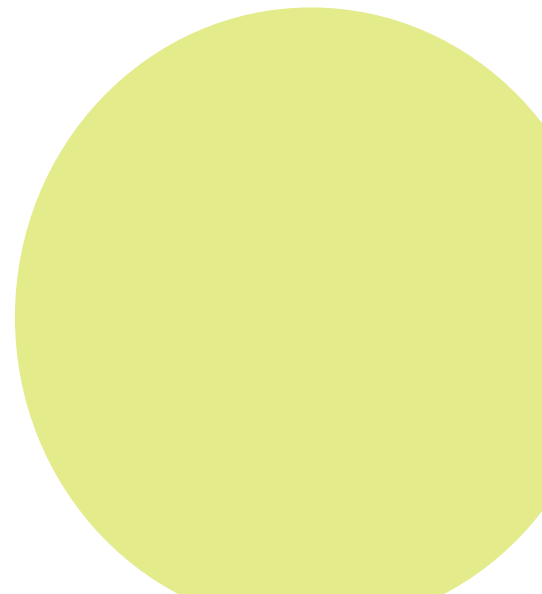


Key Takeaways:

- Why emotion drives action (and how to tap into it)
- The limits of “explaining” your impact
- Simple storytelling frameworks you can reuse
- How to make your audience the hero of the story
- Ways to apply storytelling across your communications
- How to thoughtfully share and navigate complex or sensitive topics



People love stories ...



People love stories ...

Global | 5/4/26 - 5/10/26

NETFLIX

RANKING		WEEKS IN TOP 10	VIEWS	RUNTIME	HOURS VIEWED
01	 <p>SWAPPED <u>Swapped</u></p>	2	38,700,000	1:42	65,800,000

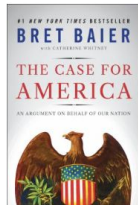
New York Times Best Sellers:

FICTION



Our Perfect Storm by Carley Fortune
 After her fiancé leaves her, Frankie goes on her planned honeymoon trip with her best friend from childhood, George.

NONFICTION



The Case for America by Bret Baier
 The chief political anchor for Fox News shares his perspectives on our national character during divisive times.



Michael

Weekend Gross: **\$26M**

Total Gross: **\$283M**

Weeks Released: **4**

★ 7.7 (93K) ☆ Rate

We always have ...



Oldest-known manuscript fragment of the *Odyssey*, Ptolemaic Egypt, 3rd century BC.

We always have ...



Oldest-known manuscript fragment of the *Odyssey*, Ptolemaic Egypt, 300 BC



Matt Damon as Odysseus in Christopher Nolan's *The Odyssey* 2026 AD

Stories provide cultural cues and context:

- Stories serve as instruction of values
- Provide cautionary tales
- Deliver inspiration/aspiration
- *Careful*: Stories can manipulate behavior
- Telling stories is a *basic human need*

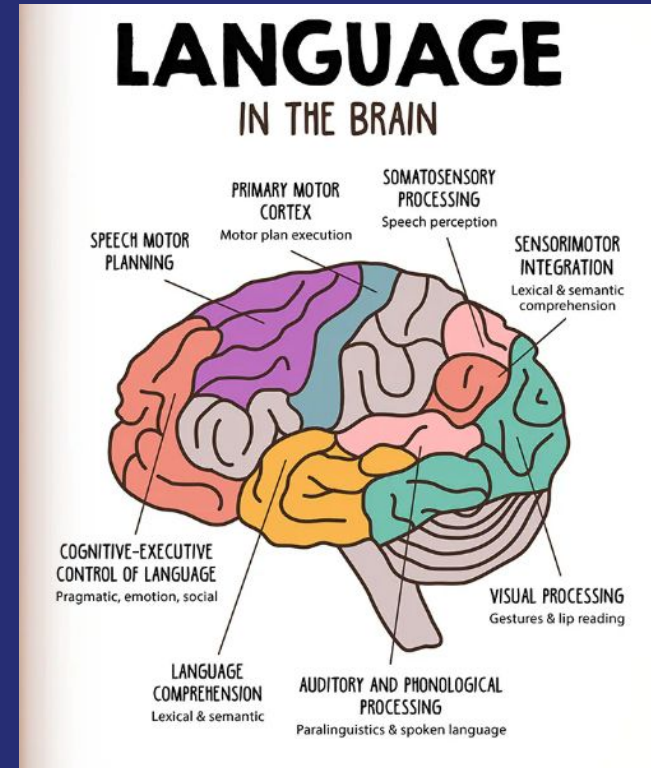
**Culture is
simply how &
why
we do things
*around here.***

