

*Interaction*  
*in*  
*Organizations -*  
*how to use storytelling to*  
*radically transform organizations*



Photograph: Jens Hemmel

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## **Content**

<b>The listener is the Storyteller</b>	<b>page 3</b>
<b>Interaction in Storytelling</b>	<b>page 5</b>
<b>Interaction in Organizations</b>	<b>page 12</b>
<b>Interaction in Training</b>	<b>page 16</b>
<b>A Master Storyteller</b>	<b>page 19</b>
<b>A different View (the Pea-story)</b>	<b>page 21</b>
<b>The Magic of Stories</b>	<b>page 24</b>
<b>The Organizational Tree</b>	<b>page 30</b>
I – Stories	
We – Stories	
Future – Stories	

# Chapter 1

## **The listener is the storyteller**

*The audience has always been my litmus paper, every second. Are you able to listen to them, does the audience conduct you like a conductor of a major orchestra? But pity that storyteller who get flattered and carried away; the audience can also be your wild horse, that throws you off the saddle<sup>1</sup>*

When a story is told, a fellowship arises between the person telling the story and the person listening. Each listener perceives himself as co-creator of both the images that arise in his mind and the structure of the story. The storyteller on the other hand is influenced by every member of the audience, every image seen in the public and every question raised about the structure of the story.

Enriched by the experience, the listeners will subsequently be able to transform and change reality. They are co-creators of the world while the story is being told and can thus afterwards truly be co-creators of reality, the real reality. It is an utterly dizzying perspective.

Oral storytelling is a state, a state characterized by interaction.

A story that is told aloud does not just describe reality; it also transforms it

## **Two-Way Communication**

For what purpose can a modern person in a stress-filled job use an old-fashioned form of communication like storytelling? Can't we just text a message or write an e-mail? If we do that, haven't we communicated what we wanted to? If you hold a presentation, isn't the only important thing that you select your very best PowerPoint slides so that your message gets through? If only your PowerPoint slides are good enough, then you're sure that your audience will really listen and receive the message.

A big problem with modern means of communication is the amount of dead information they involve. There is so much noise in the transmission that we spend most of our waking hours sorting relevant information from irrelevant.

The written statements and PowerPoint slides have one major weakness: they don't invite me inside. They don't need me. It's a done deal. The communication – or, rather, the flow of information – happens even if you leave the room, eat watermelon, fall in love, die, or go to Hawaii. You are not important.

Old-fashioned media – books, radio, TV and the movies – are characterized by one-way communication. It is impossible to change the messages or form your own images. In the long run, it's not that interesting. I want to help create what is being told.

When I listen to a story, I know that I'm having a constant influence on it

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<sup>1</sup> Dario Fo, Il paese dei mezaràt, Feltrinelli, Italy, 2003

It may not be something you notice consciously, but just the feeling of eye contact, the direct and clear communication between two people, is enough for me as a listener to feel that I am important in determining the direction the story will take. Each of the people listening to a story affects how the story develops.

It is a strong feeling to take with you out into the real world. You helped shape the story; now go out and shape reality. You have to experience it to understand it completely: how the almost hypnotic state a story can put a person in can activate and create at the same time.

### **A Story is a Process**

Every time a story is passed on orally, it becomes a new interpretation of reality. The way your listener reacts when you tell your story tells you something about your relationship with that person. You understand the world through the stories you tell about it. The response you get shows something about your relationship with the world.

You unconsciously edit reality so that it fits in with how the listener perceives reality.

The story you hear is a different story than the one the storyteller is telling. When you tell a story in an organization the way it is transformed shows something about the way the people in organization sees the organization.

You tell about other people who either fit into the description of reality that you call the world or are markedly different. The way you talk about the people who are not like you shows a clear and unmistakable mirror image not only of the person you are talking about, but also of the person telling the story. You are your stories, and you must act in accordance with what your stories say about your perception of reality.

In the feeling, in the interaction with my surroundings and with the people around me, the need arises to make the world fall into place by telling stories. All you need is a memory, a mouth and two ears

### **A new change**

In the beginning of the 21th century a new change could take place – it is up to us, whether or not we commit to a brighter future.

We can choose between the old one way-communication, leadership in the old fashion top bottom way and production with no social responsibility or environmental considerations and see what happens.

Or we can choose another form of communication with interaction which reflects another form of leadership that again is a mirror for an organization with a high moral and a high level of connection with the surroundings, socially and environmentally.

## Chapter 2

### Interaction in storytelling

*Interaction is a kind of [action](#) that occurs as two or more objects have an [effect](#) upon one another. (...) All systems are related and interdependent.<sup>2</sup>*

#### Basis of storytelling

I started teaching storytelling in 1994 at Borup Folk High School. We offered our students a program with two lessons once a week for four months. So I found myself in a situation where I had to prepare more than thirty lessons with theory about storytelling, practical exercises to make the students become better storytellers and inspiration to work outside the classroom.

At the time I had been a theatre director for ten years and my experience with storytelling was limited. Therefore, I looked around and found very little of interest.

My main goal with the education was to investigate the basis of a story: The storyteller is influenced by the listener. The creation of the inner film is a mutual responsibility. The new knowledge achieved by the story told is a mutual responsibility. It is like a dance where you are not 100 % sure of who is taking the lead.

I asked myself this fundamental question: How does the storyteller involve the listener in the creation of both meaning and flow of the pictures

#### Interaction Between Storyteller and Listener – you prepare

The first interaction between the storyteller and the listener is the choice of story.

Try to imagine one of the listeners. What is her interest? Who is his partner? Try to put yourself in the shoe of the listener and from that point answer the fundamental question:

- Is the story relevant to me as a listener?

If you have answered yes to that question, ask yourself the next, just as crucial:

- Does the storyteller learn something new from telling this particular story to this particular audience?

The storyteller must be curious - must have the spirit to explore the unknown. This story will be told once to these people at that moment. So you as a storyteller are excited to learn from the experience.

When you search for a good story, try searching unlikely places. If you are the boss, ask the cleaning staff, if you are a mother searching for a good story, search in your own life. Do you remember your first bike? The first kiss?

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<sup>2</sup> [www.wikipidea.org](http://www.wikipidea.org)

Sometimes a story needs to be refined to be a diamond. And the only way to find out if the story is a diamond is by telling it. So find someone to practice on. Ask the person: Will you please listen to this story and give your honest feed back?

### **A master storyteller meets his audience**

I met Dario Fo in 1996 when he was in Copenhagen for a master class. I witnessed 460 people in a theatre in Copenhagen conducting one man without knowing it.

Every time he was uncertain he used the power of the audience, not the power within him. And every time the audience thought they knew what would happen next, he showed them that he was ahead of them.

It was like a dance between Dario Fo and 460 minds, hearts and bodies. It is a complicated and yet simple interaction.

I arrived early the third day of the master class. The rest of the group did a lot of heavy warm ups, the body and the voice were stimulated in various ways. I sat quietly on a chair next to Dario Fo, who also sat watching all these young energy. Suddenly I realized that the man who should be on top of the evening, the one the crowd of more than 400 people had come to see, the man who was going to give power all evening, that man was sitting on a chair with a soft smile watching. I asked Dario Fo if he shouldn't warm up, as I knew that the power of his voice was enough to fill the most of Copenhagen. He smiled gently at me and said: "What do you think I'm doing?"

Nothing else had to be said and I realized I just had a lesson learned. It is not about the energy that you put inside your body/voice warm up, it is question of attitude towards the meeting between this humble man and his audience, an audience he loved and feared at the same time.

If you transfer this to organizational storytelling you meet every person with the same attitude. A humble and yet clear presence. And your warm ups could be playing with your two year old daughter instead of refining your latest power point slide. The story is not going to be any better because you rehearse it one hour before you have to present it to 1500 of your company's most important shareholders.

### **Interaction Between Storyteller and Listener – you tell**

You have found an opportunity. The listeners are there. You have an audience.

Before you start telling your story you have to consider: Are the listeners comfortable? Do they hear you? Can you see their eyes?

What about the light? Do you stand in front of a window? Are your face visable?

Your beginning is crucial.

Go straight to the story. Let us hear: Where? When? Who? You know that your story is good. Show it! Be there for the listener. In the silence, you invite us into the world of your story.

You let us, as listeners, create meaning and images
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Stimulate our senses.

It could be done very fast by telling about the looks, the sounds, the smells. And then silence.

If you are uncertain, be honest. Don't shout, whisper. Instead of throwing more energy to a sceptical audience, you should try the opposite: Give less energy. Create a moment of silence. Invite the listener into a mutual experience.

Tell us your story both as a king and as the most humble servant. It is a **complementary** movement between opposites.

When you finish your story, you are the king again. Just finish your story.

Stop talking and let the listeners speak. Don't apologize and don't ask for their sympathy. Just relax and let the listeners give their feed-back.

### **Economy of the body**

Dario Fo works with something I call 'economy of the body'. If you perform one of your characters and the next moment in your story you have to change character the secret is: Do as little as possible. Move from one gesture to the next in one movement with as few changes as possible.

If you tell my story about the pea, you can act a pea. How is it to lying on the floor suppressed by the heavy burden and then you swift to the princess lying high above saying 'ouch'. Can you do that very fast?

I give you here an example as it could have happened. I don't know any stories from Dario Fo with an old man, a boy and an apple tree filled with the most wonderful apples. I create the story right now for this purpose.

*We are in wonderful Italy in the autumn. An old man is unexpectedly coming home from hunting. He has got a rifle over his shoulder. A boy is eating one apple from the tree in the garden of the old man.*

*When the boy jumps down from the tree he hurts himself and the old man catches the boy still with the rifle over his shoulder. Now imagine the old man holding the boy raising the right hand to beat him and the boy holding a hand at his foot while he is trying to avoid the beating.*

Can you please get up from your chair? Try it out. Stand up and create the position of the old man. Imagine how the boy is lying on the ground. The old man looks down at the boy while shouting at him. The angry man raises his right hand so he can beat the boy.

