

EPISODE 1542

[INTRODUCTION]

Paul Smith (PS): Everybody wants to hear the story about somebody who was in their shoes facing the same problem that they're facing right now. That is the most helpful type of story you could ever tell someone. And those few words at the beginning, just let them know that the story that's about to follow is one of those types of stories. But again, I'm not going to tell you whether I succeeded or failed, I'm not going to tell you what my conclusion was, I'm not going to tell you how I solve the situation, you have to listen to the story to learn those things. All I'm letting you know upfront is that's the kind of story you're about to hear.

Whitney Sewell (WS): Thank you for being with us again today. I'm so grateful that you're back. Thank you. I hope that you listen to this segment of shows, and you will be encouraged to be a more effective leader while doing that. Would you hit the like button and subscribe to the show? I would be so grateful if you would leave us a written rating and review on iTunes. Also, if you'll do that, I will have a special gift for you. You can send us a screenshot of that review to info@LifeBridgeCapital.com. And we'll get you a gift in the mail personally from me. So I want to thank you again for listening. Have a blessed day.

[INTERVIEW]

WS: Leaders that are effective tell great stories. That's what our guest today told us just yesterday. And I want to thank the listeners for being back with us again today. I hope you heard Paul Smith yesterday talked about, we went through 10 stories that leaders should tell. All of us, whether you're a passive investor, whether you're active, you want to be an effective leader, they may be just a leader in your home or in your church or your organization, your business, whatever that may be, we all like to think of ourselves as an effective leader. And here's a great way that's gonna help you to do just that. Paul, welcome back to the show.

PS: Yeah, thanks for having me back. This is good.

WS: Awesome. Well, today, we want to help the listener and myself to dive into storytelling. Yesterday, we covered some of the, why that's so important. Even ten examples, ten different examples of stories that every leader should know or kind of have in their tool belt to tell about. And today we want to think help you think through the structure of a story. And Paul is going to help us to do just that.

So Paul, thank you again for your time, I cannot thank you enough. But how can a story structure help craft just a better story? You know, oftentimes, we're asking the question, we kind of fumble through our words, right? I've done it so many times that way, you know, but thinking through that structure, get a start.

PS: Yeah, so well, that's exactly why it helps. And then that moment where you want to tell the story and you're fumbling through your words and not knowing exactly where to start and when to stop and what to say next. Yeah, that's awkward, right? That's clearly not the best-delivered story is one that just fumbles its way through. So having a structure just makes it easier for the storyteller, the leader, to tell the story because they know exactly how they're going to tell the story. They don't have to just make it up as they go along and fumble through their words. But the other reason I think it's important to have a structure is if you think about the great stories you've heard, compared to the awful stories that you've heard, the awful stories tend to just be a rambling run-on mess. I don't think you want your story to sound that way.

There are lots of different story structures that you could use. In fact, I studied as many of them as I could and did the research for it. And you've heard of several of these, and you probably study them yourselves. In fact, up when you were probably in the third grade, and you started, did your first book report? Do you remember the structure that the teacher taught you to do your oral presentation of the book report, or of any little speech that you gave? There was the very first structure you were ever taught.

WS: I doubt. I wish I did.

PS: Okay, I'll say it and see if you remember this. So, introduction, body, conclusion.

WS: That's right. Yeah.

PS: The way that they would tell you to remember that was, tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, tell them what you told them, right? Introduction, body, conclusion. And if you're doing a book report, that still works, that's a great structure. But that's a terrible structure for a story. And this is another reason why leaders need a structure for stories because the ones that we've been taught in the past for various things, like making a presentation don't work really well. So, making a presentation is not the same as telling a story. As an adult, we still kind of follow that introduction-body-conclusion. If you're gonna make a recommendation, you got a presentation to give you get up in front of the audience, you got your PowerPoint slides behind you, the first thing you do is here's my recommendation. And then I'm gonna go through all the reasons why that's what I'm recommending, the Board of Directors adopt this new whatever, whatever, which is kind of like that introduction, body, conclusion. At the end, you're going to remind them, here's what I want you to do, I want you to sign here, decide this or fund this or whatever. Again, that works great if you're making a presentation or a recommendation. But can you imagine a story that worked that way?

