



Steuben County Community Foundation  
Nonprofit Capacity-Building Initiative

# Telling Your Organization's Story

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TRINE UNIVERSITY  
KETNER SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

THANK YOU  
for the  
IMPORTANT WORK  
you do in OUR communities!



# Today's Story

- Why a story?
- Where to tell the story?
- Rules of Storytelling
- Where do I find the stories?
- How do I bring it to life?

## **The Role of Family and Community in Mentoring Alienated Youth in the American Midwest**

- At-risk youth raised by extended family in farm belt
- Suffers severe head trauma from extreme weather event.
- Undertakes high-risk journey to distant, mineral-based urban center.
- Accompanied by three homeless adults.
- Pursued and threatened by malevolent person of color (and airborne primates).



**“The Wizard of Oz”**

Numbers numb.

Jargon jars.

Nobody ever marched on Washington  
simply because of a pie chart.

If you really want to reach people  
and change the world,

**tell them a story.**

# A Quick Story

The screenshot shows the homepage of the 'Wheels of Success' website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with two buttons: 'I NEED HELP' (red) and 'I WANT TO HELP' (green). Below this is a large banner with the text 'Working Wheels Keep Families Working' and a background image of trees. On the left side, there is a vertical menu with links: Home, About Us, Our Work, Our Events, Our Support, Our Success, News / Media, and Contact. Below the menu is a 'DONATE NOW' button. Further down is a 'SIGN UP' section with links for 'EMAIL NEWSLETTER' and 'VOLUNTEER', and social media icons for Facebook and Twitter. At the bottom left, there is a logo for 'Opportunity CARS' with the text 'Outside of the Tampa Bay Area?'. The main content area features a story about a woman who needs car repairs. The story is repeated twice, once in a large white box and once in a smaller grey box. The story describes a woman who has been referred to the organization by Metropolitan Ministries, has an older car she loves but cannot afford repairs, and is working hard to save money to move into her own home. The website also features a 'FUNDRAISER' section for Friday, May 13, 2011, at the A La Carte Events Pavilion, and an 'ONGOING SPONSORS' section with the AAA Auto Club South logo.

**WHEELS of SUCCESS**

**Working Wheels Keep Families Working**

[I NEED HELP](#) [I WANT TO HELP](#)

- Home
- About Us
- Our Work
- Our Events
- Our Support
- Our Success
- News / Media
- Contact

**DONATE NOW**

**SIGN UP**

- EMAIL NEWSLETTER
- VOLUNTEER

Facebook Twitter

Outside of the Tampa Bay Area?  
**Opportunity CARS**

**A woman who has been referred to us by Metropolitan Ministries.** She has an older car that she loves, but she cannot afford the repairs that it needs to continue running safely. Her beloved "clunker" allows her to continue working at her *three jobs* (one full time and one part time). She is working hard to save enough money to move into her own home and become self-sufficient but fears the expense of car repairs will keep her from attaining her goals.

**FUNDRAISER**

Friday, May 13, 2011  
A La Carte  
Events Pavilion

**ONGOING SPONSORS**

**AAA**  
Auto Club South

In fewer than 100 words, the nonprofit paints a picture of a woman whom we can envision and feel empathy for. The story makes "the nature of their challenge" human and compelling.

# Gasi Spring -- before





# Gasi Spring -- after



## 6 Word Stories

For sale: Baby shoes. Never worn.

Each day is a fresh start.

Hope arrives on little kitty feet.

People working on global warming solutions.