Now shift to the position of the boy. It should take you less than 1/10 of a second. Your voice changing, the hand in the air turns around and now it is protecting the boy from the old mans attack. Imaging how the old man is placed over you. The key here is the hand and the direction of the two bodies.

You can work on the conversation at this point in the story. Here is a suggestion.  
The old man (voice loud and aggressive): "I'll teach you not to steal my apples"  
The boy (voice is lighter, frightened): "But grandpapa, don't hit me"  
The old man (freeze the hand in the air): "I am not your grandfather"  
The boy: "Look at me." (pause). "I look a lot like you. You remember how Alexandro, your oldest son, adored my mother, Maria when she was young and handsome."  
The old man (hand back in slashing position): "Shut up! It doesn't matter, if you are my grandson or not, you shall not steal my apples."

For the audience the first thing they have to imagine is the old man and the boy in the garden with the apple tree. The storyteller describes and the audience creates the images. At the most dramatic part of the story the storyteller starts acting the two roles. Hopefully you as a listener are taken by surprise, and that's good. Have you forgotten the rifle? No, I thought so, you are a clever reader.

The listener is not supposed to know what is going to happen next in the story
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The audience is now getting the images and the dramatic actions from the movements of the storyteller. Often you start with the role with the highest status, in this case the old man.

Because you have made an agreement with your audience you can easily shift between the two roles and the role of the storyteller.

*The old man stops the nonsense and is going to slap the boy. In that moment he gets a heart attack. He is in great pain while he falls to the ground. The boy just stares for a second at the old man, gets up and notices that it is possible for him to limp. He stops. Again he looks at the old man. Then he takes the rifle and shoots it up in the air.*

*He shouts and screams for help.*

*Soon there is a crowd to take care of the old man.*

*Imaging the end of the story – wonderful, right? A picture of two male characters sitting in the hospital, a boy with a broken leg and an old man recovering from a severe heart attack, sitting there quietly talking to one another.*

If you look at the story, there is a little surprise for you. The rifle. All kinds of images, thoughts and expectations is raised in your head when you read the word rifle. I work deliberately with that. And the end I make a turning of the story – the rifle becomes the instrument for the boy to save the old mans life.

If this story was created by Dario Fo, it would have been a little bit more grotesque and dangerous. I am a soft man and my morale is often gentle as this.

If you transfer this lesson of the work of Dario Fo to organizational storytelling

- You have to be precise in your actions
- Do only what you have to do
- When you tell your story you have to learn the feelings of every character in the story



### **Resistance**

One of the things that my encounter with Dario Fo confirmed me of was the importance of every member of the audience. Every person creates images and understanding in interaction between the two sides of the brain - the left analytic part and the right emotional part. And every member of the audience affects the way the story is told. Their inner films affect my inner film.

When you experience resistance in the audience a natural impulse would be to fight that resistance, give more power, talk louder and faster.

Do the opposite. Step backwards, make longer periods of silence, invite the listeners. By doing that you give the listeners an opportunity to experience a mutual responsibility for the creation of the story told.

### **Interaction Between Meaning and Pictures**

If the story just contains a lot of beautiful images and the meaning is nonsense, you have lost your audience. And they will never come back to you. So you have to pick a good story with new insights for the listeners and you as a storyteller.

But just as important is the need for clear and creative images in the story. Read the work of H.C. Andersen. In every story you are stimulated. He creates images, tells about the sound and the smells. In this way, he activates you, he invites you to work.

My Swedish colleague, Anders Granström tells about a city that had a wall around it. When he has finished his story, he asks the listeners, "What colour is the wall?" A woman on the first row saw a red wall, in the back two men agree on yellow and soon the room is filled with suggestions.

As long as the details are not relevant to the meaning of the story, the listener can create their own images.

There are always two stories told: The story of the storyteller and the story of the listener.

Silence is a key word here. It is in the silence filled with tension that the listeners create images.

### **Interaction Between Left and Right side of the Brain**

There is a change film turning around on the web. A nude female dancer spinning around and the text are utterly strange.

*If clockwise, then you use more of the right side of the brain and vice versa.*

If you are a right side of brain – person, the dancer moves her body in one way and if you are a left side of the brain person the dancer moves another way. How the film is constructed I don't understand, but it is funny how this test works. I have shown it to a dozen of people that I know and the results are amazing. The most people really see the dancer mowing anti-clockwise. I can only see her spinning clockwise, so I am a right side stimulated guy. Well, as I am storyteller, no surprises there.

Let's look at the difference between the two sides of the brain:

**LEFT BRAIN  
FUNCTIONS**

uses logic  
detail oriented  
facts rule  
words and language  
present and past  
math and science  
can comprehend  
knowing  
acknowledges  
order/pattern perception  
knows object name  
reality based  
forms strategies  
practical  
safe

**RIGHT BRAIN  
FUNCTIONS**

uses feeling  
"big picture" oriented  
imagination rules  
symbols and images  
present and future  
philosophy & religion  
can "get it" (i.e.  
meaning)  
believes  
appreciates  
spatial perception  
knows object function  
fantasy based  
presents possibilities  
impetuous  
risk taking

My point here is that storytelling stimulates both part of brain, the left analytic and the right imaginative side of the brain.

**Interaction Between Silence and Words**

If you don't know what to say, say nothing

When you are quiet as a storyteller the silence is filled with tension. In the silence the listeners create their own story. They imagine the ending, they ask if it's a reliable story, they create the images of the story, they are very active here.

The silence create rhythm, the story is like a piece of music. Some of the parts should be told very fast, others are slowly told with lots of details. It depends on the story and the only way to find the rhythm is to tell the story.

**Interaction Between Epic and Dramatic Storytelling**

Once upon a time is a typical epic phrase. You describe the scenario, where does the story take place? Who is in the story?

When you change your voice, so it sounds like one of the characters in the story, you are dramatic. You can also change your body gestures as long as you remember a story told is not theatre.

It is of the outmost importance that the storyteller links organically with the movements, the gesture and the changing of the voice. If it doesn't feel natural, don't do it.

There has to be a balance between the two, the epic and the dramatic parts in your storytelling.

**A dance**

As the storyteller, you enter into an unpredictable dance between different elements that constantly shift from one to another. This complementary dance of contradiction is what I call "interaction" or "Interaction".

## Chapter 3

*Governing a great state is like cooking small fish.*

Tao te King

### Interaction in Organizations

Interaction, means that

- a modern company enters into an ethical, social and environmental interaction with the society of which it is a part
- a leader offers concrete pictures of future opportunities and start behaving according to this
- tell what you do – do what you tell
- employees must act in accordance with the values of the company

#### ***Interaction Between Success and Disaster***

A person, company or organization that thinks that only success stories have any effect had better think again. There is an Interaction between these two types of stories that provides credibility.

We have become used to a distinct division between the journalistic story on the one hand – which is never positive – and the stories that are told about a business enterprise. There always has to be these shining picture-perfect advertising images that no one believes. Until recently, our world consisted of two dualistic opposites, i.e. opposites that would always combat each other. Instead, it is possible to find a balance between the two.

#### ***Interaction Between Management and Staff***

If employees feel they are respected as individuals and that management listens to their ideas and wishes, then they will reciprocate with respect for the company.

#### ***Interaction Between Company and Customers***

Don't sell a product: there are more than enough products out there. Try to get your customers to form a relationship with the company. A partner in a relationship feels much more obligated than if the company simply considers its customers to be consumers. Remember that the best advertising you can get is word-of-mouth compliments paid to you and what you can offer.

#### ***Interaction Between Thought and Action***

If you are a leader, don't start any processes before you know that they are feasible. What if the storytelling shows that there are some work procedures that need to be changed? Is there a plan of action then?

If you are an employee at a lower level of the organization, ask yourself whether the dialog management is attempting to open is real? Or is it just a maneuver?

The problem with modern employees is that they are way too smart to be satisfied with empty promises; there has to be some substance to what management does. If there isn't, then anti-stories appear. An anti-story is a story that goes against the official story and undermines its intended effect.

### **Interaction Between Truth and Fiction**

This is the interaction that works for me as a storyteller in an entertaining capacity. I can tell my stories without having to be sure that I'm telling the truth. I'm allowed to do that; I'm a storyteller, not a truth teller.

When you start using storytelling as an organizational development tool, you will discover that it is not so easy to employ this Interaction between truth and fiction. November 2001

*Something unfortunate happened at a large-scale conference on storytelling held by author of The Dream Society Rolf Jensen. Up on the podium sat various representatives from the world of storytelling (which was and continues to be a highly diffuse concept: does it mean oral or written communication, or is a journalist a storyteller, too?) Among all these smart people, there was also one who was an oral storyteller. At one point, the panel was asked whether a story had to be true, or whether, in some situations, it would be possible or desirable to tell an untruth. The storyteller answered, "It doesn't matter whether a story is true or false, as long as it works."*

It is understandable that a storyteller who works with fiction says that kind of thing about finding stories and telling them to an audience. The problem is taking the storytelling rule that fiction must be credible and applying it to work relationships. It's something completely different. The occurrence of a lie is something very serious in any relationship.

If it turns out that you can't trust the person telling the story, the person who is supposed to be your guide, taking you to places you hardly knew existed, then you would react strongly. You would not permit that person to take you there ever again.

If a company is caught lying, then it will be the death of that company in the short or longer term.
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For this reason, the stories you tell either as a company or a leader have to be very carefully verified first. You have to do your research before a story can be used.

So the statement would have to be as follows: "If the purpose of your story is just to entertain, then it doesn't matter whether a story is true or false, as long as it is credible. If, on the other hand, you are telling a story at a workplace to achieve a certain purpose, then you must be sure you are telling something authentic true."

### **Interaction Between Writing and Speaking**

Our descriptions of reality are being revised today. Our old culture, recorded in writing, claimed that some things are the truth. We've been told that ever since we learned that two plus two could never be anything but four. Aristotle and others stubbornly maintained that there was only one scientific truth and it could not be contested.

An organization based on the newer principle of interaction would never categorically claim that anything is true in a scientific, locked-in way: an interactive perception of reality works with the concept of a complex reality that cannot be encompassed by a single true and comprehensive description.

