

THE ART OF STORYTELLING: GABRIELLE DOLAN

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“A lot of the time managers are rolling out a new strategy or find themselves having to deal with the complexities of communicating significant change to their employees - the best way to engage or resonate with the audience is by incorporating personal stories.”

In this interview with well-known author Gabrielle Dolan of Thought Leaders Global, we explore the way using personal stories to illustrate a point can enhance your business communication.

Michael Corleone, the main protagonist in *The Godfather*, made famous the phrase: “It’s nothing personal [Sonny], it’s strictly business.” This piece of wisdom has long since been used as justification for separating emotions from necessary business matters and actions. Using a story to illustrate a point is a fitting preface to a discussion on the power of storytelling we had with Gabrielle Dolan.

Throughout her career, Gabrielle identified that effective communication is one of the keys to personal success. And so for the last 15 years she has managed her own business, which at the core is focused on helping individuals and leaders to master business communication. Gabrielle says, “It’s important to understand and immerse yourself in communication.” However, that alone won’t make someone a more engaging and inspiring speaker.

You then need to learn how to share your ideas or instructions in a way that is impactful to your audience,” she continues.

The best way to do this, Gabrielle believes, is by incorporating storytelling into communications.

“A lot of the time managers are rolling out a new strategy, or find themselves having to deal with the complexities of communicating significant change to their employees. Using personal stories to get the message across is often a great way to resonate with people,” she says.

As the pace of life continues to get busier, we find ourselves in a constant battle to be more efficient with the little time we have. In parallel, the rapid advancement in technology is changing the way we work, do business, communicate and live. With this comes new tech-terminology, often not widely understood, and so we naturally condense it into an acronym mainly to make our communication seem more efficient. The problem is, however, “when you use acronyms or jargon, you can actually create a disconnect with your audience if they aren’t familiar with what it means. Rather than speeding up the flow of communication, you may in fact be slowing it down as the listener tries to decipher what you’re referring to...”

For communicators, the key is to shift the focus to the listener and moderate the language or style of communication used to suit them. Lawyers have an added layer of complexity to be mindful of – their use of ‘legal language’ and shorthand is difficult for non-lawyers to understand.



“A great communicator, regardless of their profession, needs to be able to un-complicate the complicated.”

To help individuals enhance their communication, Gabrielle has written a book, *Stories for Work*, which breaks down the four different types of stories individuals should incorporate in their ‘bag of tricks’.

1. **Triumph:** These are stories of success and achievement, and may be used to inspire an audience or to demonstrate that in order to achieve success and to be triumphant we must often overcome challenges and adversity along the way – but it’s the reward at the end that makes it worth it.
2. **Tragedy:** These may be stories of regrettable events that either you may have caused or had happen to you. And they may be useful when you need to communicate a message about caution, the importance of preparing or anticipating undesirable outcomes. Or they may be used to personalise your character by opening up and sharing a time in life when you were vulnerable.
3. **Tension:** These are stories about times when your values or obligations were challenged, causing you to feel uneasy and perhaps forcing you to make a choice or compromise. These stories may be used to communicate your values, but also to give examples of how to overcome adversity in moments that have created tension. They are used to encourage the listener to rise above.
4. **Transition:** These stories explain times of significant change in life. They may help to describe your personal history, reinforce the importance of maintaining performance during change, highlighting the benefits of a future state, and reinforcing the opportunities that come as a result of change.

As an illustration of the profound impact a story can have in a professional setting, Gabrielle talks about a woman who, like many, always ignored or slept through the safety advice on aeroplanes until one occasion when her flight hit high winds and had difficulty landing. When the emergency plan needed to be actioned, commotion and panic sounded as passengers were confused with what to do first.

Gabrielle encouraged the woman to use this experience as a story to aid and enhance her communication when needing to reinforce the importance of paying attention and being alert at all times, even when things seem uninteresting. In isolation, that message may have gone unnoticed; however, by including a personal story, the audience is more likely to recall the point being made as a result of engaging with the story.

“Stories have a way of crossing cultural boundaries,” she says. “It’s really important, especially when you’re dealing with a technical subject like law. It helps to make things easier to understand, and easier to recall. The trick is to keep it concise, yet engaging and to have a few different types of stories up your sleeve you can call upon.”

As well as being an author, Gabrielle is now an Australian and New Zealand partner of Thought Leaders Global, where she uses her specific skills in thought leadership and using storytelling to work with various organisations and give them a competitive edge in their respective spheres of expertise.

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