



# Storytelling: Advocating for Extension

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## **Learning Goals:**

- Identify three reasons for telling stories to advocate for Extension
- Identify six types of stories
- Develop a story to advocate for Extension

## **Advance Preparation:**

- Review lesson plan
- Review handouts, PowerPoint slides and activities
- Review and utilize companion pieces "Building Partnerships and Communicating with Policymakers" and "Understanding Adult Learners" for enhanced advocacy efforts
- Make copies of handouts and evaluation form

## **Materials Needed:**

- Computer and projector
- PowerPoint presentation
- Handouts
- Pens
- Ball of yarn

## **Time Needed:**

- Preparation: 2 hours
- Presentation: 1 hour to 1½ hours

## BACKGROUND

Tell me a story! Stories are one way you can market and advocate for the Cooperative Extension Service. Since everyone can relate to a story, they are a marvelous form of public communication (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). A good story can catch your attention, educate, inspire, entertain or influence (Harris & Barnes, 2005). When you speak for Extension, a story based on your knowledge and personal experience can build a bridge to the main purpose of your message and help you develop a relationship with the listener.

Cultural traditions and lessons have been passed from generation to generation and from culture to culture through storytelling for centuries. As long as people have had language, there have been stories (Harris & Barnes, 2006). Stories are simple, timeless and appeal to people regardless of age, culture, or profession (Harris & Barnes, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

Storytelling comes naturally to people. It is how we share with others what we see, feel, and sense. Stories can be powerful, since they are often based on our opinions, life experiences, values and beliefs (Boleman & Deal, 2003; Glaser, 2005; Simmons, 2001). We develop meaning through our conversations with others, and at the center of most conversations are stories. When we tell another person about our successes and failures, we invite them into our story and our view of reality.

Research studies from speech communication and social psychology confirm the value of storytelling and the influence stories have on the listener. Speech communication studies have found that stories engage a listener as they actively think about the meaning of the story and try to make sense of it based on their own life experiences. Because the active thinking process the story creates is so engaging, it grabs the listeners' attention and holds their interest. Social psychology suggests that stories, analogies, and metaphors are a convincing way to communicating complex ideas, as opposed to summaries, facts, and policies which may be abstract and uninteresting (Harris, & Barnes, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

*"Tell me a fact and I'll learn. Tell me the truth and I'll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever."*

**- Indian Proverb**

Adult learning theory and practice contributes additional support to the value of storytelling by suggesting that adults retain new knowledge longer when they have both a cognitive and an emotional experience while learning (Hernandez, 2008). According to Simmons (2001) genuine influence can be gained through meaningful stories. A story allows the listener to create meaning, draw conclusions, form a mental map to establish what is important, or determine how things are done in an organization. Ultimately, a story lets a listener decide for him or herself (Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Senge, et al, 1994; Simmons, 2001). Meaningful stories may also inspire hope and belief and provide comfort, reassurance, and direction (Boleman & Deal, 2003; Glaser,

2005; Simmons, 2001). Stories are persuasive and may communicate the point when nothing else works (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

Storytelling can play an influential role in organizations and may help organizations to (Boleman & Deal, 2003; Harris & Barnes, 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 2002):

- Pass on organizational traditions
- Train, mentor and coach employees or volunteers
- Empower and energize people
- Recognize accomplishments
- Spread the word
- Have fun
- Recruit people
- Market and advocate for the organization
- Develop better managers
- Introduce people
- Start a meeting
- Illustrate a concept
- Get a point across
- Begin a conversation
- Move an organization toward change

A good story may convey one of these common storytelling themes (Boleman & Deal, 2003; Harris & Barnes, 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 2002):

- Mistakes and failures
- Unexpected opportunities
- Risks and rewards
- Choices and consequences
- Lessons learned
- Obstacles and challenges
- Advice from a mentor
- Someone who inspired me

Some of the criteria for an effective story are (Boleman & Deal, 2003; Harris & Barnes, 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 2002):