I used to think it was about making a firm choice between written and spoken modes, that it was impossible to have an interactive relationship with reality when you worked with written media.

This was before I had a wonderful conversation with Tove Vejlgård Schørring, who heads up Xact Consulting, consultants whose aim is to be IT bridge-builders and disseminate knowledge. As I already mentioned, Tove was one of the attendees at a mini-training course in Steve Denning's methods that Steve and I held in the spring of 2005. At the course, we had unblushingly claimed that it was no use writing stories down. Written stories, we said, simply did not work. Oral storytelling was the only effective way. In the course assessment session, Tove made a reference to our bombastic claim that writing stories down didn't work. I tried to wriggle out of it. I know that Steve usually says that his experience at the World Bank was that only his oral storytelling worked. I told her I had proved that day that I could perceive the world in an oral, changing and complex way so I could give each attendee a response that matched that person. Et cetera, et cetera. I could tell it didn't sound convincing.

So I sat down and asked her why she posed that question. She explained that, in her job, she didn't have the time to tell each employee all the stories she regularly sent out into the organization, so she also used the written channels for that kind of communication.

I stared at her. She radiated a self-confidence that included two feet planted solidly on the ground, which was why it seemed so strong. She smiled and her eyes were curious yet confident. I coughed a little, and then I suddenly understood. The statement Steve and I made was wrong, although it had been true in 1996 when Steve changed the World Bank's Knowledge Management strategy without knowing anything about storytelling.

In 2005, business leaders work with their concepts in an unforced and natural way. Tove handles her reality as a leader by using small anecdotes and stories in an organic flow that matches the development of her organization.

That is the method I called oral until very recently: now I call it "interactive," and I use that word because the method also involves the use of written newsletters, e-mails, etc. It is possible to involve other media than speech in this flow of stories.

I made the point that interaction/Interaction is a principle in oral storytelling and that, by definition, a written story communicates in one direction only and thus not nearly as interesting as an oral story – that employees don't feel the same shared responsibility as they do when they hear a story told aloud.

Tove explained more in depth in an e-mail: "At Xact, it is vital that there is interactivity in the storytelling, because Xact is a virtual workplace. By virtual, I mean that there are rarely more than a few of us sitting in the same place physically at the same time, since our consultants visit many different customers on a daily basis.

"Of course, the storytelling is oral when we meet (staff and consultant meetings and social activities such as plays, concerts, etc.), but also written, in our weekly news communication, to which everyone at Xact contributes last week's 'stories,' descriptions of their situation, problems, or just sports news (for fans). It's all very nice, and it helps connect us all of us that work for the company together. In practice, we are exchanging information, often wrapped up in informal stories. For Xact, the things that are important are identity, loyalty (both ways) and having an idea of what is happening with all the different employees, who again need these little stories about what goes on at the office when they are out in the field.

"It's interaction, and it works, but written stories can't stand alone, of course."

## Chapter 4

### Interaction in Training and Education

*Only willing hands make light work<sup>3</sup>*

#### Feedback to a story told

When you give feedback to a story told use this three steps:

1. **The strongest image that this story gave me was ...** by doing that you tell the storyteller that the story had an impact on you as a listener.
2. **Positive feed back to the way the story was told** - this is very easy, everybody is an expert here. The feed back must be concrete: eyes, voice, hands, body gestures etc.
3. **I think the story is about ...** This feed back began with the two different views: The strongest image and the way the story was told. In the third step we starts talking about the content of the story. The dialogue was founded on the principles of storytelling which means that you as a listener suggest something. You are not the clever professor that knows, you are a humble servant and a listener, that have had a clear picture and now suggest around the content.

*Washington, D.C., 2006. Golden Fleece, a loose network of storytellers, consultants and businesspeople in Washington. A young consultant has signed up for my workshop to find stories that show the power of storytelling. My presentation at the Golden Fleece seminar is more or less the same as what's in this book. It's something completely new to the Americans. The content really makes them sit up and listen; the room is filled with energy, and new knowledge emerges.*

*After the workshop, the consultant is not satisfied. It turns out she wants to tell about her own experience with the power of storytelling, not other people's. I criticize her for not taking the opportunity at the workshop, while we were working with the stories. She smiles evasively. I tell her that this moment will never come again. Then she looks up at me with the most amazing eyes and asks if I would work with her stories now.*

*We run around a little, looking for a place where we can sit. We end up in some oversized armchairs in the middle of the lobby of the activity center where the seminar is being held. She tells me she's left the safe and secure world she knows. She was active in volunteer organizations, where, among other things, she saw Native Americans solving conflicts by telling stories. She saw how storytelling could be used to reach agreement on important issues.*

*Now she will be working with some of the big players in the American corporate sector and is a bit nervous about it. She doesn't think her stories will hold up. I listen to one of the stories that she intends to present for these business leaders.*

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<sup>3</sup> N.F.S. Grundtvig, former of the Scandinavian Folk High School.



*I stare at her, horrified. The woman sitting there is deadly boring, no sparkle in her eyes, and she's saying something that sounds most of all like homework. I interrupt her and tell her that I think it's one of the most boring things I've ever heard. She stops and looks at me, horrified. She thinks I mean the content of what she's saying. I wasn't thinking of the content at all; that will come later. No, I'm thinking of her face, her eyes and her body language, all of which very clearly indicate that it's not her personality that's there, only what's going on inside her head. She is pure will, nothing else, and that is deadly dull, let me tell you.*

*I tell her there are three things she has to remember when she tells a story:*

*1. Tell your story because you can't stop yourself. You are so filled up with what you want to say that you simply need to communicate it.*

*2. If you don't know what to say, then be quiet. Storytelling is not so much the words you say. It's more all the words you don't say. Some people call these "pauses." It is an unfortunate description, because what happens to the audience is not that they are put on hold: quite the contrary. It is during these short pauses that your audience is invited inside your story.*

*3. Feel your feet: if they are not planted firmly on the ground, I won't be able to feel your story. I will understand it, perhaps, but it's a poor effort if you just use a small part of your brain, and it's really also disparaging me as a listener if you only appeal to that ridiculously small part of me.*

*She tries to be the good student and does everything in her power to follow her teacher's advice. I'm still bored, so I stop her. I steer the conversation away from this task that she clearly has way too much respect for. At one point in the conversation, we laugh. Suddenly there's life in her eyes, and she feels great again. So I'm blunt: I tell her to take that energy she now has and put it into the story. She looks at me with surprise, but she's at least starting to understand. Then something happens. She does it, very slowly and quietly, tentatively. She sits with both feet solidly planted on the ground, throws her hair back and begins.*

*The change is amazing. The story flows, and there is now life in her eyes. I look in wonder at her hair: the light plays on it now, with a glow that definitely wasn't there before. Once we've cracked the code, the rest is easy.*

I hear three of her stories and draw the following conclusions:

1. When you lay the foundations for a story, you must be as brief and clear as possible.
2. You must be one with your story.
3. Telling a story should first and foremost be a delightful thing to do.

When you have to respond to a good story, you should

- tell what was the clearest image in the story.
- tell about something you liked about the way the story was told.
- say what it was you learned from the story.

***The Danish town of Ollerup, 2006.***

I am speaking to a group of teachers at private independent schools all over Denmark, telling them about the above conclusions.

At one point, one of the teachers tells me about a boy named Anders who hates the oral storytelling class. The teacher shows how Anders' body language indicates that he hates the class. She also shows what her own reaction is: She stands in front of him, friendly and inviting him to participate, on her toes leaning towards him, and tells the poor boy that of course he can tell the class something funny about the little mouse that is the subject for the day. She gets a negative reaction.

I say, "No darned wonder," get up and get her to sit down like Anders. I stand in front of her and show with my posture, my face and my voice that I am inviting her to participate.

She says I seem threatening, and I tell her that's how Anders feels, too. He sees a person about ten feet tall. There's nothing about the situation that gives him a clue about any way to resolve it. Instead of standing in front of him, I ask her to sit beside the student, looking forward, towards possible solutions to his problem, and then see whether he can think of anything funny the mouse can do about that cat. When she does it, she smiles and says she'll try it when she gets home.

I get up in front of the group of teachers and draw their attention to the fact that they just saw interaction in practice.

## Chapter 5

*When you are 4 years old, you are a master storyteller, but then at the age of five something terrible happens to you, you go to school, and that is the end of your storytelling career.<sup>4</sup>*

### **A master storyteller**

*In 2000 my son Asger, two years old at the time, and I sat playing in a pile of sand lying right by the road. It was a beautiful summer day, and when we left that place, we both felt good.*

*One week later, the rest of my family came walking by the place where we had played. When my son spotted the sand pile, he began gesturing and speaking in incomprehensible baby talk to my wife. She laughed and looked at my son with loving eyes, and we all felt good when we left there.*

Tell a story and become part of the tribe

### **Emotions / structure - story / action**

Asger is filled with an emotion – in this particular case it is joy - and like all human beings he is like a bathtub. When it is filled with water, the water just runs wherever it will.

His mind, his heart and his body is filled with all the joy the two of us had shared. When he told his story to his mother, his body jumped up and down and his face showed a wonderful smile. And Asger discovered an enormous power. Mama laughed back. And then mama smiled to father, and father turned to Asger said he also had a wonderful day.

The biggest magic in the world: Somebody cares about you and the people you care about care about each other. Bigger magic is never going to happen.

### **Strange reality**

Reality is a strange thing. Sometimes it almost seems logical.

But then in an instant somebody smiles at you or hurt your feelings or surprises you. You're hit by an emotion and because you're human, you just have to put that emotion in a frame, you build a structure around it. You tell a story.

And you find that structure inside your DNA. Because you know it works. It did that when you were born, when you were two years old and again when you fell in love and again when you talked to your children and again in the films you watched and again in the theatre and again in your dreams and again and again ...

Do you remember when you were a small child before you could read or write? When somebody or something hurt you, you cried. Somebody else came and while crying you told them what had happened. And then action.