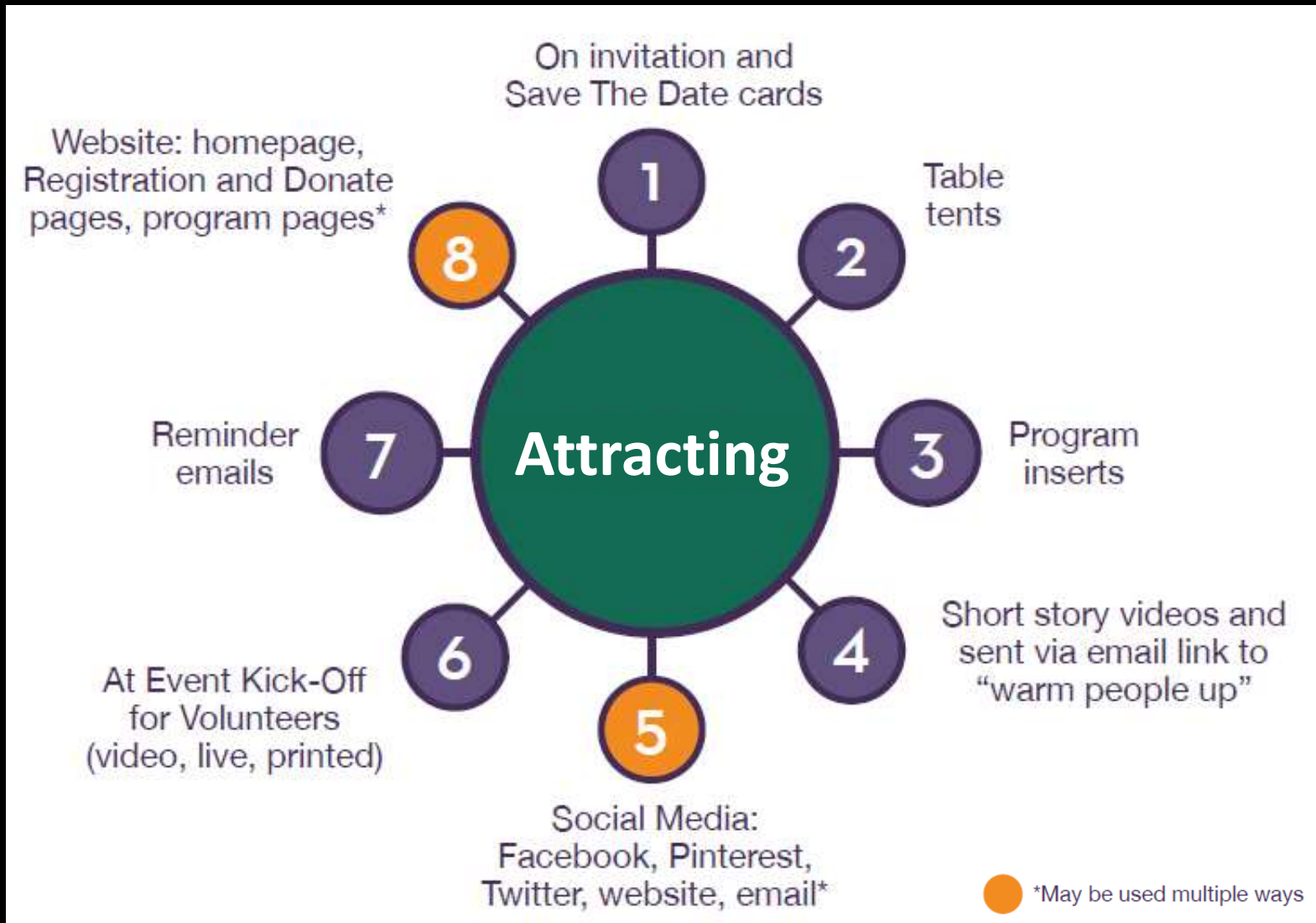
Transforming America from 'me' to 'we.'

Teen battling cancer marries his sweetheart.

# Where Does the Story GO in a proposal?

- The problem/opportunity description
- Definition of your community of clients
- The evaluation section
- The history or track record of your organization
- The people behind your work (staff, volunteers, etc.)