- Tell something about you or your organization that the listeners' may not know
- Have a clear and persuasive message
- Avoid content that is arrogant or self-serving
- Avoid sarcasm and negative comments
- Avoid preaching or talking down
- Include an identifiable concept
- Relate to a current issue
- Communicate empathy or understanding
- Start a conversation
- Include humor

## **Six Types of Stories to Influence Others**

Kouzes and Posner (2002) suggested that good stories tell a personal story. When you tell a story, tell about something you know or that gives an example to which both you and the listener can relate. The most effective story is about a real person, has a strong sense of time and place, and is told in colorful, animated language in first person. These are six stories that may help you influence others (Simmons, 2001):

### ***“Who I Am” Stories***

A “Who I Am” story is often personal help the listener see who you are. A funny or humorous story is one way to help people relax so they can listen to what you want to tell them. However, you don’t always have to tell a personal story to connect with the listener. You can use a fable, a parable, a current event, a historical tale, or a story you heard from a friend (Simmons, 2001).

### ***“Why I Am Here” Stories***

When you are marketing or advocating for Extension people want to know, what is in it for **you** before you tell them what is in it for **them**. A “Why I Am Here” story allows you to explain your goals in a way that makes sense to the listener. This type of story provides a believable reason for your good intentions. Consider this example:

When I do training, especially a multiple-day training, I want to challenge the learners to be responsible for their own learning and to maximize their investment of time. One way I do this is to tell a story about my father that answers both the “who I am” and “why I am here” questions. I grew up in a household that placed top priority on education. My parents were both educators. My mother was an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher and my father was a high school counselor. As I entered my sophomore year and my sister began her freshman year in college, my parents were beginning to enjoy their empty nest status when Mother was thrown from one of the Tennessee Walking Horses that she had ridden all her life. The fall broke her collarbone. My parents had a clear division of responsibility: Mother took care of all the inside chores and Daddy took care of all the outside chores. All of a sudden, their couple dynamics shifted. Mother couldn’t clean, cook, wash clothes or bathe by herself. Daddy had to help her with everything. During this time he discovered that he liked to cook. I would come home from college and there would be cookbooks stacked everywhere. One day I asked, “Daddy, what are you going to do with all these cookbooks? You’ll never use all of them.” He told me, “If I find one recipe in each cookbook that I use all the time then it is worth my investment.” I’ve never forgotten this simple statement because he pointed out to me that everything I learn may not be useful. However, it is my responsibility to find the things in life that will be valuable. I usually follow up this story by challenging the learner to find at least one thing each day of the training that they will use every day in their professional or personal life.

### **“My Vision” Stories**

To truly influence a listener, they must understand what is in it for them. What do you want from them and what will they get out of it? What is your vision? You may choose to tell this story with clear facts and figures, but it may not compel the listener to do what you are asking them to do – whether it is to volunteer for Extension, donate resources, or simply to support Extension. Tell a story that paints a picture for the listener. This story may be the most difficult story to tell.

### **“Teaching” Stories**

This type of story addresses “what” and “how” to do something, such as learning a new skill. If you tell a story about the best volunteer you know or the best Extension supporter you know it allows the listener to think about what they might do or how they might do something in a similar situation. A “teaching” story allows a listener to think about how they might use a new skill (Simmons, 2001).

### **“Values in Action” Stories**

The best way to teach is by example, and people learn best from experience. When you can provide neither an example nor an experience, a story may be the next most effective approach. Stories are one way a listener may learn from the experiences of others (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Tell a story that expresses your values and demonstrates your credibility.

### **“I know what you are thinking” Stories**

When you do your homework on a group or person you would like to influence, you have the opportunity to identify any concerns they may have regarding your message. If you can name their concerns first or let them know that “I know what you are thinking,” you may be able to win them over or diffuse their concerns before you get to your main message.

### **Storytelling Tips**

Tell the stories you already love to tell. Telling a story in an informal setting may be the best way to begin developing your Extension story. Informal storytelling is a good way to practice before you tell a story to a larger group.

If you are not comfortable with your story, tell a story you heard from a friend or colleague. Be careful to protect the identity of the people in your story unless you have permission to use their name. Be sure to give credit to the original storyteller.