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<sup>4</sup> Steve Denning in his oral presentation, transcribed here from memory

Somebody did something with that pain so it disappeared, next thing somebody did was to prevent the bad things from happening again or if it was a good sensation, talked about how it could happen again.

Whenever there are two persons, there is an emotion, then a story and whenever there is a story, there is action

### **A positive listener**

My son demonstrated one of the fundamental aspects of storytelling by telling the story to my wife, not to me, although it was me that was pushing the baby carriage.

But I had been there, you see, when it originally happened, and to create a new space, the story had to be told to my wife. This allowed our son to take part in the world twice:

1. by doing something with his father that made us both happy, and
2. by telling his mother about it, thus creating a new happiness, one not unlike the first.

Before we have a language we tell our stories  
We leave our footprints behind whenever we tell a story

### **A new comer**

An employee enters his or her new workplace and starts listening to stories about the other employees, the values, the vision and the mission statement. The new employee ask a simple question: Does the company do, what they tell they do?

According to what is the reality in the company consciously or unconsciously the new comer will pick out a few of the stories told in the company and starts retelling these in a way that reflects the values and the way the new comer thinks that things should be done.

In interaction with the reality in the workplace the newcomer acts, tells and is told about – that way the new comer becomes a part of the company.

Like Asger every human being act and uses stories to make the actions understandable. The way the stories are transformed tells the employee whether or not he/she is accepted in the working place.

Tell what you do and do what you tell

## Chapter 6

*"But he hasn't got anything on!" the whole town cried out at last.*

*The Emperor shivered, for he suspected they were right. But he thought, "This procession has got to go on." So he walked more proudly than ever, as his noblemen held high the train that wasn't there at all.<sup>5</sup>*

### A different view

#### The Pea

*'A Well-Known Story from Another Viewpoint' or*

*'How Does the World Look from Underneath Twenty Mattresses, Twenty Eiderdown Beds and a Princess?'*

*Once upon a time, there was a pea that knew it was destined to grow up and have a different future than most peas. The pea felt deep down inside that it would one day be the most famous of all the world's peas.*

*"People will tell stories about me," it thought, closing its green eyes and imagining a grandmother sitting with a book on her lap and all the children wanting to hear the fairy tale about the fantastic pea. It heard part of the story. It heard that the fairy tale was about a prince, a queen and a young woman that might well be the princess she told them she was. The pea saw the beautiful girl, shivering from the cold, and the pea felt that it had a major role to play in the story at exactly that point in the story, although it wasn't clear what the role was.*

*The ending was so bright, though: the pea was lying on red velvet on display in a museum, and everyone admired the pea and said how handsome a pea it was, all green and round. And it would make the world a little greener.*

*But we all know the real story of that pea: that the pea had to suffer so much, not on velvet but on the floor. It had to lie there a whole night, underneath twenty mattresses, twenty eiderdown beds, and what might or might not be a princess.*

*We know that in the morning, after all the fuss about her being a princess, the maid swept the green oily spot off the floor and threw it in the garbage can. It was so sad.*

*So when Hans Christian Andersen came by and heard the wonderful story, and he wanted to write it down so he could become famous. The story was called "The Princess on the Pea", and he wanted the pea to be put in a museum. The queen carefully selected the most beautiful green pea left in the bowl.*

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<sup>5</sup> H.C. Andersen: The Emperor's New Clothes

*It is this pea that lies there on the red velvet in the museum, while our hero looks down from his pea heaven, just a little bit envious.*

### **An Artisan Storyteller**

I'm an artist, not a consultant. I have held many presentations and workshops that turned out very badly. Naturally, I've also had days where I can hardly keep from constantly throwing my arms into the air from sheer enthusiasm. I have been successful when I maintained a focus on my starting point as an artist. To me, being an artist means that I see the world as a place where paradoxes meet, poetry rules and everything sometimes turns upside down. It's good for the world to take a roller-coaster ride like that sometimes.

When I was young, the choices I had were either to go crazy and get locked up in a mental institution or to become an artist. Luckily, I chose the latter.

When I look at what I can contribute at companies and organizations, I see three things:

1. I can tell stories.
2. I can listen to stories. Stories should be told as if you were telling someone about what just happened out on the street. Businesspeople get so nervous when they have to tell stories that some smart consulting firm charged a fortune to come up with, or if they know that the whole future of the company or organization depends on them telling the story well. Then I'm the artist that can tell them that it is not that important. Forget your intentions and let me hear your story, from one person to another.
3. I can turn things upside down, be creative and find solutions that aren't immediately apparent by looking at things from a pea's eye view.

There is danger in an artist meeting people from the world of business: one thing is that, as an artist, I risk disappearing. I could also lose my usual leather jacket and turtleneck, instead donning a nice suit, trying to look like a million bucks, and then just generally act like everyone else in the corporate world.

If the meeting between art and business is to be advantageous to both, there has to be mutual respect.

In his book *A Leader's Guide to Storytelling*, Steve Denning<sup>6</sup> describes how he went to a storytelling festival and told his 16-word story on the health worker from Zambia – 'in Kamana, who in June 1995 logged himself on to the Center for Disease Control Web site and got the answer to a question on how to treat malaria.'<sup>7</sup> The professional story-tellers had a very negative response to his story. Where were the descriptions of the people in the story? Where was the plot? Who was the opponent in the actant model? And so on and so forth.

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<sup>6</sup> Steve Denning, *A Leader's Guide to Storytelling*, Jossey Bass 2005

<sup>7</sup> Steve Denning, *The Springboard*, p. 10, Butterworth and Heineman, 2000

This example shows how stereotypical we are in the way we function. These storytellers did not hear the effect of his story, and they didn't see that the story had to be viewed in its context.

The 16-word story about a health worker in Zambia had impact on the people from The World Bank because Steve Denning and his crew supported the lesson learned from that story: We need to change behaviour.

And because there was a coherence between the spoken word, the man telling the story and the behaviour from the rest of the group, the story itself didn't have to have Oscar winning quality.

The storytellers at the storytelling festival only analyzed the story based on a storyteller's premises – a poor effort on their part, in my opinion.

On the other hand, I've seen examples of storytelling, after the art encounters the business world, being transformed into an abstract, analytical maneuver that ordinary people don't understand.

When smart people who know something about storytelling get up and turn their backs to me to read aloud from a PowerPoint slide, then I know there's something wrong, that there is a basic lack of respect for what a story is.

Get up on your feet, look into our eyes and tell us a story. You claim that stories can change the world. Show us!

## Chapter 7

### The Magic of Stories

*The early nighttime is filled with sounds. The trill of a nightingale comes from the tall thicket. A sheep bleats nervously from the fold below. A drake laughs scornfully. Around a campfire sits a small group of people wrapped in gray woolen blankets, speaking together in low tones.*

*I am at Denmark's first International Storytelling Festival in 1996. Storytellers from all over the world are gathered at the Lejre Experimental Centre.*

*I volunteered to pick the storytellers up at the airport and drive them to Lejre; I have just begun my professional storytelling career and am just there to learn what I can.*

*The audience has gone home, and only storytellers and festival staff remain. There are merry voices coming from inside one of the small cottages. I knock on the door. An old man with a Scottish accent invites me inside, grinning. I am invited to sit and offered a spot on the floor. The old man is Duncan Williamson, who claims to know more than a thousand stories. We probably won't be able to hear that many this night, but we might manage a few.*

*Someone lights a candle. It is a large room with small bunk beds along all the walls, a white curtain across each of the beds. There are fifteen storytellers staying in this same room.*

*Duncan is telling a funny story; it's almost a joke. As he tells it, he is a young man again. When the story is over, we all laugh, and we hear people laughing from behind the bed curtains.*

*The invisible threads of night are being woven between us. At one point, I lean back and can see the first red stripes in the sky of the sun on the horizon. Time and the stories are gone; left are a number of images, moods and thoughts. I have learned a great deal this night, also about myself. A story dies away, and we all sit still for a few seconds.*

*Then Duncan says, "That reminds me of a story."  
The curtain on one of the beds is drawn back, just enough to allow the head of a tired woman to come into view. "Which we're not gonna hear. Goodnight, gentlemen."*

*We look a little at each other, get up and go outside. It's probably about four in the morning, and the sun – which comes up early at this time of year in Scandinavia – is rising above the horizon. A new day is starting, with more and more birds tentatively joining what is rapidly becoming a wonderful cacophony of birdsong, as if testing to see whether their voices still work all right after a night of silence. They certainly do.*



*We all stand in a row, looking at the sunrise and marking our territory: happy boys having a good time together, a time we will always remember with great pleasure.*

### **The secret of a storyteller**

You ask me if there is some secret to storytelling. If there is one, then I just revealed it to you.

You ask again, this time a bit impatiently, and ask me not to reply with yet another story. You tell me that it must be possible to give a few statements or rational arguments that can sell the point that storytelling is good for your organization.

If that isn't possible, then it must be possible to make a couple of PowerPoint slides with nice arrows and a few circles overlapping each other.

I don't know whether I have made it clear to you, but my point is exactly that what you are asking me to do is not good.

*Bullet-point statements and models only water down reality – make it one-dimensional.*

I warn you. This is not the best way to argue whether or not storytelling should be a way for your organization to use storytelling. The best argument is a story.

But as I understand, you would love to have these one-way rational arguments. Ok – I will give it a try.

### **What is it you can learn from a storyteller?**

A good story well told actually adds more dimensions to reality. That is also one of the reasons why a story should be told, not written down. A story told aloud makes manifest many more layers of reality than a "flat" written story could ever do.

That is why I wrote the story with which I started this chapter. It would have been best to tell it to you in person, but the point of writing it down is:

It explains what storytellers do on their day off – tell stories – or the second-best thing: listen to stories. We can't help it.

The images the stories elicit remain after the stories themselves are gone – and I learn about myself by noting which images remain in my memory, in my head.

Listening to stories is a physical activity: you create images in your mind while you are listening.

Being present in the now is something you can practice.

Storytelling generates energy, both in the listener and the storyteller.

You must keep a tight rein on the story, otherwise it all turns into fun, but smoke and mirrors.