# When & Where to Tell Your story (besides in the grant)



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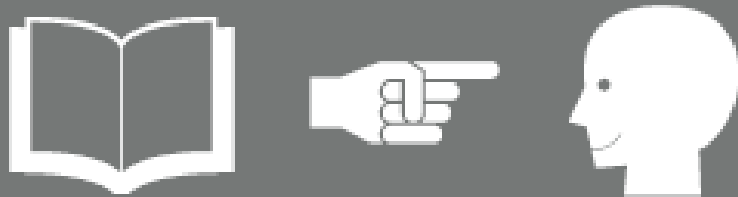
## WHEN INCORPORATING INTO PRESENTATIONS:

- Three stories in a short, seven-minute speech
- You can use more examples in a longer speech, but keep them relevant, short, and varied, but with the same “message”
- Use them
  - To emphasize a point
  - As a transition
  - To insert drama, clarity, humor
  - To close your remarks

# Seven Rules of Storytelling

## 1. STORIES SHOULD BE ABOUT REAL PEOPLE

Ideally, stories about those who need something that YOUR organization provides.



## 2. ALLOW THE PERSON IN YOUR STORY TO HAVE A REAL NAME, AGE, AND TO SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES



## 4. KEEP YOUR STORY SHORT

6 words to 2 minutes works best.



In about 4 – 10 seconds your listeners tune out if you haven't grabbed them. Don't tell them you are going to tell them a story about someone, just tell it. Start with the person's name, age, and a few descriptive words.

## 3. MINDS WANDER REALLY QUICKLY





# Seven Rules of Storytelling (cont.)



## 5. ALLOW YOUR STORY TO ELICIT AN EMOTIONAL RESPONSE

Anger, sadness, happiness, pride—it doesn't matter what the emotion is, but your listeners should feel **something**.

## 7. THE BEST STORIES ARE TOLD BY THE PERSON THEMSELVES

Clients telling their own stories are the most moving way to share how your organization makes a difference.



## 6. YOUR STORY SHOULD HAVE A MOMENT THAT PAINTS A PICTURE

Encourage your listeners to see themselves or someone in their lives. It could be aging parents, the daughter of the person who makes their latte or takes their bank deposits, or even their own children.



# How to Create Stories – Step 1

## ASK STAFF & VOLUNTEERS QUESTIONS

- Who did you turn away last week? Tell me about one of those people or families.
- What person, family, child, senior, or fill-in-the-blank has stayed on your mind this week? Why did they come in? What are we doing to serve them? What are we not able to do for them?
- What is your favorite thing about this person? Why do you want to help them?
- Is there anyone you've met lately who made you feel incredibly proud that we exist? Tell me about them and how YOU inadvertently or directly helped them.

# How to Create Stories – Step 2

## GET PERMISSION AND FILL IN THE BLANKS

- Follow your organization's confidentiality protocols.
- Connect one-on-one with remarkable/unique clients and stakeholders
- Record their story, change the names, write it up, ask them to review and approve it.
- Incorporate pictures and videos where appropriate.
- Save originals securely.

# Bringing the Story to Life

*By her own account, Beth was a “normal” professional woman. She had a thriving career in international marketing, but she also harbored a dark secret—addiction. It started with taking extra migraine pills, which made her “feel great.” Soon, she spiraled out of control, abusing different prescription medications. “The doctors gave me what I wanted because I looked like a normal business woman,” she says, “One even gave me a prescription for morphine pills.” When the doctors finally curtailed her prescriptions, Beth turned to alcohol, which was easily available.*

*Beth’s story is all too common in our communities. Addiction affects two out of three families at all income levels, all ages, all religions, and all races. The national statistics on addiction involving women and children are startling....*

*The good news is that treatment works – treatment that reflects women’s lives works better. Effective treatment must address the individual’s drug use and any associated medical, psychological, social, vocational, and legal problems...[Organization] treats the whole woman while combining our philosophy or empowerment with the philosophies of 12-Step programs. After multiple courses of treatment, Beth is now sober, the proud mother of a high school senior, and a popular volunteer at [organization]. She is proof that treatment works, and she takes daily walks with women at [organization] as they travel their own path to recovery. “I tell the residents to take one day at a time and it will get better. It did for me.”*

