

How to Tell an Effective Story Worksheet

Great stories often answer ONE of the following questions:

- What do you know that most people don't know because they don't have your job?
- When was a time you learned a big lesson?
- When was a time you changed your mind about a person or idea or project?
- When was a time someone came to your (or a friend's) rescue?
- What's something about you or your job (or our community work) people might find surprising?

The story should do the following things:

- Reflect who you are/want to be to this audience. It should suit your image, and the occasion.
- Have a point, lesson or take-away.
- Center around a way you learned something, changed, grew or realized something.
- Be entertaining to strangers. Can it be funny? Is it dramatic? Is there much action? Suspense?

Great stories also:

- Involve surprise, so we don't know everything that's going to happen...
- Involve action, so things happen that we can picture in our minds as you tell.
- Involve physical spaces so we can picture what you're saying – the room, the people, the colors, etc. Think about how you might describe these spaces - where are you standing, what are you wearing, what does the room look like?

Things to consider:

- Limit stories to 6-10 minutes to maintain audience's attention.
- Focus the purpose and content of your story.
- It should NOT be a life story
- It should NOT be a career day story.
- It should NOT be an accounting of everything that happened.
- You do not owe the audience the WHOLE story/truth.
- You owe the audience just enough so they can follow the narrative.
- Jot down your ideas in outline form. Resist the temptation to write it out like an essay - notes to yourself are best.

A story is usually organized like this:

- Describes people, place and time
- Hook – what is this story going to be about? Foreshadow conflict. – Within first minute.
- Problem/conflict
- Progress – someone or something (VSUW or agency) comes to the rescue.
- Point – stories have explicit or implicit points