Using Story to Sell Ideas

WORKBOOK
Whether you’re working for a large corporation or a small startup, everyone at some point in their work life will need to sell an idea to the people who have the power to help you make it real. You can use story to create an emotional tether between that person or persons, but it means identifying to whom you are selling your idea. Be specific, identify them by name or by role.

Who is the audience to whom you are selling your idea?

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A story isn’t just a recounting of events; story has structure, evokes emotional response, and resolves conflict. But not just any conflict, your idea has to resolve the conflicts that your audience cares about most if you want their interest piqued. When those conflicts are resolved, transformation takes place. Communicating that transformation is paramount to embedding your idea in their hearts and minds.

Conflict is the lynchpin to storybuilding. A story has to have something to overcome, because humans are born problem solvers and it’s how we assign value to something. To discover the conflicts your audience experiences, answer the following questions.

What does your audience care most about?

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QUESTION 2.1.2
What conflicts do they need to overcome in their job in general?

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QUESTION 2.1.3
What would make their work/life better?

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QUESTION 2.1.4
How does your idea help them overcome these problems?

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TRANSFORMATION

While conflict is what marks a story, it doesn’t make that story necessarily compelling. Transformation does. When conflict is overcome and something transforms, that’s when story becomes personal to a listener, because everyone can relate to it. To understand the transformation that your idea will initiate, answer the following questions.

QUESTION 2.2.1
When your idea is accepted, what will change in your audience’s world?

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QUESTION 2.2.2
Who stands to benefit most from your idea being accepted?

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Human-Centered Story Design is just that: building your story from the human up. To do this, you need to uncover what moves your audience specifically. Transformation delivers a natural, emotional response to a story, but every person responds differently to a range of emotional triggers. To help understand what moves your audience specifically, let’s explore their loves and fears.

What does your audience love? Every person has specific things, scenarios, experiences, and states-of-being that they love. They’ll spend time, money, and resources to experience them more. For your specific audience, answer the following questions.

**QUESTION 3.1.1**

What does your audience love, professionally speaking?
QUESTION 3.1.2

What does your audience love, personally speaking?

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QUESTION 3.1.3

How does your idea fit in with or give them what they love?

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<th>QUESTION 3.2.1</th>
<th>What does your audience fear, professional speaking?</th>
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<th>QUESTION 3.2.2</th>
<th>What does your audience fear, personally speaking?</th>
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QUESTION 3.2.3

How does your idea alleviate their fears?

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A story arc is an outline to a story. It contains story beats, the major points along the arc. It’s called an arc because a story outline always has a shape. Since story is linear, we can track the growth of a person or situation, we can assign conflict, and we can mark transformation. To use an arc as the foundation to your story, you need to first choose the most appropriate arc, then fill in the points along the arc with your story beats.

On the following pages are three simple, 3-part story arcs. Choose the arc you feel is most appropriate to the story you are telling, then answer the questions provided. Each response becomes a beat to the story.
STORY ARC ONE

QUESTION 4.1.1  CONFLICT  >  What is a problem your audience experiences?

QUESTION 4.1.2  SOLUTION  >  How does your idea solve that problem?

QUESTION 4.1.3  RESOLUTION  >  What is the resulting human outcome of solving that problem? (how the idea gives them something they love or alleviates something they fear)
STORY ARC TWO

**QUESTION 4.2.1**

**IGNORANCE** ➔ What is something that your audience does not know (or gets wrong) that your idea will illuminate?

**QUESTION 4.2.2**

**DISCOVERY** ➔ What is the key insight your idea will uncover?

**QUESTION 4.2.3**

**UNDERSTANDING** ➔ Now that this is known, how does that change what your audience can do?
QUESTION 4.3.1

**DESIRE** > What is something your audience is desperate to accomplish?

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QUESTION 4.3.2

**EXPERIENCE** > How does your idea lead to an action that can make that happen?

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QUESTION 4.3.3

**TRANSFORMATION** > Once it happens, what will be forever changed moving forward?

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Crafting a story is only one half of the ideaselling equation. The other half is in the delivery. In most corporate settings, you’ll be communicating your idea in presentation deck form, but it helps to have the narrative expressed textually so you can tailor the correct output to the opportunity.

Following the outline you created in the Story Arc exercise, write out your story at the following lengths.

Write a one page version of your story

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PROMPT 5.1.1 CONT.

One page version of your story continued

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PROMPT 5.1.2
Write a one paragraph version of your story

PROMPT 5.1.3
Write a one sentence version of your story

PRESENTATION DECK FORM
Most business presentations include a presentation deck. Using the story beats you generated in the Story Arc exercise, create a single slide for each story beat. Then add transitionary slides that move the listener between those story beats. Once you have your outline in place, fill in each slide with the content that satisfies its purpose.

Fill in slide outline (with story beats at top) on the following page.