Stories are often used to establish trusting relationship with the listener. Be honest when you tell a story. Never lie - trust occurs when the listener believes that you are telling the truth.

A story can express a range of emotion – joy, sorrow, anger, hurt, humor – be sincere about feelings.

A good story has three parts – the beginning, the middle, and the end. A strong ending to your story will help you transition to your main message.

Children's books, fables, fairy tales, parables, current events, and historical tales provide good material for storytelling, if you don't have a personal story. Learn the story by heart and relate it to your main message.

Visualize your story. See each scene in your story as if you are watching a movie and tell the story as you see it.

Help the listener visualize the story by incorporating the five senses into your story – sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch.

Make eye contact with your listeners and gesture naturally. Observe your listeners for feedback and use it to adjust your story.

Pauses are powerful. Practice the pauses in your story so they become part of the narrative flow.

Speak clearly, but loudly enough to be heard. Breathe normally. If you are nervous, take a deep breath or two before beginning.

Practice telling your story out loud. The more often you tell your story the more natural-sounding it becomes.

Use a story only when it is appropriate. A story may not always fit a large or very formal setting.

Remember the purpose for telling your story. The listener needs to know that the story relates to part of a larger message. A story creates a bridge to the main message.

## **INTEREST APPROACH**

### **Part I - My Story (2 to 5 minutes)**

Begin the lesson by telling your Extension advocacy story. Here is a story that is a great example. This story is a great example of the type of story that can be used to influence partners, key decision makers, funders, or individuals thinking about participating in an Extension education program. The story, as told by a county educator, is very compelling. Just imagine the power of the story when told by Gloria.

## Empowering Advisory Board Members: Storytelling

Gloria O'Hara has had an immune deficiency disorder since her pre-mature birth, nearly 40 years ago. As a result, it is risky for her to be out in public, especially during cold and flu season. She makes periodic trips to the Mayo Clinic for various kinds of treatments. At five feet four inches, she weighed 89 pounds. Gloria, with the encouragement of her mother, enrolled in ReShape Yourself in 2008. Each week she did a home study of the lesson offered by the Cooperative Extension Service as part of a ReShape Yourself class. As a participant in the 14-week Extension program she received an exercise band and a pedometer, and learned about good nutrition using The Food Guide Pyramid, daily physical activity, and strength exercises. Today Gloria weighs 102 pounds, up 13 pounds from when she began the program. While she was gaining to a healthy weight, she says that her husband was losing his extra pounds – all due to following the Extension recommendations she learned during the ReShape Yourself Program.

-Told by Joyce Whittington, County Extension Agent – Family and Consumer Sciences

Start your story with, “Let me tell you a story....”

### **Part II - Tell A Story (15 minutes)**

Using an activity to begin the storytelling lesson will help prepare your group to tell their own stories. A storytelling activity may help the group laugh and relax, as well as jump-start creativity. Select one of the following storytelling activities to get the stories started (Evans, 2009):

The one word story - Everyone sits in a circle. The first person begins the story with a single word, and each person in the circle contributes a single word in turn until a complete story has been told. This works best with large groups.

The one sentence story - Everyone sits in a circle. The first person begins the story with a single sentence, and each person in the circle contributes a single sentence in turn until a complete story has been told. This works best with medium-size groups.

The story web - Everyone sits in a circle. The first person holds a ball of yarn and begins telling a story by contributing several sentences (a paragraph or so). Then holding on to the end of the yarn, s/he passes the ball to someone across the circle whose turn it is to contribute the next paragraph, hold on to the yarn, and pass the ball to the next teller. Continue until a complete story is told and everyone is holding one or more parts of the yarn, forming a web that connects the storytellers to each other.

Whose story is it? - Form teams of three tellers. Each teller in the group shares a short (1-2 minute) personal story. Each group then chooses one of the stories for all three tellers to tell. Reassemble the group, and one team at a time, each teller tells the story as if it happened to him or her. The whole group then must decide who the story really belongs to. The real question behind this activity is: does the story belong to the person to whom it happened or to the person who can tell the best story?

