



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

SHARING THE Y STORY

STORYTELLING
YMCA VIRTUAL DIGITAL SUMMIT SERIES

February 22, 2021



STORYTELLING FOR THE Y AGENDA

- 1. WHY STORYTELLING IS IMPORTANT?**
- 2. OBSERVATIONS OF NONPROFIT STORYTELLING**
- 3. ELEMENTS TO INCLUDE IN A STORY**
- 4. STRATEGIES TO HELP IDENTIFY**
- 5. STRATEGIES TO WRITE/TELL A STORY**

WHY STORYTELLING IS IMPORTANT?

Why Tell Stories?

- To “bring people inside”
- To connect qualitative to quantitative information
- To educate (without using a boring PowerPoint like this one!)
- To prove what we are doing is effective and impactful
- To spur people to take action

Stories are powerful because they engage the imagination

WHY STORYTELLING IS IMPORTANT?

Stories vs. Making a claim

- When you tell a story, it engages the imagination
- When we tell a story, it is more compelling and emotional
- When you make a claim (The Y served 5,000____), the audience activates their logic and may question

WHY STORYTELLING IS IMPORTANT?

A message is not a fact/claim

FACT: Accelerator YMCA provides housing for 250 young people on any given night.

MESSAGE: Accelerator YMCA provides essential support services to young people experiencing housing instability, providing them with housing and the tools they need to be safe, successful, and happy.

We want a donor to feel and embrace the emotion more than think or evaluate data

OBSERVATIONS OF NONPROFIT STORYTELLING

1. Nonprofits do not tell enough stories: Story about a person who did something
 - Storytelling is harder than sharing data or impact statements, but are far more powerful a method of communicating
2. Nonprofits too often substitute data, info graphics over stories
 - Good data can be shared but is often completely unpersuasive. If you use data, find ways to contextualize that data, connect it to something readers know or understand
3. When nonprofits do tell stories, they often seem to repeat themselves
 - When story has repeatable type model, it sometimes loses it power

Many org are not storytelling like they should, if we become known as the organization that tells stories (well and often), then we can differentiate the Y from other organizations

ELEMENTS TO INCLUDE IN A STORY

Elements to include in story:

- Who is it about?
- What do they want/need?
- What's different at the end?



STRATEGIES TO HELP IDENTIFY STORIES

3 shortcuts to identifying stories. These plots never fail!

- Classic Confrontation Plot (**David vs Goliath**) – someone overcoming an obstacle, digs deep to push themselves further than they, or anyone else, thought they could
- Relationship Plot (**The Odd Couple**) – story of someone bridging some sort of gap of age, demographics, ethnicity, economic status, etc. When people of different situations/backgrounds come together to achieve some greater purpose.
- Creativity Plot (**The MacGyver**) – when someone, through innovation/inventiveness, is able to achieve something greater.

STRATEGIES TO HELP IDENTIFY STORIES

How do we surface stories in our Ys? They are all around us!

3 questions to ask at every staff meeting, which helps to foster the culture of storytelling

- Who were we not able to help last week?
- What did you learn this week?
- Who is your favorite client/member/participant?
- Who can't you get out of your mind?

Dig into each and follow up with more questions



STRATEGIES TO HELP COLLECT STORIES

INDIRECT STORY COLLECTION

Exit surveys from programs

Program staff story report form (with incentive)

DIRECT STORY COLLECTION

Build rapport

Be conversational

Provide interview questions in advance

Keep neutral

Bring a program staff member

STRATEGIES TO HELP COLLECT STORIES

Optional Questions for gathering a story

- How did you hear about XYZ program?
- When did you first become involved with the Y/xyz program
- What do you like most about working with the Y/xyz program?
- What do you think you'd be doing if you hadn't found XYZ program at the YMCA?
- How has the program/person helped you to work towards/reach your goals?
- What challenges were you facing before you became involved with the Y/xyz program?
- How would your life be different if you weren't involved with the Y/xyz program?
- What goals did you have when you first came to the Y/xyz program?
- What goals have you accomplished since working with the Y/xyz program?
- What changes have you seen in yourself since being in XYZ program?
- What have you learned since being in XYZ program?
- 5 years from now, what do you see yourself doing?
- What is your favorite memory with the Y/xyz program
- Is there anything else you'd like to share?

HOW TO TELL BETTER STORIES

TELLING BETTER STORIES

Good stories need 5 things:

- A Hero
- A Guide
- Structure
- Readability
- Emotion

TELLING BETTER STORIES

A Hero:

The Y is never the hero!

Hero should be the person/family/teen/senior we serve, helped

- Define the hero.
 - What does the hero want?(Be a better dad. Live longer. Have better health. Overcome a fear. Access to ___?)
 - What is in their way?
 - What will their life look like if they get it? or don't get it?

TELLING BETTER STORIES

A Guide:

Introduce A Guide (someone who helps the Hero get to where he wants to be).