## **What Can an Oral Story Do?**

A story told aloud:

**Invites.** Each individual employee can form their own pictures in their head. This interactive aspect is the fundamental aspect of storytelling: that reality is created and changed as it is being described.

**Gathers together.** It turns complex reality into simple images.

**Activates.** It stimulates the other half of your brain. For example, I normally work with smells and with sounds: two different associations that activate very different centres in the body.

**Stimulates.** It makes us feel like children again. A girl once told me, "It's just like dreaming while you're awake."

## **How Can a Storyteller Help You Understand Your Organization Better?**

In my encounters with the business world, it fascinates me deeply that I as a storyteller have anything to contribute to your world. That was what I thought the first time I encountered the world of business as a storyteller, and I think so still.

Storytelling and what people do at work have a great deal in common. Four of the most obvious things are as follows.

As a storyteller, I know something about

1. interacting.
2. creating images.
3. the importance of a good story.
4. creating a metaphor that is alive and becomes an organic part of the shifting reality that an organization is.

In a perfect organization, with a flat structure and in which management has the courage to maintain a running dialog with staff, then all the opportunities are there to exploit each of these four points that, as a storyteller, I know something about.

In this perfect organization, there are some guidelines taken from this knowledge.

As a leader, you have to

- be able to navigate and delegate.
- clearly express what you want from the future.
- have a good story that separates your workplace from the rest.

As an employee further down on the organizational ladder, you have to

- make the story of your organization your own, and take it further in a loyal and yet deeply personal way.
- weave yourself into the story of your workplace.
- be active in the specific expression of what you want from the future.

Over the past years, as I have come to know your world better, there seem to be four other things that characterize people in a real-life organization:

1. You are busy
2. Your reality is constantly changing without anyone consulting you about it first
3. You are met with growing demands every day
4. You will be even busier in the future

Being busy kills any kind of innovative thinking, storytelling or happiness. So you have to work towards the perfect organization. And a way to get there is telling stories that embodies the goal.

One goal is to learn how to be present – this moment is magic. The next is as well, but if we constantly think about all the good things to come, we forget to enjoy what this moment, this instance can bring us.

### **Double Presence**

*While you are telling your story, you must be aware of the reactions of your listeners. Is that possible at all?*

*I am at the 2002 Lejre Storytelling Festival. I am outside the farm cottages area. I suppose there are about 80 people sitting in the sun listening to my stories. Steve stands at a bit of a distance. I can feel that I'm concentrating more than usual today. I dance, whirl above my stories and then suddenly stand still and feel how they change.*

*When I'm done, Steve comes over to me. He tells me I'm a completely different person when I'm telling stories. I protest: I'm not playacting. I'm not playing the role of a storyteller. Then he laughs and says I'm being touchy.*

*He says that what he saw was that I underwent a transformation, as if I transformed myself into a different state, a state of 100% presence. I explain that the presence comes from my perceiving storytelling as an interactive dance, that I can be 100% present in my stories and see all the images, feel all the feelings, and smell all the smells in the story, while at the same time being 100% aware of how each listener down there is breathing, is with me, is participating through the images they are forming in their minds.*

### **Microsoft Denmark**

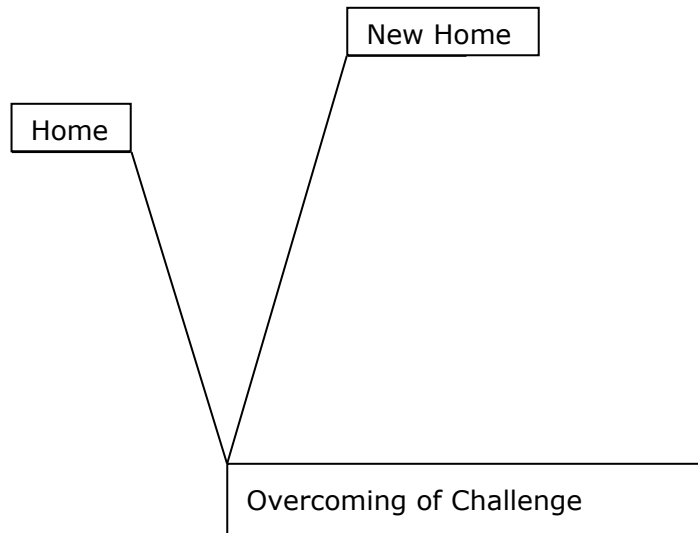
Summer 2008. Microsoft Denmark is a success in the Microsoft Company. The rates are high and the group of Key Managers is constantly looking for new possibilities to maintain a strong position in the market. This situation is challenging. It's easy to motivate to get to the top, to stay there demands something special. So storytelling could be a motivate factor.

I'd been contacted by the manager of a group of nine Key Account Managers to do a workshop for two hours.

I shall tell a metaphor that reflects the challenges the group face ahead and organise a workshop with I Stories and We Stories.

As always when I work with Microsoft it is challenging and very productive.

I talk about the mutual responsibility in a told story, how to connect to the customers in a way that involves the listener. I introduce a model taken from fairy tales.



To overcome this challenge our hero needs a helper.

This is taken from a model called actant model:

Helper – protagonist – opponent

I tell the Key Account Managers that H.C. Andersen: “The Travel Companion” is a fairy tale with a very clear helper.

The Travel Companion meets our hero Johannes as he is walking towards the town where the wicked princess is killing suitors just for fun.

The Travel Companion picks up three bundles of sticks, a sword and a couple of swan wings. When they arrive at the castle, the princess tells Johannes that he shall guess what she thinking about in the morning when they meet again.

So the Travel Companion uses his sticks and the wings to fly with the princess out to the ugly troll that has enchanted the princess. The troll tells the princess that next morning she shall think of one of her gloves.

So next morning Johannes knows what it on the princess’ mind.

The third night the Travel Companion uses his sword to cut off the head of the troll. And then the princess is released from the enchanting chains and Johannes can marry her.

I told the Account Managers that I would like to hear some stories from the real world, so I could make this metaphor a Microsoft Denmark story. Microsoft should be playing the part of the Travel Companion and the customer should be Johannes.

We started with the morning exercise. Tell about this morning and give response to the story told.

Next exercise I gave to the group was an I Story with a meeting/challenge and a happy ending.

I overheard a story from one of the Account Managers. It concerned an offer to a major customer. The customer was asking for a highly sophisticated solution that Microsoft could deliver 90 % of the support needed and the last 10 % had to be developed.

He had told this to his customer and he was very disappointed with this message and searched for other partners.

In the end they made the agreement with Microsoft and with the missing 10 %.

I said thank you and asked if it was OK to use that story as part of the Travel Companion story. He accepted that.

After this exercise I told them that I would like to hear all the stories.

So we did the first and last meaning-exercise.

Exercise first and last - in a group, min. 15 people.

Create a space for the storytelling performance. The storytelling space is empty. The group members sit on chairs. Everybody has prepared a story. One by one they get up and stand in the storytelling space.

The person who had left the audience and now is a storyteller stands firmly on both feet and tells his story

1. the first meaning (king)
2. silence (servant)
3. the last meaning (king)
4. silence (servant)

Now leave the storytelling space and return to the audience.

The next listener becomes a storyteller. By this way you can hear 15 stories (or part of 15 stories) in a very short time.

In the Microsoft setup I adjusted this, so everybody just had to get up from the chair and tell the first and the last meaning. That saved us some time.

One of the Key Account Managers said that it was a good exercise and she would do this first and last meaning next time she would do a presentation. It gives the outline of the presentation in a second. I agree.

Now it was time for me to tell the story "The Travel Companion" or "The Helper".

So I told them about the man going for his long journey that would bring him into deepest forest, over the biggest mountains and over the most dangerous oceans. He needed somebody to help him. And when the helper came and told him about the equipment for the journey our hero was warned. This can help you fighting the dragon, but it can't protect you against all evils.

Our hero said, 'I will follow you and whenever you find that your sword, your cloak of iron and your shield isn't good enough we will find solutions together'.

And our hero was so pleased because he had tried to be out there in a storm fighting the biggest dragon of them all and when he was in the middle of that fight he realized that his equipment weren't of any help. And so he nearly drowned.

Because we was warned he could be alert and with the helper on his side they could always find some solutions together.

## Chapter 8

"(...) there are three stories the leader needs to communicate: Who am I, who are we, where are we going."<sup>8</sup>

### The organizational tree

I read these clever words and began wondering: Why is everybody talking about storytelling as a leadership tool?

What is leadership?

It is top down or bottom up?

And it made me realize that I had to construct a metaphor that everybody could relate to.

*May 2003, Kings Garden, Copenhagen. I was going to tell stories under the branch of a wonderful red beech close to Rosenborg Castle, build in 1606 by the Danish king Christian the 4. It was a warm evening and the sun was low. It was amazing. The beautiful sunset just behind the tree, the castle standing there all red for the sun and already there was a little crowd.*

*The tree was standing like it has been waiting for this annual event. I jumped up and touched the lowest of the branches. I told the tree that we were going to tell stories like we had doing for the past seven years.*

*It was as the room between the grass and the branches of the tree filled itself with expectations.*

*The audience was approximately 80 people, some young, some old, but all with listening ears and open hearts. It was a magical evening.*

When we finished our storytelling, I had the picture of the tree inside me while I drove home to my suburban house.

I came home and went to bed. I couldn't sleep. So I got up and made a drawing of the tree.

Then I thought about the division of stories in three categories and had them on the tree.

Before you turn the page and look the tree that I made that night I like you to draw a tree of your organization.

Use the blank forthcoming page.

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<sup>8</sup> Noel M. Tichy: The Thought Leader, Interview [By Randall Rothenberg](http://www.strategy-business.com/press/16635507/8458) from the website <http://www.strategy-business.com/press/16635507/8458>





Take a look at your tree and ask: Is your workplace grounded? Does the roots, including you self, get enough nourishment from the soil so the tree can grow to become a majestic and beautiful tree? Is there something wrong with the trunk, the values and the ways things are done? Remember, the trunk is holding the top of the tree!