# SO MANY STORY- TELLERS!

WHO TO ASK	SAMPLE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS
People you serve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What was your life like before you came here?</li> <li>• How has our team helped you?</li> <li>• What is your life like now?</li> </ul>
Family members of people you serve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the differences you've seen in your loved-one's life since they came to us?</li> </ul>
Board members and former members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why did you join our board?</li> <li>• What is the most important part of our work for you?</li> <li>• Do you have a special "mission moment" you remember about someone you met who was helped by our organization?*</li> </ul>
Long-time donors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why do you make a financial gift to us?</li> <li>• What is special for you about our work?</li> <li>• Do you have a special "mission moment" you remember about someone you met who was helped by our organization?</li> </ul>
First-time donors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What brought you to us in the first place?</li> <li>• What is special for you about our work?</li> </ul>
Other staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have a special "mission moment" you remember about someone you met who was helped by our organization?</li> </ul>
Foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why have you funded our programs?</li> <li>• What is different/special about our work that compels your foundation to make a grant?</li> </ul>
Event sponsors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you know about our work?</li> <li>• Why do you make a financial gift to us?</li> <li>• Do you have a special "mission moment" you remember about someone who was helped by our organization?</li> </ul>
Vendors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you know about our work?</li> <li>• Do you have a special "mission moment" that you remember about someone you met who was helped by our organization?</li> </ul>
Elected officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you know about our work?</li> <li>• Do you have a special "mission moment" that you remember about someone you met who was helped by our organization?</li> </ul>

# The Foundation of Good Storytelling:

**A)**

Tell a story about an actual person using name/age descriptors so your listener can visualize.

**B)**

Use words that emotionally connect the listener to your work and the person you're speaking about. NO JARGON.

**C)**

Share specific examples of YOUR work and how it makes a difference in the life of a real person.

**D)**

The story must be short—2 minutes or less.

# Bringing the Story to Life

After William Green completed his 10-year prison term for bank robbery, he was determined to turn his life around. A friend told him about the ABC Career Center, where he soon explored his options, learned to write a resume and cover letter, and practiced how to answer difficult interview questions about his past. In his new job as a prep cook for a catering company, William has become a model employee! "ABC accepted me. They were warm and friendly and took the time to help," he said.

# Six Steps to Create an Emotionally-Connecting Story

1

*Identify one person* (only one) who stands out for you as someone who has benefitted from your programs, has been a real success story for your organization, OR could have been a success if you had more resources.

2

*Learn their first name, age,* and describe some characteristics of their personality or how they look.

3

*Write down all of the exact results* that man, woman, or child got from being served by your organization.

Be very specific. Did he get a job? Stop drinking or using? Did she get her diploma? Did that child have someone to trust for the very first time? Did that teenager start to make choices that were not harmful?



# Six Steps to Create an Emotionally-Connecting Story

4

*Make a list of the transformations that person experience as a result of those results.*

Take some time and make the list as long as possible. Make sure to use words that are feeling words rather than “reporting” words.

With someone to trust for the first time, did the teen start getting better grades in school? Have spent less time suspended or in the principal's office? Did he or she feel like they fit in better? Did she begin to look and feel differently because her self-confidence and energy were higher?

5

*You now have a list with many words and phrases perfect for crafting your story.*

Underline or circle the words that resonate with you; that cause you to feel something.

6

Now fit the story into the framework and practice telling your story. *Often.*

# The 4 Parts of a Great Story

## A RELATABLE PROTAGONIST

That means an individual, not a group or institution! The protagonist has to be facing something with which we can relate. What unites us are the trials and tribulations of being human.



## LOTS OF CONFLICT

Conflict is story oxygen. The more conflict, the more engaging the story.



