

Fundamental Elements of Crafting a Story



Todd E Jones

Crafting a Story

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FIRST EDITION

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Introduction

Storytelling has picked up steam in recent years for brands as they try to connect with their customers. There is a good reason for that. Stories are very powerful.

As a business, how do you craft a story that will resonate with your audience? One of the first things you need to do is to actually know what your story is.

I believe that your story is composed of four critical pillars: History, Passion, Values, and our Skills. This article is going to take a look at each area.

Originally, each pillar was discussed in an email series I did in 2017. I have since taken them and packaged it into a framework that I use with clients to help them tell their story more clearly.

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1. History gives context to your story

A while back, I was listening to the radio. I know that is a big surprise, but you know, in this day in a time of digital downloads and all things Spotify, I was in my car. Thus, I listened to the radio.

For some reason, the station was playing old American Top 40's with Casey Kasem. I'm not going to go into who Kasem is, but I'll say this, the dude was a legend.

Every Saturday for several decades he hosted the top 40 countdowns and he simply had one of the most recognizable voices in the world.

This must have been in the 80's because the rock band **38 Special** had a song on the charts. He introduced the song with one of his famous stories that he gleaned over the years.

I had to search and search to find the story and finally did in an old article originally published in The Georgia Straight magazine.

The story was how they got their name.

If you will bear with me, I'm going to quote bandleader Donnie Van Zant from the magazine article:

"Yeah, we had a problem in Jacksonville finding a place to rehearse at. The thing was, we found a place and it would be so loud that we'd disturb the neighbours and they'd get warrants out for our arrest. So we had to move to the outskirts of Jacksonville, around the borderline of Georgia and Florida. And we found this place that looked just like The Alamo—so we called it The Alamo! And we were out there rehearsing one night and we heard these sirens going on and cars squealing, so we put the instruments down. But before we could get to the front door the police were out there and knocked the door open. All of them had their guns drawn, and one of them just made the remark that "We'll take y'all to jail with these .38s". And more or less that's how we got it."

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38 Special: Courtesy MrBlueGenes <https://www.flickr.com/photos/mrbluegenes/>

One of the core components of your story is history. The history of the band 38 Special was influential to the name of their band.

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2. Passion is a part of the story

Passion is a part of the story Passion is part of your story. When you tell your story, you reveal your passion.

*Now John at the bar is a friend of mine
He gets me my drinks for free
And he's quick with a joke or to light up your smoke
But there's someplace that he'd rather be*

Do you recognize those words? They are from the song *Piano Man* by Billy Joel. It is a classic song and doubles as a great storyteller.

Joel sings about being a piano man in a bar where he was early in his career. [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piano_Man) tells the story.



Bill Joel Courtesy of <https://www.flickr.com/photos/slhc/>

John, in the song, was the bartender. John, like all the other characters in the bar, had dreams, or passions. This made up part of their own stories.

What was John's passion?

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He says, "Bill, I believe this is killing me."

As the smile ran away from his face

"Well I'm sure that I could be a movie star If I could get out of this place"

John wanted to be a movie star.

Each and every character in the song has a passion.

Funny thing about passions, they don't always equate to making a living. We are convinced these days that a career doing your passion is the way to go. It's kind of like hitting the career lottery.

It doesn't always work out that way. For some, they are able to utilize their passion for making a living while others see it as a dream.

Regardless where you fall on this debate, everyone has a passion. You may a copywriter but dream of driving race cars. Heck, maybe you drive them on the weekend but it is really a glorified hobby.

Passion helps us live. Passion gives us a mission. Passion gives us hope.

Passion is a part of our story.

By the way, if I had a passion, it is to learn about and share others' stories. Maybe that's why I like music and pro wrestling. I have other things I like as well. It's pretty eclectic.

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3. Our values also drive our story

Writing our story really isn't overly complex. One of the features of our story is our values.

In Christopher Nolan's movie *The Dark Knight*, there are a lot of points that are made, many by the trusty butler, Alfred Pennyworth.

While visiting with Bruce Wayne and discussing the menacing Joker, Bruce Wayne makes the statement, "Criminals aren't complicated, Alfred. Just have to figure out what he's after."

Alfred, in all his wisdom, corrects Wayne by telling him a story.

"With respect Master Wayne, perhaps this is a man (Joker) that *you* don't fully understand, either. A long time ago, I was in Burma. My friends and I were working for the local government. They were trying to buy the loyalty of tribal leaders by bribing them with precious stones. But their caravans were being raided in a forest north of Rangoon by a bandit. So, we went looking for the stones. But in six months, we never met anybody who traded with him. One day, I saw a child playing with a ruby the size of a tangerine. The bandit had been throwing them away."

Wayne, puzzled, asks why the stones were stolen.

Alfred replies, "Well, because he thought it was good sport. Because some men aren't looking for anything logical, like money. They can't be bought, bullied, reasoned, or negotiated with. Some men just want to watch the world burn."

Quotes courtesy of [IMDB.com](https://www.imdb.com)

Classic line. And, this describes Heath Ledger's Joker to a T.

His value was chaos in the city of Gotham.

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Why? I'm not really sure.

There is a scene in the movie where the Joker is meeting with the Gotham drug lord in a warehouse and he burns a pile of money.

You may not value chaos, but you value something. Maybe you want to change the world. Maybe you value faith. Maybe you value feeding hungry children or providing clean water in a third world country. Maybe you value something more than profit.

Whatever it is, you have values and it makes up your story.

Values is another component of writing your story.

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4. Our skills gives our story value

Our skillset gives our story value Our skills are a part of our story. Our skillset is a part of who we are just as history, passion, and values are.

How many hours of practice does it take to become a master at a skill? That is the question people much smarter than me study.

10,000 hours is the “number of greatness” according to a book by Malcolm Gladwell and based on the research of some science dude back in the 1990’s.

This equates to, roughly, about 20 years or practice, 90 minutes a day.

I always thought that being an expert is knowing something better than someone else. Okay, I know that is a little shallow.

Now, new research is questioning. Nevertheless, you know what makes someone an expert is a continuous practice for a very long time.

Stevie Vai was known to have done this when he once outlined a course for practicing the guitar. Apparently, he practiced the guitar up to 10 hours a day. Vai is now considered one of the best guitarists in music. Go figure.

The point is, we have skills, and we have practiced those skills for a very long time. We are better than most people at those skills.

Our skills are a part of our story. Our skillset is a part of who we are just as history, passion, and values are. Remember those three? We just finished emails in the past three weeks outline the importance of each of those core elements of a story.

Have you ever watched the movies about Ip Man? I was recently introduced to the movies from an email marketing guru and ended up watching all three within a weekend. Seriously, if you have Netflix, check them out.

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Ip Man was the guy credited as one of the most important teachers of the Wing Chun martial arts form and known as the teacher of Bruce Lee. Throughout the movies, you will see Ip Man practicing his craft during downtimes. He used his patented Wing Chun wooden dummy.

The moves were the same. Over and over again. Not changing anything. During the fight scenes, you can actually recognize the moves as the same ones he used when practicing.

Conclusion Are you ready to tell your story better? Once we identify the four pieces, the four pillars of your brand's story, it is easier to create your narrative and relate to your target audience.

Storytelling doesn't have to be hard, but you do have to spend time creating purpose. Your story lining up with your target audience's story is where you find a connection that leads to leads and more business.

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