Imagine spring – on the tree there are these small green buds holding the future. How do you feel about the future of your organization? Imagine autumn – now the fruit are covering the tree. What is the possibilities in your organization?

That is the funny thing about a metaphor – you can ask quite difficult questions. But if you ask them metaphorically it is not that dangerous.

The truth and the fiction work together interactively.
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Every metaphor has strength and weaknesses. You can't create a picture that holds all the different elements in the real life.

One of the things I like about this metaphor is that it is organic. Your workplace has an organic flow, of information, of goods, of decisions etc. It changes all the time. That is one of the major challenges today.

Other good things to be said about a tree as a metaphor for an organization:

- Everybody knows a treeThe water flows from the roots all the way to the top
- If you don't take care of your roots, give them water and nurse the ground, you will find that the tree will die
- A great part of the tree is hidden under the surface and it is best to stay that way
- The trunk holds the top of the treeIn the spring the tree is filled with buds
- In the autumn it is filled with fruit (if it is a fruittree!)

### **I - , We – and Future – stories**

There are basically three kinds of stories in an organization:

- *I - stories – the roots of the tree*: Every person in the organization is important and every voice should be heard. Some of these stories should stay hidden under the surface.
- *We stories - the trunk of the tree*: Stories that create identity. Values become alive in these stories.
- *Future stories – in spring it is the green buds soon to become blades on the tree and in the autumn it is the fruit on the tree*: Concrete change ideas of what the immediate and long-term future will bring to the organization.

A healthy organization has equal many I, We and Future stories and there is a balance between the three categories of stories depending the nature of the challenges.

Stories are born, have their own life and after a while they die – new stories arises or old stories are reborn. Your workplace is a organic place, and therefore shall the stories of this organic place have a organic nature.

Trees demands soil, air, water and light.

Stories demands people, time, presence and relevance.

I like the metaphor. It creates new insights.

It has weaknesses. A tree is immovable. A tree can't eat another tree. But all in all it isn't the worst metaphor I have heard to describe what is going on in an organization.

### **The roots in the ground – I stories**

In 1966, when I was eight years old, my sister died of cancer.

She was thirteen years old at the time and had been sick for four years.

In those days children weren't supposed to attend funerals. So the doctors told my parents it would be better for me to be elsewhere and have some fun.

I spent the time during my sister's funeral together with a stranger. We went into the centre of Copenhagen, where we bought a toy car for me. It was a grey open Bentley.

When I was twelve, I smashed the Bentley with a hammer.

At the age of twenty six I was filled with rage.

I was angry and afraid at the same time.

Angry with my father, the society, the world.

Afraid of elevators, people, heights, you name it.

So I went to a neurologist. His name was Ole and was 71 at the time. He held my hand firmly, looked me straight in the eyes when I arrived and said "Hello". Then I sat down and talked to him for one hour. I realized slowly that I was telling him my story and it was fantastic for me to have a listener. When I left his "Goodbye" was just as firm as his "Hello".

Between our meetings whenever I was troubled I remembered those bright eyes and that firm handshake.

I consulted him for half a year.

At the last consultation we talked about what I would like to do for a living. I told him I had considered becoming an artist. I wanted to be a theatre director. He smiled at me and told me that sorrow and grief had been the incentive for a lot of artists.

Then he said something that seemed so strange at the time.

"Your story is your story, and it stays your private story as long as you want it to be. But if you put out in the world, you have to make it our story.

And to do so, you have to give hope. Hope for the future, hope for the people that will come after us."

Ole was a clever man and I will always be grateful for his capacity to listen, as I made my travel back to the living. And he is to this day an inspiration for me.

What Ole did to me is, quite simply, what we all do when we are listening to a story – we connect not only to the storyteller as listeners, but to a world outside of ourselves. Just as important, the storyteller makes a link to the past, the present and the future inside and outside of the listener.

You tell I stories at the coffee machine, at lunch, in the cantina – in all those informal meeting you have in your daily work. These meetings tie human beings together.

The stories belong to every single individual and the organizations just have to accept their presence. A lot of pressure can be relieved in these informal rooms.

The stories are invisible and a lot of power is hidden here. The secret is that they only stay powerful if they stay underground. The stories often concern things that is close, something you worry about or something that brings pleasure. These I stories are informal, they show ways of doing things.

I have created such an I story – I am not sure whether or not it is true but I am sure of one thing: It could be true.

*A secretary is late for lunch with the other secretaries. When she arrives she is furious. A telephone repairman had arrived at 9 am and told her that it would only take one hour and she wouldn't notice him while he was working.*

*"He is still in my office and he has been talking to me all morning – I have answered all kinds of idiotic questions about our telephone line and I haven't done a proper work.*

*And the worst thing, you know my son David, he is going to play baseball at four pm. I was in a hurry before, now I am in a rush. And if that stupid telephone man just could have told me in the morning that he would be here all day and that he needed me there to support him, you could have helped me with some of the work piling up at my desk."*

*The other secretaries provide her with all the support she asks for. They run through her projects and after a while she is calmed down. She laughs: "MEN!"*

*One of the new secretaries is listening carefully. A lot of information is hidden here and she will act according to the information.*

Are you able to find the hidden information? And what did the new secretary do after this incident? If you have any suggestions, you are welcome to email me. I will put the suggestions on my blog.

Stories acts as examples
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### **I Story - to Create Trust**

I would like you to listen to me. One of the ways to make you really hear what I am saying, not just politely nod your head up and down, is to tell a story from my life.

I will send you back to the early days of the sixties, where the Russian and the American raced who would be the first to send a man in orbit.

It was the Russian who won the race.

In 1961 the Russian cosmonaut Jurij Gargarin was the first man flying in a space. His flight lasted less than two hours but it was a major sensation in those days.

In February 1962 John Glenn was the first American to orbit the earth. He spend four hours in space.

*At 8 pm local time the 20. February 1962 a crowd of people had gathered on a bridge in my home suburban town 15 km. from Copenhagen.*

*It was a bright cold winter night with glimmering stars.*

*My mother from Norway, my dad, a blue collar guy with big hands from the countryside of Denmark, my sister five years older than me and my self were standing on a bridge looking up in the stars. All in all we are approximately 40 people on that bridge this evening.*

*I was afraid of the bridge because of the steam train passing by underneath. If you were standing on the bridge, when a train passed, you disappeared in smoke.*

*I was cold and frightened, but I didn't dare say anything to my dad. He was excited and held my hand real tight. It hurt a little bit. Then he screamed: "Look, son, there he is" and pointed up in the sky. I wasn't looking up, because he was so enthusiastic seeing one of the stars mowing through the sky, that he pressed my little hand and this time the pain was too much for me. So I looked down on the ground and started crying. My mother mumbled something and the two of us left the bridge leaving my sister and dad pointing up into the black heaven.*

*When we got back to our apartment my mother told me to go to bed.*

*I heard my father and sister came back to the little two room apartment. They were thrilled with excitement.*

*A man from our part of the world, not one of those Russians, travelled around in the space and it was possible for us down here on the earth to watch it – it was unbelievably. I heard the voices from the living room and I was lying in my bed feeling little and useless.*

*Suddenly everything was quiet in the living room. The door opened and my father and sister quietly came in and sat down on my bedside. They said they heard from my mother that I was sad. I looked at them, puzzled.*

*My father had a newspaper in his hand. He asked me if it was OK to show a picture of the astronaut. The name of the astronaut was John as my best friend and I said something about his haircut because my friend John had just cut off his hair in a very short hairstyle. I was right. John the astronaut had short hair. When we saw the pictures from the space shuttle a lot of questions were raised. Where was the toilet? How can he eat when the food is flying around? We had a great time imagining how a daily life would be on a space shuttle.*

*When my father said "Goodnight" to me and my sister, I thought that I was lucky to have someone saying goodnight to me. I didn't know whether or not the astronaut John had a son, but I knew that if he had, no father would say goodnight to him that night.*

I stories shows a number of values and attitudes, that give the listener an opportunity to ask: Are these values and attitudes important for me? Do I approve the communication offered here?

I stories are easily told because you were there. You don't have to imagine anything. The images, the noises, the smell, you just have to recall it. The story happened in the past, your job is to make alive again. The reality is a source of never ending inspiration.

One strange thing: You have to check your story. Even if it is your memory, you have to ask about the details: Was it winter? How long time did he stay up in that space ship?

I stories are easy to tell because

- It's easy to recall. You were there, now tell us what happened
- You know the people you are talking about
- The sensations created in the moment should be re created, not invented
- You catch the attention of the listener in a second
- The listener tells his or her own story into yours
- You reveal your way of life and you find recognition in the response from the listener

I stories are hard to tell because

- You loose yourself in distracting details
- You are overwhelmed by the emotions in your story and forget about the structure
- It is so much fun to tell stories from your past that you forget the purpose
- You become too personal

### **I Stories Teambuilding**

I 2001 my colleague Anders Granström and me held a workshop for a group people that didn't know each other. The participants were leaders from the administration of the city councils. We held a workshop on Tuesday and the same content on Wednesday. People had to sign in for the workshops in advance. The organizers were disappointed because of the low interest for our workshops and we were placed in one of the smallest room in the Congress Centre where the event took place. We had 40 people attending our workshop the first day and expected 50 at the second.

Our workshops followed the lines of this book. Basic of storytelling, images, I stories and a lot of interaction. The first workshop on Tuesday was a success. Especially the I stories was fun.

The second day was a chock for the organizers. We were nearly 100 people when we closed the door. They were sitting in the windows, on the floor, on the tables stabled in the end of the room, everywhere.

One exercise was to describe a room that you felt comfortable in when you were a child. I will never forget the picture of these managers sitting on the floor telling each others stories from their childhood.

A story from your life should be personal, never private
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### **"Oops" Stories**

We do not need to focus only on successes: on the contrary, remembering only part of the past only makes us poorer. It must be legitimate to tell about the "oops" mistakes we make: they happen to all of us.

In the beginning, this will cause a great deal of uncertainty, and ethics rules should be introduced for this work – it is very strong forces we are unleashing when we do this. After a while, however, we can see that it doesn't hurt (all the time) and that it is an effective way to share knowledge.