## LESSON

- Use the PowerPoint “Storytelling: Advocating for Extension” with notes to guide presentations.
- Introduce the lesson by telling a meaningful story about your Extension experience (Interest Approach – Part I and Slide 2).
- Review the learning goals (Slide 3).
- Select one of the four storytelling activities to engage the learners (Interest Approach – Part II).
- Discuss the value of storytelling (Slide 4).
- Distribute and briefly discuss the following handouts:
  - “How Storytelling Helps an Organization” (Slide 5 and Handout 1),
  - “Storytelling Themes” (Slide 6 and Handout 2),
  - “Storytelling Criteria.” (Slide 7 and 8 and Handout 3).
- Review “Types of Stories” handout. Ask learners for other ideas and discuss. (Slide 9 and Handout 4)
- Share the storytelling tips (Handout 5) and ask learners for their ideas and discuss (Slide 10 & 11)
- Conduct the “Developing Your Extension Advocacy Story” learning activity. Select all or part of the activity, depending on the amount of time allotted for the lesson (Learning Application; Slide 12 and Handout 5).
- Summarize lesson. (Slide 13).

## LEARNING APPLICATION

### Developing Your Extension Advocacy Story – 40 minutes

This learning activity includes sharing with a partner, individual brainstorming and writing, and group storytelling. The purpose of the activity is to help the learners begin to develop and practice a story they can use to advocate for Extension. The story may be developed to share with an individual, a small group, and/or a large group. The best stories are based on personal experience.

The first part of the activity, sharing a story about someone who influenced you and/or about how you became an Extension advisory leader, are intended to help each person find their personal story and establish a foundation for an Extension advocacy story. The second part of the activity is to help the learners begin to formalize their story and the third part of the activity is designed to help the learner practice telling their story.



Part I A - Share a Story About Someone Who Influenced You:

- Ask everyone in the group to find a partner and sit with them
- Ask each person to share the following information with their partner. Allow about five or six minutes for the partners to share their story (approximately two to three minutes each):

Think about experiences you have had with someone who wanted to influence you – boss, co-worker, salesperson, volunteer, minister, consultant, Extension educator. Identify a person who failed to influence you and a person who succeeded at influencing you. How connected did you feel to each? Describe what caused you to feel connected to this person. Did you feel connected because this person influenced you, or did they influence you because you felt connected to the person? What gave you confidence one, but not the other?

Part I B - Share a Story About How You Became an Extension Advisory Leader:

- Ask everyone in the group to find a partner and sit with them. They may use the same partner for this part of the activity.
- Ask each person to share the following information with their partner. Allow about five or six minutes for the partners to share their story (approximately two to three minutes each):

Think about how you first became involved with Extension as an adult. What or who sold you on Extension? Who or what influenced you to become an advisory leader for Extension? Think about who you are, why you are here, what your vision for Extension may be, how you can tell a story to teach something, or the values that makes you a credible Extension advisory leader.

**Tips for Using this with your Council**

- If limited for time, ask the learners to share only one story with their partner. You may give the learners a choice. They may tell a story about someone who influenced them or about how they became involved with Extension or you may decide which type of story they share.

Part II - Writing Your Extension Story

- Ask each learner to think about a personal story they can tell to influence others to think positively about Extension.
- Provide each learner with a copy of the Storytelling Worksheet (Handout 5)
- Ask the learners to use worksheet to develop a rough draft of their story (10 minutes).

- If the learners shared a story about how they became involved with Extension or how they became an Extension advisory leader with a partner earlier, encourage them to use this as the basis for writing their story.

### Part III – Telling Your Extension Story

- Divide everyone into groups of three to five people.
- Ask each person in the group to tell their Extension story based on the Storytelling Worksheet (approximately 2 minutes per person).
- Each group then chooses one story and one person from the group to share the story with the entire group.
- Reassemble everyone and ask each group to tell their best story (10 minutes).

As an advisory leader, you may be asked to speak or to serve as an advocate for Extension educational programs. Telling a meaningful story about your Extension experience is one approach to telling others how and why you support Extension. When you understand the reasons for telling stories and when you know what types of stories to tell you can begin to develop your personal Extension advocacy story.