## A LOATHSOME VILLAIN

Name names, or make clear what tough obstacle is in the way of our hero.



## TELLING DETAILS

If a story element can't connect with one of five senses, be suspicious of it.



# A Basic Story Framework

- A. What life was like before your organization was involved? (Who or what is “the villain”?)
- B. What happened when your organization got involved with this person or family?  
(How is your organization “the hero”?)
- C. What is life like now? Show the hope and future here OR show how the ending that is not yet finished and could be changed with more time, support, and resources given to your organization.

# Bringing the Story to Life

Two questions you should ask:

1. Who is your audience?
2. After you have shared your story, what do you want your audience to think, feel, and do?
  - Be aware?
  - Give money?
  - Volunteer?

Craft your story to make them want to help!

## Checklist for Ways to Say You Need Help Without Using the Word "NEED"

1. What's missing is \_\_\_\_\_
2. Together we will \_\_\_\_\_
3. With support from our community we will be able to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. More resources allow us to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Here's our vision for the future and what it will take to get there: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Our current level of resources don't allow us to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. We are working to eliminate our current funding gap of \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. The demand for our services is increasing faster than our annual fundraising can grow.
9. When we have additional resources we will \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Your gifts create an impact. More gifts = more impact.
11. Here's how you can make a difference/impact: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Bringing the Story to Life

## Triggers – ways to engage your audience

1. Ownership – Make them feel what it's like
2. Mystery – Don't give it away early
3. Uniqueness – Show them something new & fresh
4. Familiarity – Share something they'll relate to
5. Humanity – Make it about the people - name & face
6. Contrast – Show a big difference between A & B
7. Urgency – Tell why it's important to act NOW

# Bringing the Story to Life

## Story Starts – ways to engage your audience

- Can you imagine...
  - how that must have felt...
  - what it must have been like to...
- Have you ever...
  - experienced...
  - seen what X does to ...
  - wondered...
- Would you like to...
  - see pictures...
  - take a tour...

# Bringing the Story to Life

## Words and Phrases That Evoke Emotion

There are many, many words that do a good job of evoking emotion. This list was created to help get you started crafting your story and to spark more ideas. Begin to take notice throughout your day of the words that make you feel something and incorporate those into the stories you share.

Remember though, the placement of these words and phrases is key to creating a powerful story.

<i>A place to call my own</i>	<i>Healthy</i>
<i>Abandoned</i>	<i>Joy</i>
<i>Ashamed</i>	<i>Kind</i>
<i>Awkward</i>	<i>Leathery hands/skin</i>
<i>Blessed</i>	<i>Lifeline</i>
<i>Bright</i>	<i>Overcome</i>
<i>Catapult</i>	<i>Passionate</i>
<i>Delight</i>	<i>Precious</i>
<i>Emotionally bruised</i>	<i>Ravenous</i>
<i>Empower</i>	<i>Revitalize</i>
<i>Erupt in anger</i>	<i>Safe</i>
<i>Even out the odds</i>	<i>Surrender</i>
<i>Explosive anger</i>	<i>Thrive</i>
<i>Exuberant</i>	<i>Tired eyes</i>
<i>Eyes pooled with tears</i>	<i>Uncomfortably shy</i>
<i>Fleeting feelings of _____</i>	<i>Unrestrained excitement</i>
<i>Gentle</i>	<i>Vibrant</i>
<i>Glowing smile</i>	<i>Weary</i>
<i>Gnarly hands</i>	<i>Weather</i>



# A Before-and-After Example

**Let's Try It!**

# Simple Template for Moving Your Story from Boring 2 Brilliant

Let me tell you about:

---

---

---

---

*(Fill in their name, age, and a few descriptive details about them.)*

His/her life was:

---

---

---

---

*(Share specific details about how they felt about their choices, unasked for situation, health issue, etc. You get the idea.) Special note: Stay away from jargon and "grant-writer" speak.*