*2002, Copenhagen, an office worker in a group of four.*

*I have instructed them to tell a story where they succeeded and one story where they failed. The other members in the group shall listen to the*

*stories of success and write down all the things that could have changed the story to a 'oooops' story. And when they hear a 'oooops' story they shall write all the things that could change this story to a success. The woman starts her 'oooops' story by saying that the rest of group have to promise her never ever to retell the story to anyone. They accept and off course the expectations are high.*

*After the story is told to an end the disappointment from the others are big. I can tell you a story about something I did and that was worse than what you just told us, said one of the other. The woman telling the first story had never tried to admit she had done a mistake. Poor woman! Everybody makes mistakes and if you can't admit this, the 'ooops' story turns into something you can use a lot of energy to control.*

Very few organizations dare show their 'oooops' stories for the public. I can only remember one organization that shows one employee that makes a mistake and learn from it.

### **Knife in the box – story**

The story is from Lego, the Danish toy Concern. Lego introduced in 2001 a CD with stories, The Lego Spirit. The HR department in Lego had gathered stories from around the world. The purpose of the CD was to show how the values of Lego was alive. I 2008 the CD is a piece of history. Now the Lego Concern works with other strategies for their employees.

I had the CD sent to me in 2001 and heard all the stories. There was one story that caught my attention. It was so different from the rest. The other stories on the CD were all about how fantastic the Lego Products were and how the employees of Lego was filled with good ideas etc. This story was different of two reasons: The person on this particular video was authentic in a more profound way than the people telling stories of their successes. And the story the woman told was about a major 'oops'. It was a woman from USA, in her mid 50. Here is the story:

*A couple of years ago when LEGO DUPLO came out with the Winnie the Pooh product, we had to check that the boxes contained the right pieces. At this particular time I took ten units and used my knife to cut the master cartons and taps on the boxes. When the inspection was all done I packed up and re-taped everything and it went back to the line to be shipped out.*

*Some time later I realised that my knife was missing. I asked a colleague Elaine if she had seen it, but she hadn't. So I tried to retrace my steps: I looked on the floor, I went through the garbage, I looked in the restroom. But I couldn't find it. Then it struck me: Could I have lost the knife in one of the DUPLO sets? The thought scared me.*

*Immediately I notified Nancy, who works in the distribution centre, to put everything on hold so that nothing would leave the warehouse for the stores. Then I notified my supervisor, Andrew, and together we went up to the distribution centre and started looking through the boxes - one by one. After opening about 50 DUPLO boxes, we found it. The blade of the knife was open so if a child had put his or her hand in there they could have been seriously hurt. It made me sick to my stomach.*

*Since then we have started attaching little bungy-cords to the knives, so that your knife will always come with you. It's always attached to your person so nothing like that can happen again.*

I watch the video again when I am writing this book and my wife looks over my shoulder. She likes what she sees and hears. 'This is good', she says. 'This woman is honest and she had learned from her mistakes. Not often people admit that.'

## **I Stories Becomes We Stories**

**or**

### **The Official and the Unofficial I Stories**

Another way of categorizing the I stories is the official and the unofficial I Stories. The I Stories at the coffee machine is most often unofficial, but the stories of the single individual being a hero can change and become an official story for the company to use for various purposes, attract the best people could be one of them.

The use of the stories can change. I stories covered by soil and not to be heard in the public can change to stories that reflect the values on the working place, so called We Stories.

The next story is used to give inspiration to a group of nursing aides. The self-confidence in the group is low. One of the consultants at the hospital tell these women a story, the question is: Is it an I Story or a We Story?

*This consultant was a princess when she was a child. Every member of her family protected her and acted like she couldn't do anything in the household. The girl never saw that as a problem.*

*At the age of 18 she travelled to England and got herself a job as a au pair girl. When she came home for Christmas the whole family was gathered. And she was asked if she couldn't tell about her life in England. She told them about the first day at the new work and all the things she had to take care of. The little baby, the boy at the age of three, the washing of clothes etc.*

*And her family stared at her: And what did you do about that? She told them that she took care of all these duties and the au pair family was pleased with her effort.*

*Her family didn't believe her and she realized that she had to work hard to change their picture of her being a princess.*

When the consultant tells this story it has a strong impact of the audience because she is standing right in front of them. Look at me, she is saying by her presence. And they look at see this wonderful strong woman that changed her own perception and therefore changed others.

An example to follow.

### **Three We Stories**

*1. September 2004 – City Council of Copenhagen. The fire workers are very conscious of their corps spirit. A fireman tells about how the group of firemen heard that a widow of one of their colleagues had problems with her garden. It was spring and there was so many things to be done. So the group of firemen went out to the suburb where she lived.*

*They had a wonderful day together and the garden was really nice when they sat in her kitchen after a good days work. She gave a beer and a thank you. Well, the last was unnecessary.*

*2. October 2005 – northern part of Denmark. The leaders from a small town administration, a group of leaders from the kinder gardens in the town, all the school leaders, the manager of the green areas etc. were gathered to find the soul of the little town. I had asked them to take some pictures and show them to us.*

*It was great fun. There were more than 100 photographs of children playing in the sun, roses to be cut, beautiful sunsets over the fjord etc. And every one of these leaders told stories why they were proud of doing what they were doing from those photographs.*

*3. March 2006 – Copenhagen. A house of consultants in growth. Our workshop deals with values and they have been working in groups for two hours trying to find stories that reflects their values. One of the girls in the kitchen raises and looks around. The group of consultants looks at her with expectations. This is a new voice.*



*She is a little nervous. They help her. The girl from the kitchen starts telling the story of a former colleague that the managers suspected for drinking problems. The young girl was a new employee at that time and she was astonished how the management helped that poor woman. They offered her help and paid for a stay at one of the alcohol abuse centre.*

### **Characteristics of a We Story**

- are all the stories that shows You are different than everybody else
  - are carried by the values on the working place and nourish them when the stories are told
  - can be something that the group are proud of
  - can be something that the group are very little proud of
  - can be about a threat from outside and how You as a group confronted the threat
- The stories shall flow in the organization not just from top to bottom, but also bottom up.

### **Values in Play**

A mid-level manager from the Danish Insulin Company Novo told about a process of formulating the corporate values of a production unit. The values were supposed to be something people should always have in mind; they were to be identified by the people who were to use them, and everyone in the unit was involved in this identification process.

She said, "It was a unique process because the person who was in charge of finding these values was our site manager's secretary. That was unheard of, that it was a secretary who would be figuring out what values our business unit should have. I think that it actually helped with respect for the values, though, that it wasn't just something laid on us from above. It was something we were supposed to do together, and a secretary could just as well be good at coordinating the process as anyone else.

"It was a good process in which we were divided up into groups. Everyone had the opportunity to have their say.

"Our values are the same as those of our parent organization (and that's what many object to about the values: that they're the same ones everyone in the organization has!) But I don't have the same attitude towards the values of the parent company because I didn't help formulate them, even though both sets of values use the same words. For example, the word 'accountability' means much more to me as one of our values because I was part of the process."

### **The Fruit of the Tree**

#### **Two Springboard Stories**

*It is around lunchtime, and it isn't until the air saturated with the smell of the spicy meatballs and hot chicken reaches our nostrils that we suddenly discover we're hungry. There are 15 of us from different organizations on this day in June 2001 attending a workshop with Steve Denning, former World Bank director of knowledge management and author of the book The Springboard. Lunch interrupts intense and exciting work being done. We had gotten our money's worth this morning; that doesn't always happen when you take a course.*

The program consists of two parts. The first part was Steve showing slides and telling us how he single-handedly transformed the World Bank's knowledge management strategy by using a kind of story he calls "springboard stories."

We understand that springboard stories show the opportunities of the future through specific examples from the past. I nod. As a storyteller, I know that the past, present and future merge in an oral story.

Two of the springboard stories in Steve's tale are central. The first story is ultra-short, almost a non-story: sixteen words about a health worker in a little village in Zambia that couldn't find information on malaria at the World Bank's Web site.

The second story is more complex. Steve's slides show us the story of a highway engineer in Pakistan who went looking for information on a problem they were having with the construction of a highway. He received his information from all over the world much faster than normal because he was part of a virtual network.

The above were two examples illustrating Steve's idea for change in the World Bank was – that it should become a knowledge bank – and two examples that showed the effect that a springboard story should have: immediate action. That's why it's called a springboard story. It makes people get up and do something.

Steve claims that the two stories were enough to change the way ten thousand employees looked at knowledge management. After an hour of lively PowerPoint presentation, we believe him. Even though the guy claims he's not good at telling stories, what he says is credible. We are with him when he claims that the stories dramatically changed this huge organization that didn't want to change. He is his own example. He is authentic.

The reason Springboard Stories has an effect on people is partly due to the nature of storytelling. The possibilities of the future is described in a way that gives the audience an opportunity to create own ideas, to become involved in the realization of a change idea in a way that no other communication tool can achieve.

One other secret is the link to the present. Imagine if ... is the key words.

### **Changing of The World Bank and Borup High School**

It is 1995, and Steve Denning is working for the World Bank. I am a teacher at the Borup Folk High School. A folk high school is a uniquely Danish institution of adult continuing education, often with boarding students.

Steve is on his way up the career ladder and ends up heading the African Region. I direct a large-scale theater project and am working on a cultural exchange project with the Danish Red Cross cultural centre. Steve's boss leaves the World Bank, and Steve is demoted.

The general crisis in the folk high school sector is worsening: we don't have as many students as before.

Steve is asked to look for information. I find myself at a crossroads. How can we attract students to the school?

Steve realizes that the World Bank will have to change: it must become a knowledge organization. I find some of my old notes from the first time I taught storytelling and wonder whether students at the Borup Folk High School in 1995 perceive interaction as a central principle.

To change the primary focus of the World Bank, which was to lend money, Steve tried different approaches: arguments, bar charts, diagrams, numbers – none of it worked. Then he began to tell stories. That worked. One of them was the story of a highway engineer who needed information.