Well, I'm going to tell you upfront, the boat sinks, okay, now, I'm going to tell you the whole story, or you know, I'm going to tell you who got murdered, and then I'm gonna tell you like, stories don't work that way. Stories have a very different structure. And there are a lot of story structures that will work. And the ones that your audience most likely have heard of is the *hero's journey storytelling structure*. And because it's one that Hollywood uses a lot, and the problem is it's like a 17-step plot structure, you know, and that's just the plot. There are a lot of things that have to happen before the plot and then, you know, learning the lesson afterward and making a recommendation. That's just the plot. So if you're going to try and tell a story, and do you remember how long the story should be, how many minutes?

WS: Two or three minutes?

PS: Yeah, from our conversation yesterday to three, four minutes, so you don't have time for Joseph Campbell's 17 Step hero's journey storytelling structure, right? Plus, it's just too hard to remember. So that's probably not a good one. You need a short one, but the introduction, body, conclusion is not helpful enough, and it's really not the right order. So what you need is something in between those two.

PS: And what I found works the best and I'll give you two ways to remember it, one is the more academic structure, which is, first of all, a *hook*, you need to get people's attention. Then you go through the main part of the story, which is the *context, challenge, conflict, resolution*. There's also going to be a lesson and a recommended action at the end. But what I found in teaching this is that using the more academic-sounding parts of a story is more difficult for people to remember and harder for them to know. Well, what goes in what part so what I found to be the easiest is just that there are eight questions your story needs to answer. And if you answer these eight questions in this order, a story will emerge in a way that makes sense to the audience and will be effective for you the leader. Alright, here are those eight questions.

WS: When I think about a scenario like that, where somebody's come to you and said, you know, I've had this problem. I love that, like you're relating them right away, you know, you're showing respect for one, you had some struggles as well, right? Allowing them to relate to you and your being just real transparent. All those things, building credibility, I think just immediately by saying that, you know, how much of this is on the fly versus like, you've already thought through these eight questions, or you've already built this story ahead of time. So you're prepared for this? Or maybe it's a question you get often, but obviously, there's gonna be questions that you're not asked often as well. And you may try to tell a story. So how much is kind of on the fly? You know, these eight questions, you're building that kind of measure, as we're speaking versus no, I've got these these 10 stories, or however many prepared ahead of time.

PS: So yeah, great, great question, you would be better served, obviously, as a leader, if you had more of these stories in your repertoire to use when the time is right. So the best leaders have already cultivated this, you know, repertoire of stories, the story bank that they can draw

upon when they're in the right situation. And if they've already thought through, you know, if and when I need to tell the story, here's kind of the answer the eight questions, here's how I would tell it, they're going to be more prepared, right? The worst time to tell a story is when you don't have a good story to tell, hey, that just sounds terrible. Obviously, you're just faking your way through this conversation and trying to or or you tell a story that's completely irrelevant, just because, well, I've got this really good story. And I'm trying to shoehorn it into the conversation wherever I can find a place to put it because I love the story. Well, that's not helpful to the audience. So you'd be better served to have as big of a repertoire of stories as you could, and then go ahead and think through In fact, the way I recommend to people to save and remember their stories is just like in a Word document, just type out the answer to the eight questions in short, little bullet points, you know, in that way, if you can find it when you need it.