[NAME]

made his/her way to us because:

---

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*(Share how the person found you or your programs. Be specific. A helicopter didn't drop them off. Maybe ten other homeless shelters turned them down or their doctor or landlord referred them to you.)*

## Simple Template for Moving Your Story from Boring 2 Brilliant (continued)

Here's how our organization helped:

---

---

---

---

---

*(Be specific here. As you share examples of your work or the impact your staff has had be sure to choose engaging language and share what the person in your story felt about your support/work/program.)*

Because of our work: \_\_\_\_\_ is now: \_\_\_\_\_

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*(What are the exact results AND transformations your main character is experiencing? Remember: even if you are serving the environment or an advocacy organization you are still talking about one person whose life is different because of your work.)*

This is just one of thousands of stories I could share with you about how we:

---

---

---

---

---

*(Explain briefly how you save or change lives.)*

**Let's Share & Polish.**

# Look & listen for:

## A RELATABLE PROTAGONIST

That means an individual, not a group or institution! The protagonist has to be facing something with which we can relate. What unites us are the trials and tribulations of being human.



## LOTS OF CONFLICT

Conflict is story oxygen. The more conflict, the more engaging the story.



## A LOATHSOME VILLAIN

Name names, or make clear what tough obstacle is in the way of our hero.



## TELLING DETAILS

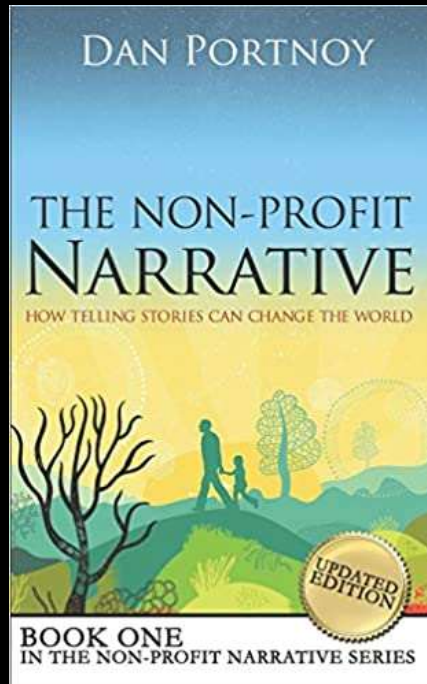
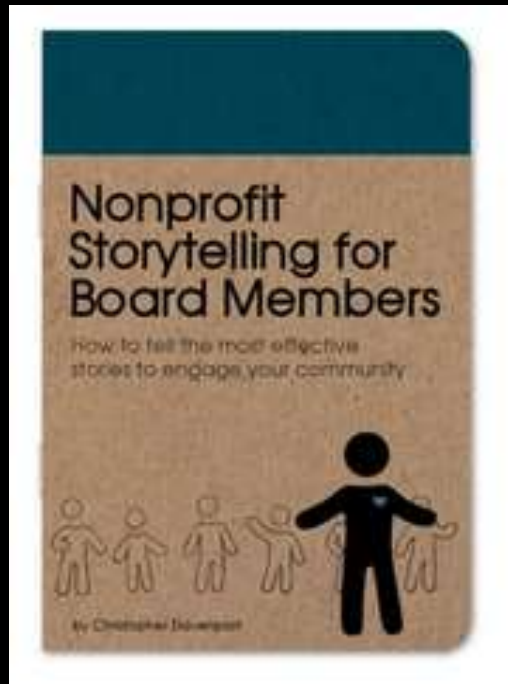
If a story element can't connect with one of five senses, be suspicious of it.



# Questions?

**Write down your  
2 next steps...**





<https://nonprofitstorytellingconference.com/free-book-npstory-boards/>

<https://www.amazon.com/Non-Profit-Narrative-Telling-Stories-Change/dp/0615599796>

THANK YOU  
for the  
IMPORTANT WORK  
you do in OUR communities!

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