It is 1996, and there is a problem in Pakistan with a highway. It is a problem that needs to be solved very quickly. The normal procedure is to write a report, prepare budgets, etc. That would take at least three months, and the highway engineer needs an answer immediately. So he sends an e-mail to the people in his network, a loosely based network of people with the same interest: highways. Within a week, it turns out these other people have lots of experience with exactly the problem he faces. There is a book being written in Argentina on the subject; the South Africans have already tested various solutions and will send their results; and there is more. Instead of the normal three months, a solution was found in the week they had to fix it. Because his network worked and because the knowledge was there and in play, it was possible to solve the problem. And then comes the magic word in this kind of story: imagine.

Imagine if the knowledge that an organization holds could always be open and available. Imagine the advantages of knowledge sharing. This triggers the little voice in their heads that turn story listeners in to active participants in the process of changing reality that the story describes. The ten thousand employees of the World Bank changed course partly due to the stories Steve calls springboard stories.

To get more interaction at the Borup Folk High School, I began to tell the story of Sara and Knute. Knute was an unskilled worker working for a bricklayers' firm. He was about 50 and a little different from the others in the class, but they liked him. He was honest and told you what he thought, plain and clear. Sara was a punk rocker who wore big military boots that somehow always had soil in the grooves of the soles, so she was constantly shedding little bits of dirt when she walked. One day after lunch, I see Knute come into the lounge to smoke. He sees there is this empty seat beside Sara. As usual, Sara has flung her big boots up onto the table and looks as though the world is her oyster. Knute doesn't really want to look at her ugly boots, so he walks over to stand by the window. Then he lights up his cigarette, looks at her boots again, and makes a decision. He sits down beside Sara and tells her to get those boots off the table. Sara turns toward Knute, quick as lightning. She's just about to give him the finger, or maybe both of them, but then she sees it's Knute. Her fingers are frozen in sort of a half-way-up position. Then she grins, says something like sure, she can do that, and she starts chatting with Knute. They talk about the philosophy class coming up, about Jørgen, a guy they both like, about life.

At that point in time, I hadn't yet met Steve and didn't know the significance of the magic word "imagine." So I never gave my colleagues (there were ten of us teachers) the opportunity to activate that little voice and create change. My colleagues were never convinced that the cultural encounter illustrated by my story was true of all the students at the school, that it was the foundation of folk high school life: the interaction between different people.

Today, this is exactly what companies and organizations are looking for. They don't want employees that are clones of each other. Diversity generates energy, and friction generates warmth.

Steve Denning left the World Bank in 1999 to become a storyteller. The World Bank was named one of the world's ten most admired organizations in 2001.

In 1999, the Borup Folk High School fired me because there weren't enough students. Danish folk high schools are still in a crisis, also because they did not understand the message in my little story. The interaction between different cultures is not about putting Chinese students and Danish students in the same class; it is just as much about people that would not normally encounter each other finding a place where they can meet and exchange experiences, dreams and thoughts. This place could well be the folk high schools.

Stories about the future involves a preconceived idea of the future, so remember to use "imagine that..."

Another thing the story could teach us is that it is your position that determines the effect your story will have.

### **Stories of the Future Are the Fruits**

*The year is 2004, and we are in the old royal city of Roskilde just west of Copenhagen. A group of medical secretaries are gathered together to talk about the future. They are a threatened profession. New technology is gradually making their jobs obsolete, so it is important they take up new challenges and change professional tracks. I had been contacted by their labor union to put together a workshop that will help them think new thoughts.*

*I start my workshop, introduce myself, introduce storytelling as a profession, and then divide them into groups of two and ask them to tell each other stories.*

*A little later, when I ask who wants to get up in front of everyone and tell a story, no one volunteers. I notice, though, that there are two women, about 40, sitting next to each other having a good time. One of them keeps giving the other little playful pushes, as if urging her to go ahead. So I ask this woman if she would like to tell a story. Her friend gives her a little push again, and she says okay. I ask if she wouldn't like to come up here, where I'm standing. No, no way, is the reply. So I let her stay seated where she is.*

*She tells us that she works as a secretary to a number of doctors at the Gentofte county hospital. One of the senior doctors came up to her one day and said, "I'm in charge of a Web site about a certain illness that I'm an expert in; you know that."*

*Yes, she knew that.*

*"It takes me much too long to administer the site. Would you want to help me out with some of it?"*

*And then she said two very wise things: 1) "It sounds very interesting," and 2) "I'll have to get some training so I can do it properly." He said that would be fine. The instructor of the Web design course she took was excellent; he helped her and gave her the support she needed, also with the site itself.*

*Then she looks humbly down at the table in front of her and says, "I must be doing an okay job, because now there are three other doctors asking me if I can do the same with theirs."*

*The room goes completely silent. No one wants to say anything, and who needs to after a story like that? It is crystal clear that this is what we had all come here for. She dared to say yes to a new challenge, but she also dared say yes in a way that was not just an acceptance; she demanded something from the change she was offered.*

This has become my favorite springboard story because it invites direct action: if she can do it, so can I! Her humble attitude towards telling the story made all the other medical secretaries want to take action themselves.

## **Chapter 9**

### **The Story Ends**

For the past eight years, I have made my living from telling stories and nothing else, and on my tax return it says "storyteller." I'm one of the few professional storytellers in Denmark.

Does that mean, then, that unlike amateurs, I don't like doing what I do? Or does it mean that I am quite seriously claiming that I am better than others at telling stories? I'm not sure. I do know that I love my job.

And I know that all my time is spent becoming a better storyteller, creating new stories, arranging events at which people can experience storytelling, and trying to fit storytelling into different contexts such as companies and organizations.

To get a bit closer to the answer to the question of whether I am a better storyteller than the people who don't get to write "storyteller" on their tax returns, I would like to tell a story from real life.

For eight years now, I've been organizing "Stories under the Beech Tree" events at which various storytellers tell their stories in their own way. It is the best possible setting: the Royal Gardens, with Rosenborg Castle the backdrop. The storytellers stand under a wonderfully beautiful old copper beech tree.

An interesting thing about "Stories under the Beech Tree" is that the tyranny of the target group has been abolished: all kinds of people like to enter the gorgeous gardens; enjoy the sun setting behind the castle; drink a little of the thermos coffee, wine, Bavarian beer or soda pop they brought with them; and listen to stories for two hours. It is an event that builds bridges across cultural chasms: there are punk rockers, executives, students, senior citizens, and more.

#### **The Lady with the Bike**

One Sunday in May 2007, I had invited an unknown storyteller from Aarhus that I get along with real well. We tell stories that are happy and just a touch erotic, inspired by Dario Fo, among others. The mood we create is a really good one. I am finishing up my stories when I notice a woman who has been standing, leaning up against her bicycle for 15 minutes or so. She smiles playfully, a little mischievously, and I recognize her as one of the regulars.

She says loudly that she's been here many times, and that she didn't really have time this evening, but if she could just tell a story, then she'd be on her way. Naturally, I accept, smiling, and sit down. The woman is leaning up against her bicycle, standing, while she tells her story. It is a story about her grandson, who threw a ball out into the pond just behind where we're sitting. Everyone looks at the pond. Well, then the mother of the boy sits down and paddles in the water to bring the ball to her. Once the child gets hold of the ball, he wants to throw it back in the water.

I look around me. The lady is not a very good storyteller, judging by storyteller school standards. Her voice is much too low; she speaks in a monotone; and she tells the story without rhythm. Still, the audience is rapt. They love her and carry her to the climax of the story, which is maddeningly exciting. Will Mom and Grandma save the ball? They do. Phew. The story is over, and the lady with the bicycle nods friendly and bicycles away to get to her appointment on time.

I must admit a certain envy. Here I work myself to the bone finding good stories, refining them and doing eye, voice and body exercises every day, working to become a better storyteller, and then some lady comes in from left field and says, "Excuse me, but could I..." and the audience listens to her with their hearts on their sleeves, disappearing far into the story, completely with her until the last breath – a story that wasn't really even a story.

Everything depends on the context in which a story is told. These listeners felt they were partly responsible for the project succeeding as well as it did. They helped create something wholly unique.

For me this is the most important lesson learned from storytelling and that is why it is going to be the one of the most important communication skill in the future. The storytelling approach of communication reflects one of the basic facts of life:

If you are part in creating the future possibilities you are devoted, and you will do what it takes to get there
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So if you will work with some of these methods at your working place you have to ask yourself whether or not you are ready for the changes that the process could generate.

The people at your workplace have to ask whether they are ready to accept storytelling. In their encounter with storytelling, they will discover that it generates new energy and releases a lot of pent-up energy. It is *so* simple. Tell a story; listen to one. Feel how it gives you pleasure and extra energy. It makes you want to change reality. Do it!

When everything gets back to normal, do you have an action plan? When your subordinates have specific wishes to the future, do the resources necessary to implement these wishes exist? On the other side of the equation, are your subordinates ready to fulfill the resulting obligations?

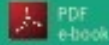
In this book, I showed you how a storyteller thinks and works. Now it is up to you to take these experiences out into the real world, and it will be up to you to get the two worlds, organization and storytelling to connect somehow.

Go out there and face your challenges. Create a connection between stories and actions. Tell us who you are. Be honest and set goals that are desirable and reachable. Stay on course when the storm comes. Create clear and simple images of the opportunities and challenges your place of work offers.

Easier said than done, you say. I know. If you dare to use stories in the specific situations you encounter, you will discover that it works, but you will have to be committed. In the book, I tried to give as clear directions as I could; now the rest is up to you.

Get out there and tell a story!





# Tell a Story

## Be Heard, Be Understood, Create Interaction

*"That is the interest of this book. To storytellers who are interested in making such a journey from storytelling into organizations. And to managers and people in organizations who are wondering whether there is anything in storytelling that is of relevance to business.*

*The book points out matters of profound interest to both the world of storytelling and the world of organizations.*

*In writing it, Svend-Erik has done a service to both worlds, and I hope you find it both educational and entertaining."*

**Steve Denning**

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