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# LEADING WITH A **GOOD STORY**

BY **JOHN BALDONI**

What is life if not a story? We are born, a beginning. We grow and develop, a middle. We die, the end. Prosaic to be certain, but a narrative nonetheless. It is no wonder that stories exist all around us in a kind of rich soup of ideas, myths, opinions, and narrative. If we drink of this soup we come to an understanding of ourselves as individuals with obligations to ourselves, our families, and our communities.

Good leaders can be good storytellers. Stories are the substance of good communications. They lend context and texture, color and warmth. In short, they resonate with the human side of the enterprise.

## **Character is action**

When it comes to creating and telling stories, it is useful to consider the maxim of good drama: character drives action. In drama it means people will act out of a need to do something. In business it means that people will perform because it is what is expected of them. This concept works well when thinking about stories of organizations in crisis, or those undergoing transformation. Leaders at every level rise to challenges; there is something inside of them that compels them to act. Their examples make for good stories.

## **Creating your story**

Just as leadership is universal, so too, is storytelling. The chief consideration for a leadership story should be its ability to convey the leader's point of view and help the leader bring the followers along in order to fulfill the vision. The story should contain the central purpose of leadership – achieve desired and inspired results! Here are some points to consider:

**Identify a topic.** Look around to find out what people are doing now or what they have done that merits mention. These topics can be about reaching a milestone, or in process of finding ways to reach the milestone.

**Shape the story:** beginning, middle, and end. Describe the situation, the context of the story, what was happening, or not

happening. Talk about how your heroes decided to do something – fix a problem, propose a solution, reach out to a customer. Talk about what they did and how what they did changed lives.

**Find learning lessons.** Emphasize what people learned by doing what they did. How did they grow as individuals, a team, and thereby help the organization grow. Don't be afraid to talk about shortcomings, especially if they result in improvement. This is how we learn.

**Deliver the story.** Consider the story an example of good news and look for all kinds of opportunities to deliver. You can tell it at all-employee meetings or weekly staff gatherings. Don't forget to relate good news to customers. Suppliers, too, need to be considered. You want everyone in your organization to know the successes as well as what they can do to keep the successes coming.

## **Stories, stories, stories**

Leadership is the act of persuading people to follow and what better way to do it than with stories. Stories propel the leadership journey. Look for them. Create them. Tell them. Distribute them. And tell them again and again. Stories exemplify who we are as individuals and what we can become as visionaries, aligners, executors, discipliners, risk-takers, and result-makers – in short, leaders of ourselves, our teams, and our organizations.

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