Oh, yeah. What was that story about the guy in the tank? Yeah, search “tank”. Oh, yeah. Here it is. And you don't have a script. But you just have little bullet-pointed answers to the eight questions. And that way, every time you tell the story, it'll sound extemporaneous and conversational, which is exactly the way you want it to sound. But yet you have thought through how you would answer this. So when you tell a story, it's often you know, flying by the seat of your pants and like you didn't know you were going to need to tell the story because the problem just came up during the meeting and you say, oh, I need to tell the story. But what you don't want to do is make up the story as you go along. It'd be better if you've thought through it ahead of time. So I recommend spending time cultivating your story so that they're ready to go when you need them.

WS: For sure. I think even, you know, learning to do some public speaking or if I'm speaking from the stage, I have to like break the talk down into different stories. And that's helpful for me to remember that way as well. Or even if I need to speak for 20 minutes versus 45 minutes, right, I'm going to add a couple of different stories in there, or take one out that I know takes me about 10 minutes or whatever that may be. But that took some practice. And I can tell too, though, as I've, you know, if I don't speak for a few months, I'm rusty, right? I gotta follow up

on some of those stories. But it's, it helps me to even feel so much more confident on the stage though.

PS: These are the ones where you're going into a situation where you know, you're going to tell these three stories, right, you should definitely plan ahead and think through how am I going to tell them what are the answers to the questions.

WS: Speak to the structure, say, you know, whether it's a sales story versus leadership, or, you know, parenting or, you know, whatever it may be, what how does that structure change? Or does it?

PS: It doesn't, okay, the same structure works for any of these types of stories. So, I gave you the list of 10 leadership stories, same structure for all of them, parenting stories, same way, sales stories, the same structure, and the method of telling these stories is not different. What's different is what the story is about, who are the main characters, the problems, they ran into the solutions, they found the lessons that people learned from them, the action that you'll go take. As a result of it, those things are all completely different from one story to the next. But the methods are the same, which is one of the reasons that it makes such sense to learn these methods because they can be used for every type of story.

WS: It's so helpful that it's not different for everyone, right? I just think, you know, when you're telling a story, obviously, there's a lot. If it's a good story, you're engaged emotionally, right? I assume that's dependent upon the story, right? Or, you know, does the structure affect that right? Or if we get the structure mixed up, you know, we get the problem before the main character potential. I don't even know how you do that. But you know, what I mean, or there's something that's mixed up, does that affect you? No.

PS: So, the structure is the way it is for a reason. Something should happen before others, knowing where and when something happened, which is question number two needs to go at near the beginning. And the reason is that if people don't know where when what's happening is they get confused, they get frustrated. They don't know if it's a true story or not, like you

know, when you tell somebody, you know, 25 years ago at Camp Pendleton, California on this, you know, tank battlefield, okay, they'll assume that this is a true story. And by the way, that was a true story. Because you told me exactly where and when it happened. But if I don't tell you where or when it happened, or if I find say, once upon a time and a land far away, you know that it's made up?

So it frustrates people when they don't know, am I listening to a real story? Or am I listening to something you're just making up? So that question really does need there's any emotional, mental, psychological reason why it needs to be at the beginning, and then how the story ends needs to go at the end. Otherwise, you've ruined the surprise, which is very different than making a presentation where you lead with the end, you know. So yes, the order does matter. And it throws the audience off when you don't have things in the right order. Now, there are some clever ways to change a few things. And if in tomorrow's episode, we talk about the element of surprise, I'll tell you how to do that. But the first place you should stay is follow the structure.

WS: I'll make a note of that. So I know to bring it up. Yeah, no, that's awesome. That's so great. I just think through the structure and the stories that we need to be able to tell I just maybe, you know, some people think well, wait a minute, you know, this is going to take me a lot of time, Paul, to think about all these stories, I need to be able to tell, you know, and do not have time to practice and how have you done that well, or how have you seen other leaders do that well? time spent, you know, how many, how many stories should we have in our toolbox? And how do we think about that?

