



---

## RYP QUARTERLY

---

### Storytelling - The Ultimate Measure of Culture and Brand *WORDS ARE HOW WE THINK BUT STORIES ARE HOW WE LINK*

*By David Stewart Principal RYP International*



***Storytelling is the oldest and most effective way to pass on history, traditions, rituals, and wisdom.***

*In this edition we explore the power and important role storytelling plays in shaping a team culture, defining the essence of a leader, or indeed building the brand of any organisation. Research shows that 90% of people believe the story of a perfect stranger rather than any formal advertising campaign or marketing collateral. The test of any culture is whether there is a ONE MESSAGE MANY VOICES response from staff, colleagues, peers, customers, suppliers, and other key stakeholders. Marrying brand values with team values is crucial to ensure aligned message and decision making with front line staff. Today technology provides immediate access to the service experience people have with organisations through apps and online forums and the like. Often repeated stories will paint a clear picture of the culture any organisation. The key is whether staff and clients are being listened to. This is much different from conducting a survey! As Aristotle said all those years ago....  
***“We are what we repeatedly do.... Excellence then is a habit not an act!”****



## INTRODUCTION:

**Story Telling** is the window to the soul of any team culture and brand. **Story telling is the most powerful and authentic method to describe a team or the essence of any leader.**

**Stories** are the fundamental link between human expectations and experiences. It has been the method of passing on experiences, memories, and observations since the dawn of humankind. **Stories** of how teams and leaders adapt, collaborate, and innovate ultimately turn into **stories** of their performance, impact or achievements.

The brand values of any organisation (formal or informal) are played out by how team members act and behave in any given circumstance and will be shared through the **story telling** of staff, customers and colleagues. No advertising tag lines, jingles, team charters or mission statements will alter the **story** of an experience anyone has with a team or organisation. **It is the experiences people have and the memories they leave which shape the stories people share.**

Organisations seemed to be besotted with hard data customer or staff feedback scores, but often fail to hear and understand the **story** behind the score, which is more important.

**Story telling** is how people learn, share and pass on their wisdom, whether it be verbal, written, electronic or via social media. Think Trip Advisor! It is a modern platform to share stories.

*"The world is shaped by two things: the stories told and the memories they leave behind."  
- Vera Nazarian*

## STORY TELLING LINKS:

Story telling is powerful. It forms the basis of how any team or leader is described. It goes beyond labels. It goes to the heart of what people observe, feel and experience. 90% of people will believe the story of a perfect stranger rather than any formal advertising campaign.

## THERE ARE THREE KEY STORY-TELLING APPLICATIONS:

### 1. Customers / Clients Stories:

The stories of customer / client experiences become a moment of truth. How staff act, behave or respond to any circumstance reflects the team culture and the processes of the organisation. The customer experiences a person has will be played out in the story they tell others (good, bad or indifferent). A poor experience will create an attitude of indifference and a tendency to look for fault and to exaggerate their **negative experience through their storytelling to others.**



## 2. Leadership Stories:

Story telling is central to a leader's ability to coach, inspire, sell a compelling vision for the future, and promote an authentic point of difference. Any leader must be able to author, sell and tell their quest on a repeated and consistent basis. **This can only be done by telling a story**, which is authentic, believed, relevant and within context to the team. If not, it will be ignored or dismissed by the team as non-authentic. A leader must be able to shape and coach the desired performance of any team by linking good practice with the **story** of good performance. **If they cannot author their story, then they do not have a capacity to lead.**

## 3. Staff and Teamwork:

Good performance can only be achieved if it can be described and linked to the individual. The first attribute of a united team is an agreed understanding of what excellent performance looks and feels like. It must link to every individual in the team. Without this, there can be no sense of belonging or engagement. How a team member personifies how and what they do can only be done through their **story telling**. **One Story, Many Voices.**

***We cannot think without language, we cannot process experience without story".***

*– Christina Baldwin*

## THE SPEED OF STORY SHARING

**Technology now allows** customers the ability to share the **story** of their experience immediately, through social media forums, blogs, and apps as well as face to face dialogue. Consistent themes are quickly picked up, believed, and shared, ultimately describing an organisations brand. "Disingenuous spin" is seen through very quickly and often becomes damaging to the brand of a leader, team, or organisation.