Story Matters

Most, *if not all*, areas of the human brain **activate** and **participate** to differing degrees during language tasks:

Speaking, listening, processing, interpreting, comprehending, analyzing, recalling, planning, moving, imagining.

University College of London, *New Scientist*, 2023



Elements of Storytelling



Character

The individuals driving the narrative: hero and opponent.



Setting

The time, location, and environment providing context.



Plot

Sequence of events from exposition to resolution.



Conflict

A central challenge that defines and drives the action.



Theme

The deeper underlying meaning or central message.

Great Storytellers **Are:**



Empathetic - *the 'me' mirror*



Vulnerable - *personal not perfect*



Relatable - *use simple, understandable language*



Aware of the Audience - *read the room; connect*



Use Pace & Pause - *timing is everything, silence can be powerful*

Storytelling is *Persuasion*

We need to communicate persuasively, asking an audience to think:

“If you help us accomplish our goals, either through a donation or volunteering, that action will benefit you or a group you care about in a way that’s meaningful to you morally, spiritually, economically or socially.”

That’s it. That’s the job. Help your audience understand:

- This is a **worthwhile** organization that **connects** *with me* at an emotional, personal level.
- They are taking action in **a way that matters** to a place or group I care about.
- Supporting their work can **benefit** me morally, spiritually, economically or socially.

Power of Persuasion

Know Your Audience:

Who is it you want to reach exactly? **Why** a person's background or a group's shared experiences might motivate them to be open to seeing your organization as worthwhile or important. As you do, you're building a **persona** of the audience you're trying to reach. **Where** do they get their information? What sources of information do they **trust**? Which groups are likely to be able to be persuaded to see your mission as **important** to themselves or a group they care about?

Find The Persuasion Points:

Persuasion points are the details in a story – the stuff that's most likely to sway someone to see your organization as a net good for themselves or the community. This is not a comprehensive list. **Every audience has different persuasion points. Be thoughtfully selective:** Don't let your list of points become a "bed of nails" that becomes impervious to getting your most important **point** across.

“Stat & Chat”: Touch on Rational and Emotional Motives

Emotional response to a message has **greater influence** on **purchase intent** than the content itself.

CAMPAIGNS THAT PERFORMED WELL



31%

EMOTIONAL CONTENT

- Empathy-driven
- Storytelling focus
- Connects personally



16%

RATIONAL CONTENT

- Logic-driven
- Feature-focused
- Provides evidence

The use of a **statistic** at this point in my story also serves as support for those who truly need and desire some **rational reinforcement**.

Emotional Anchors

<p>PRIDE</p>  <p>PRIDE Connect with their worth.</p>	<p>LOVE</p>  <p>LOVE Foster deep connection.</p>	<p>ACHIEVEMENT</p>  <p>ACHIEVEMENT Show results matter.</p>	<p>EMPATHY</p>  <p>EMPATHY Build understanding.</p>	<p>LONELINESS & FRIENDSHIP</p>  <p>LONELINESS & FRIENDSHIP Create community.</p>	<p>MEMORY</p>  <p>MEMORY Frame the narrative.</p>
---	---	--	---	---	--



“Just make me *feel something* , dude”

– Dan Weiden



Arc of Action:

👁️ Attention

😊 Smile

😄 Laugh

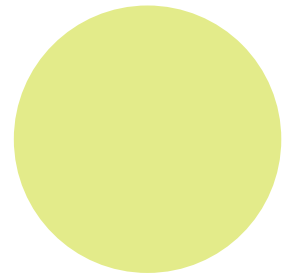
😞 Cry

👥 Connect

👉❤️ Contribute

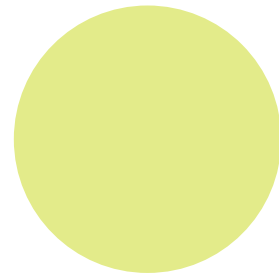


Once upon a time...