PS: Well, first of all, I think you're right, this, this is going to take some time. Yeah, it will. But it's going to be some of the most important time that you spend. And in fact, that's the number one realization I think people need to have is these stories aren't just some, you know, offhanded comments that you know, might make you know, every conversation a little more interesting. But that's not really necessary. It's not really the main thing that I'm there to do as the leader. No, they are, you should only be telling stories 10 to 15% of the time out of a

one-hour meeting, if you do that math, it's six to nine minutes out of a 60-minute meeting, you might be telling stories.

And since the story is only two or three minutes long, that means you might tell two or three, three-minute stories over the course of a one-hour meeting. That's it. But those are going to be the most memorable parts of that meeting. A month later, they're not going to remember the bullet points on slide number 72. But they will remember the two stories that you told. So your most important leadership messages need to be embedded in the stories because that's what people are going to remember. So, think about these as this is the most important part of my communication strategy. Of course, I should spend some time working on it. You know, you wouldn't go if your boss asked you to write a memo on something. You wouldn't just sit down and start typing some random stuff and like make it up as you go along. You'd go do your homework, right? You'd go do some analysis and do some research and figure out the answer to the question then finally put together the memo.

A story is the same. Yeah, you gotta go do some research, you want to tell a story about x? Well, were you there? Did it happen to you? Well, if not, then you might need to call the person who the story happened to and get the facts right? And where when did it go through the eight questions with them? Where and when did this happen? Who else was there other than you? What was the problem you were trying to solve? What did you do? Like asking them all THE eight questions. Yeah, it takes some homework, and it will absolutely be worth it.

WS: No doubt. One final question in this segment I was just thinking about was, you know, if I'm having a meeting with my team every week, you know, as a group should, you know, and let's say it's an hour and a half, you know, I mean, when we do have a, a structure for that meeting, so we're as purposeful as possible, didn't have to be an hour and a half, I'll cut it off. Definitely short, if we're not, you know, there's nothing to talk about. We're getting it off and doing something else. However, it's an important time for our week, and that other people can bring things up and we're talking through different things. Should I as a leader, be prepared to tell a story every week?

PS: No, but somebody should one person on your team should be prepared to tell a story, to share a story every week. Okay? I don't know how big your team is. But having somebody every month or two have to tell the story is not that big of a burden. But this is one of the best ways to build your collective repertoire. We just talked about, you know, do we need this repertoire of stories to tell? Well, how do you build this repertoire? Well, you share the work, right? Like I don't all my stories don't have to be about me remember, and they shouldn't be.

Okay, so if every week, if you assign them ahead of time, like this week, you know is your week and next week is my week. And next week is Bob's week, and then it's Sally's week, you know, and then three months later, it's back to your week. Everybody knows that on that week, I've got to bring in an interesting story that would be useful to people at work, and they prepare for it and they come in, and that's five minutes of your 90-minute meeting. That's it write two or three minutes to tell the story a couple of minutes to talk about it, then move on to the regular business. And after a year, you're going to have 52 great stories that everybody can tell. But no, absolutely should not just be your burden. Everybody should have to do that

WS: Awesome. But there should be a story every time. Yeah, that's awesome, coming from other people.

PS: There's probably going to be one that probably happens just by accident, right? I mean, you're in a 90-minute meeting, somebody is going to tell the story at some point. But my point is be more intentional about it to have people bring in stories that they think would be useful if added to everybody else's repertoire of stories. I think that's a great way to curate and collect stories.

WS: That's so helpful. Paul, thank you so much for another interview that helped us so much these eight questions, it's gonna help us to build a great story. Again, I want to tell the listeners of you'll go back and listen to yesterday's show with Paul, where we talked about I mean, went through what 10 stories that leaders should be able to tell it's going to help you in a massive way, become an effective leader, and then these eight questions today that's gonna help us to

build those stories. And tomorrow, we're going to jump into some techniques that I know you're not going to want to miss. Thank you again, Paul.

PS: Yeah, you bet. I'm already looking forward to tomorrow.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[OUTRO]

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