## AGILITY TO TRENDS:

**Recurring stories will reveal a trend.** Large data driven analytical research to customer or staff satisfaction is often slow to pick up trends and feedback, and often misses the immediacy of what is happening. A score out of ten does not provide the story behind why they gave the score. The recurring language and stories provided by staff and consumers provides a clear window to current performance. As the old saying goes, *"you don't need to go out and stand in the rain to realise it is raining, you just need to look out the window or ask someone!"*

**Organisations that focus on hearing and sharing the stories of their staff and customers tend to pick up trends on performance levels more quickly**, thus allowing them the opportunity to act, respond, and innovate in a manner which is agile and united and are more likely to prevail.

***"Stories give colour to black and white information".***

*– Todd Stocker*



## FOUR STEPS TO SHAPING CULTURES AND BUILDING BRANDS THROUGH STORYTELLING:

### 1. Lead and Stimulate Stories:

This is the first steppingstone. Stimulate staff, team members and colleagues **to tell stories**, by **telling your own story** as a leader.

- What are you hoping to achieve in the next three – five years (your watch)
- Why is this compelling.
- What does success look like today and in the future in the eyes of staff, customers, suppliers, partners?
- What are customers saying (what we do well, what we could improve, what requires urgent action, what is annoying them)
- Ask the same questions to colleagues and team members and engage them to find out what they are hearing (share their stories)
- Stop & really listen. Conduct listening posts to hear stories (not surveys).

**A leader must role model, stimulate, and engage staff to demonstrate the importance of authoring, capturing, and sharing stories. Storytelling is the medium for learning. Without feedback via stories told, no learning can take place.**

***“In the end only stories survive”.***

*– Alexis Smith*



## 2. Encourage the Search for Stories:

- Drive campaigns with your staff and colleagues to look for and listen to stories.
- Ask customers, suppliers, and colleagues to share their experience with you (tell you not others)
- Encourage different mediums for staff to look for stories (face to face, phone rooms, networking events, social media, blogs, and feedback platforms)
- Treat any story as good feedback (it is how you learn)
- Ask staff to share their story of the week (good, bad, or indifferent)
- Search for the stories and experiences of competitors, for in this is your quest for a point of difference.
- Listen to and report back on repeated stories.

***“Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards”***  
– Soren Kierkegaard

## 3. Showcase and Recognise Stories:

- It is crucial to share and recognise **stories** you have heard.
- Put context around the importance of the **stories**. This will help cut through and define good practice and poor practice.
- **Showcase the stories** of where staff have shown good judgement and initiative, this will help encourage others to act the right way.
- **Reward those who share stories** with compliments.

***“Storytelling is a form of history. It goes from one generation to another”.***  
– Suds Terkel





#### 4. Invest in Story Sharing:

- **Communicate and share your stories** in a meaningful way via:
  - Newsletters
  - Blogs
  - Website
  - Social Media
  - Video's / You Tube
  - Books
  - Magazine articles
- Do this in an authentic manner, not commercial spin. It needs to be believed.
- Keep the stories ongoing.
- Just when you get sick of saying it, some people are just starting to get it

**“Marketing is no longer about the stuff that you make, but about the stories you tell”**

*- Seth Godin*

#### **FINALLY:**

Things worth telling take time! **Stories without context or real-life examples are just empty spin. Story Telling** is the difference between reliability and hollow promises. The stories told reflect the experiences, impact and memories people have. **Story Telling showcases how the talk is walked. Story Telling** builds trust, belief and credibility in any promise or commitment. **No story, no integrity!**

#### ***Facta Non Verba – Deeds Not Words***

*David Stewart (B Ed, Grad Dip Sports Science, master's Business Leadership) David is the Founder & Principle of RYP International – A Coaching & Advisory Practice. He has worked globally with organisations, their leaders, and teams to develop their capability and culture to maximise performance.*