Once upon a time...

" _____ is so very _____ it makes me feel _____."



Story Starters:

"A time I felt we were doing our very best work was when _____."



Story Starters:

RESULTS/PROOF:

People want to be part of what's going to work or already working. You have to convince them you're doing more than talking. Has your organization already had some success, but could do more with more funding or volunteers? Then talk about your successes. **Brag on yourself.** Give the hard numbers and show how you helped (provide the *rational* support to that *emotional* tug ... "*stat & chat*").

Story Starters:

Think of What First Persuaded You to Do This Work:

We are all unique and special. But we are often persuaded to action by the same things. You know why you do this work. You chose this. **Why?** What was it that convinced you that this was a mission that would benefit you, your community or a group you care about morally, spiritually, economically or socially?

Ask Your People *Why They Do It*:

Get your people in a room and ask them those questions: **Why do you do this?** What's in it for you? What would be missing from your life if you didn't do it? Why this and not that over there? Ask yourself those questions. Then take that list of motivators and use it as a guide to help you find your most receptive audience and tell your story in a way that resonates.

Story Starters:

ADVERSITY:

Our species-wide love of storytelling also makes us respond to stories in which **heroes begin in adversity, but triumph through dedication and hard work**. Lots of nonprofits have stories like that: one person has an idea, and works hard, and helps a lot of people. Sounds like work. *But how many movies are about that? (Remember: they're remaking "The Odyssey" – again!)*

Talk about where you came from, and what obstacles you overcame, and what you gained from the effort.

Story Starters:

'WE'RE THE HELPERS':

Humans also love stories about people finding, at last, the thing they feel like they were born to do. **We crave meaningful, purposeful lives that matter to others.**

So if you want someone to join your mission or support it, talk about exactly why it helps – *10,000 meals distributed, 5,000 loads of clothes washed for needy families, \$14 million raised for education.*

Also: Talk about *how* the work you do helps not only those you serve, but your staff and volunteers. There should be more volunteer quotes on nonprofit websites. There should be more quotes from the people you help. That's the story, too. It all connects back to: We do work that matters, and you can directly support it or become part of it as a volunteer.

Brand Personality Quiz:

Audience & Context:

- Who are your primary customers/stakeholders?
- How old are they?
- Where do they live?
- What are they like, generally speaking?

Competitive Landscape:

- Who are your main competitors?
- What's truly different about you versus your competitor(s)?

Brand Perception & Assets:

- How would you verbally describe your brand as it exists today?
- What would you LIKE people to say about your brand in the future?
- What adjectives would you use to describe your company? Workplace? Product/Service?
- Are there colors, words, styles or design elements that you could not live WITH for your new logo (taboos)?

Brand Analogy:

- Admittedly an odd question, but if your brand were an automotive vehicle, what type would it be? Sportscar, SUV, truck? Why? What color would it be?

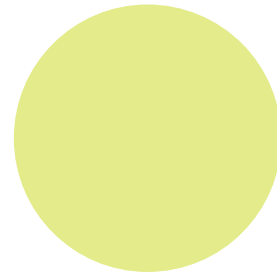
Tips from Chip:

1 *Practice* being a better listener

2 You *don't* need to be perfect

3 Play on the “see/saw”

4 Emotion leads to motion



The image features a central lime green circle with the text "Q&A" in a bold, dark blue font. This central circle is surrounded by two concentric, semi-transparent light gray circles. The entire composition is set against a white background.

Q&A