**Basic Storytelling Structure for Subject Matter Expert Speakers**

As a subject matter expert speaker, you’re typically going to be telling two types of stories.

1. **The Hero’s Journey**

In the Hero’s Journey, you are the protagonist, or the central character in the story. The story is all about you. It’s about the transformation that takes place in your life. It’s about the emotional journey you take from BC (Before Crisis) to VM (Victory Moment).

1. **The Hero’s Guide**

In the Hero’s Guide, you guide the Hero (protagonist) the central character in the story. The story is focused on the hero. Many times the Hero is your client or customer. They will experience the transformation as a result of your guidance. This story is about the emotional journey they take as a result of your guidance from BC through VM.

**Step #1: *The Hook*** – Set up the closing of your story. Tease the lesson. Don’t give it away, but give the listener a reason to want to listen to your story. Example: “Have you ever wondered what good could come out of sleeping in the back seat of a 1987 Chevrolet Monte Carlo for three months? I’ve never wondered that either . . . until the summer of 1996 when I was forced to do just that. Before that summer . . .”

**Step #2**: ***Provide context***. Set the Scene – Introduce Characters - Describe a typical day in the life - “Once upon a time” What life was like before the crisis/conflict/problem occurred? Focus on the emotions. What was the main characters emotional state. What were their hopes and dreams? What were they looking forward to? Their goals and aspirations? The foundation of the story starts with an understanding of where the main character is before the story (transformation) takes place.

This is where you establish empathy with the audience. Where you’ll hook them. Where you’ll get them to think “yea…I can relate to that”.

You can think of story as a TRANSFORMATION. You can’t have transformation unless you establish a baseline. What is the character transforming from and to?

**Step #3**: ***Crisis/Conflict/Problem*** – This is the fundamental reason we tell stories. Because some unexpected issue plopped it’s ugly head into the middle of normalcy and demanded to be dealt with. Some issue that could not be ignored. Some issue that would wreak havoc with life as we know it if it’s not handled. As you describe the crisis/conflict/problem, make a point of describing the emotions it has evoked. Remember, we’re describing the emotional transformation of the main character, so make it clear to the listener what emotions are coursing through the veins of the character as a result of facing the crisis. Of equal importance is describing the goal or desired outcome of victory over the crisis/conflict or problem. Don’t make the listener wonder what the character is striving for.

**Step #4**: ***Pursuit/Journey/Resolution*** – This is where you describe where you (if you’re the Hero) or your client/customer (if you’re the Hero’s guide) takes steps to overcome the crisis/conflict/problem. You may outline the step by step process and perhaps even include some unexpected roadblocks that appear along the way (added tension) that must be dealt with. Ultimately, this is where the lesson you’re trying to get across to the audience is illustrated. Be as clear as possible is showing how the problem was dealt with, leading to the resolution. Along the way, describe the emotions the main character is feeling as they are pursuing resolution.

**Step #5**: ***Result- Victory/Failure Moment*** – Here is where you give the main character their moment in the spotlight. Their moment to shine. Sharing their ultimate transformative emotional experience. How do they feel now that they’ve overcome this crisis/conflict/problem? Of equal importance to emotions, is the moral of the story. What’s the lesson to be learned? This is not a time to be shy. Don’t expect your listeners to connect the dots to your story. Be explicit. Say: “The lesson to be learned here is…”

Not every story is going to be a success story. If the main character fails, there is still a lesson to be learned. Share the emotions of the character and the lesson(s) learned in the failure.

**Step #6**: ***Action Step*** – Not every story is going to require a call to action. As an example, if you’re telling a sequence of stories in a longer message to support a larger point, your call to action will be a single call to action at the conclusion of your message. You might however, include a subtle action step at this point even though you’re going to follow up with other stories afterwards. Example: “So, the lesson to be learned here is ‘it’s always a good practice to back up your computer system at the end of your work day’ I suggest you schedule the last 15 minutes of your work day to run the back up utility’.

At the conclusion of your main message, so not expect your audience to know what you want them to do. You’ve got to be specific. Tell them, very specifically, what you want them to do. Schedule this, call this number, buy that, order this… whatever you want them to do, be specific.

**Some general tips:**

* Don’t say “I’d like to tell you a story” Just tell the story
* Don’t go into too much detail. Give the listener a pencil outline image of the scene. Allow the listener to color in between the lines.
* Keep to the storyline. Don’t include superfluous details that don’t move the story forward.
* Use a mix of Hero’s Journey and Hero’s Guide stories
* Develop a file of stories with an index of lesson(s) that can be learned from the story. Many times a single story can support two, three or maybe even more lessons
* One story should be told in about 5 minutes. From 500 to 650 words.
* Use a conversational style when telling stories.