## **REFERENCES**

Boleman, L.G. and Deal, T.E. (2003). *Reframing organizations: artistry, choice, and leadership*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Glaser, J.E. (2005). *Creating WE*. Avon, MA: Platinum Press.

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Hernandez, L.A. (2008). What a story! Sharing stories for effective learning and training. *Exchange*, 181, pp 55 – 56.

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Harris, J. and Barnes, B.K. (2005). Leadership storytelling. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 38(7), pp 350 – 353.

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## **HANDOUTS**

- How Storytelling Helps an Organization - Handout 1
- Storytelling Themes – Handout 2
- Storytelling Criteria – Handout 3
- Six Types of Stories – Handout 4
- Storytelling Worksheet – Handout 5

## **POWERPOINTS**

- Storytelling: Advocating for Extension

## **REVIEWERS**

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## How Storytelling Helps an Organization

**Storytelling can play an influential role** in organizations and helps organizations to:

- Pass on organizational traditions
- Train, mentor and coach employees or volunteers
- Empower and energize people
- Recognize accomplishments
- Spread the word
- Have fun
- Recruit people
- Market the organization
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# Storytelling Themes

Several storytelling themes can help you develop meaningful stories designed to inspire and influence. Here are a few:

- Unexpected opportunities
- Risks and rewards
- Choices and consequences
- Lessons learned
- Obstacles and challenges
- Mistakes and failures
- Advice from a mentor
- Someone who inspired me

## References

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# Storytelling Criteria

Some of the criteria that may help you develop a meaningful story include:

- Tell something about you or your organization that the listeners' may not know
- Have a clear and persuasive message
- Avoid content that is arrogant or self-serving
- Avoid sarcasm and negative comments
- Avoid preaching
- Include an identifiable concept
- Relate to a current issue
- Communicate empathy or understanding
- Start a conversation
- Include humor

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# Types of Stories

## ***“Who I Am” Stories***

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## ***“Why I Am Here” Stories***

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## ***“My Vision” Stories***

To truly influence a listener, they must understand what is in it for them. What do you want from them and what will they get out of it? What is your vision? You may choose to tell this story with clear facts and figures, but it may not compel the listener to do what you are asking them to do – whether it is to volunteer for Extension, donate resources, or simply to support Extension. Tell a story that paints a picture for the listener. This story may be the most difficult story to tell.

## ***“Teaching” Stories***

This type of story addresses “what” and “how” to do something, such as learning a new skill. If you tell a story about the best volunteer you know or the best Extension supporter you know it allows the listener to think about what they might do or how they might do something in a similar situation. A “teaching” story allows a listener to think about how they might use a new skill (Simmons, 2001).

## ***“Values in Action” Stories***

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## Storytelling Tips

- Tell the stories you already love to tell.
- Tell a story you heard from a friend or colleague. Give credit to the original storyteller.
- Books, fables, fairy tales, parables, current events or historical tales are good material for storytelling.
- Be honest when you tell a story.
- Be sincere about feelings and emotions.
- A good story has three parts – the beginning, the middle, and the end.
- Visualize your story and tell it as you see it.
- Incorporate the five senses into your story – sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch.
- Make eye contact with your listeners and gesture naturally.
- Pauses are powerful.
- Speak clearly, but loudly enough to be heard. Breathe normally.
- Practice telling your story out loud.
- Use a story only when it is appropriate.
- Use your story to create a bridge to the main message.



# Storytelling Worksheet

Story Title \_\_\_\_\_

What type of story will you tell: a “who I am” story, a “why I am here” story, a “my vision” story, a “teaching” story, a “values in action” story, or a “I know what you are thinking” story?

How does it begin?

What problem has to be solved or what is the purpose of the story?

List the sequence of events in outline form.

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.
- f.
- g.
- h.

Describe the most exciting part of the story.

How does it end?

Are there any repeated words or phrases that are important to memorize?

What will you say to end the story?

## References

Alachua County Public Schools Media Services (2009). *Story work sheet*. Downloaded March 18, 2009 from [www.sbac.edu/~media/story\\_worksheet.htm](http://www.sbac.edu/~media/story_worksheet.htm).

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