Examples: (Harry Potter is Hero and Dumbledore is Guide; Luke Skywalker is Hero and Obi-Wan Kenobi is Guide)

Often, it should be Y donors/funders/supporters. They need to be able to see their role in the hero's adventure.

"Without the help of a key donor, we would've had to close this great after-school program..." And the YMCA is the platform on which this hero's journey takes place.

TELLING BETTER STORIES

Structure:

The story spine boils the classic, complicated Hero's journey into something simpler and more fool-proof

Story spine:

- Once upon a time there was...
- And every day...
- Until one day...
- And because of that ...
- And because of that ...
- And because of that ...
- Until finally
*(Usually where the donor comes in;
someone like you made it possible for..)*
- And ever since that day ...



TELLING BETTER STORIES

THE STORY SPINE

THE STORY SPINE	STRUCTURE	FUNCTION
Once upon a time...	Beginning	The world of the story is introduced and the main character's routine is established.
Every day...		
But, one day...	The Event	The main character breaks the routine .
Because of that...	Middle	There are dire consequences for having broken the routine. It is unclear if the main character will come out alright in the end.
Because of that...		
Because of that...		
Until finally...	The Climax	The main character embarks upon success or failure
And, ever since then...	End	The main character succeeds or fails, and a new routine is established.

TELLING BETTER STORIES

Readability: VERY important!

Average adult reads at 8th grade level. 50% of American adults can't comprehend a book written at 8th grade level.

Target 6th-8th grade reading level for highest comprehension, especially if digital.

To reduce the reading level:

- shorten the length of the sentences
- add more paragraph breaks
- use bullets or quotes

Start strong, you have about 8 seconds to capture someone's attention.

TELLING BETTER STORIES

Emotion:

Creates instant human compassion.

4 emotions: Glad Sad Mad and Afraid.

Sometimes we shy away from being too emotional to not take advantage, but we are human and emotional creatures.

Want donors to FEEL something!

What makes them feel is a story about a person

TELLING BETTER STORIES

IMPACT STORY: JAELYN

Jaelyn came to the Accelerator YMCA after being homeless for two years in Seattle. He had aged out of foster care and had no support system to lean on as he entered into adulthood.

Jaelyn enrolled in YV Lifeset, an intensive case-management program that specifically serves young adults who have recently exited the foster care system. He was set up with a team of positive, supportive adults that connected him to community resources and gave him the tools he needed to secure his own apartment.

Thanks to you, Jaelyn is now stably housed in his own apartment, and has been connected with employment. He plans to attend a 4 year college and to get a degree in business. Jaelyn is passionate about inspiring youth in foster care to never give up on their dreams, no matter how hard life can be.

“I can honestly say if it wasn’t for the YMCA, I wouldn’t be here. I may not even be alive. They saved my life.”



TELLING BETTER STORIES



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MISSION IMPACT

Liam Learns to Swim!

During a time of uncertainty, the YMCA became a beacon of hope for Liam's family.

Liam (whose name has been changed to protect his privacy) is a 5 year old boy who is on the Autism Spectrum. As the Middle Tyger YMCA doors reopened after the 2020 quarantine, Liam's parents knew it was time to enroll their son in swimming lessons. They knew that children on the Autism Spectrum have a 40% higher chance of drowning than other children their age, and they wanted their son to be safe around water. After being turned away elsewhere, Liam's parents heard that YMCA offers lessons for everyone. The YMCA was not only able to offer lessons for Liam, but also ease the financial burden by gifting them a 50% scholarship.



TELLING BETTER STORIES

Liam struggled in his first lesson. He cried, screamed, and even tried to run away into the water. But his instructor didn't give up on him. Instead, she introduced him to Steven, a swim instructor who specializes in water therapy and children with disabilities. Liam and Steven got along swimmingly!

Later that year, the original instructor saw a young boy and his father playing and splashing in the deep end of the pool. Liam's mother approached the instructor and said, "you don't recognize him, do you?" Liam, who started out terrified of the water, was now delighted to be playing in the water with his father!



Liam's mother went on to say, "Every week Liam would ask for more 'Steven swim'."

Liam is not swimming on his own yet, but he has learned to float on his back, blow bubbles and kick, and he is working on the safety aspects of swimming. His parents are so happy that they found YMCA and Steven.

Thanks to the YMCA, Liam gained confidence in the water and skills that could one day save his life!

TAKEAWAYS

- Stories are more persuasive than claim-making because they force the audience to experience things from our point of view.
- Your team needs to be on the lookout for stories constantly. Look for popular plots like David v. Goliath, Odd Couples, and MacGyver.
- The stories we tell need heroes, guided by the Y or our funders. Make sure you're structuring your story well.
- Don't use too many big words. Or long sentences.

Lastly, include a Call to Action. Don't forget to tell the reader what to do next. How can they help? What difference can their support make?

Donate. Volunteer. Be a mentor.



THANK YOU

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