

INTERVIEWING AND STORYTELLING

Why You Tell Your Story

You tell a story to show people who you are—to stop being a stranger. Once upon a time, several eons ago, a stranger was a rare phenomenon. In a calmer, slower, more intimate time, people knew who you were. By reputation. They knew your family. They knew your upbringing. They knew your history. They knew what you had done. You had lived together. You had grown up in the same village. You were already known.

Now in these turbulent, fragmented, rapidly morphing times, it's hard to know who anyone is. People don't have the background about one another that they once had. And they are often asked to trust others about whom they know very little. They come from different backgrounds, different education, different religions, different races, different countries.

How do you communicate who you are? People want to know what makes you tick, what gets you excited, what is driving you, what values you espouse, or what goals you have in life. How will you act in a crisis? Will you level with people? Will you save yourself while stabbing others in the back? Are you someone who goes whichever way the wind blows? Or are you someone of character who stands up for what is good and true and right?

Thus if the audience can understand the critical experiences that have formed you as an individual, they can begin not only to understand the unique individual that you have become but also to infer how you may act in the future. Giving them an account of one or more turning points in your existence can enable listeners to get insider your life, to share your life, to go through what you have been through so that they can themselves experience what sort of a person you are. (pp. 80, 82)

Michael Dell's Story

The father of my best friend was a pretty avid stamp collector, so now naturally my friend and I wanted to get into stamp collecting, too. To fund my interests in stamps, I got a job as a water boy in a Chinese restaurant two blocks from my house. I started reading stamp journals just for fun, and soon began noticing that prices were rising. Before long, my interest in stamps began to shift from the joy of collecting to the idea that there was something here that my mother, a stockbroker, would have termed "a commercial opportunity."

I was about to embark upon one of my very first business ventures. First, I got a bunch of people in the neighborhood to cosign their stamps to me. Then I advertised "Dell's Stamps" in Linn's Stamp Journal, the trade journal of the day. And then I typed, with one finger, a twelve-page catalog. . . and mailed it out. Much to my surprise, I made \$2000. And I learned an early, powerful lesson about the rewards of eliminating the middleman. I also learned that if you've got a good idea, it pays to do something about it. (p. 3)

Dell, M., and Freedman, C. (1999). *Direct from Dell: Strategies that revolutionized an industry*. New York: HarperBusiness.

Denning, S. (2005). *The leader's guide to storytelling: Mastering the art and discipline of business narrative*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

A TEMPLATE FOR CREATING “WHO YOU ARE” NARRATIVES

The following template is a set of steps to be used in crafting stories that communicate your identity and help your audience build trust in you.

1. Take a blank sheet of paper to use as a worksheet. Divide it into three sections (whichever way you think is the right way to divide a piece of paper into three sections).
2. In the middle section, place a dot: this represents “where you are now.”
3. In the first section, place a cross. This represents “where you have come from.”
4. In the third section, place a circle. This represents “where you are heading.” If you have decided on a life goal, write it next to the circle. If you haven’t settled on any particular life goal, then jot down a couple of words that you associate with your future.
5. Draw a line from the cross through the dot to the circle. This represents “the journey of your life.”
6. Tell a sixty-second story, preferably to someone who doesn’t know you well, about one of these topics:
 - A favorite place when you were young and made it special to you.
 - How you overcame an adversity or obstacle when you were young.
 - An incident with someone whom you admired or who influenced you.
 - The most significant thing that happened to you when you were young.
7. After you have told the story, give it a name and insert the name in the first section (representing where you have come from.)
8. Review the story for
 - *Relevance*. Does it reflect the kind of person you are to the audience you need to communicate this to?
 - *Clarity*: Is your role in the story clear? Are your values clearly reflected in the story?
 - *Distinctiveness*: Does the story reflect what is unique about you?
 - *Consistency*: Is the story consistent with the way you conduct your life now?
9. Tell the story again to different people and note how they story evolves.
10. Repeat the process with different subjects for the story, until you have a portfolio of stories that reflect who you are.

A TEMPLATE FOR GENERATING VALUE NARRATIVES

The following templates can be used in the crafting of stories to transmit values:

1. Start in the middle section of the worksheet (“where you are now”).
2. List your values—honesty, caring, innovation, achievement, friendship, accountability, and so on.
3. If your list includes more than five values, determine which are the five most important values to you.
4. Take each of the five most important values and think of a time in your life when your conduct embodied that value or when you became aware of why that value was important to you.
5. Tell a sixty-second story about that time to someone who doesn’t know you.
6. Give the story a title and write the title in the first section (“where you’ve come from”). Retell the story until you are comfortable that it fully reflects your value.
7. Repeat the process for the other values that are important to you, until you have a portfolio of stories that reflect your values.

REASONS BEHIND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



To assist you in preparing for your interview, below are some common interview questions. It is best to think in terms of why the recruiter is asking the question...

What are your plans? The interviewer really wants to know how your future plans relate to those of the organization. This question also allows the interviewer to assess whether this job fits your short range goals and your future career goal. If the question is phrased "What are your long-term goals?" redirect your response to the next two years and how you could contribute to the company.

Why are you interested in our organization? In asking this question, the employer is hoping to determine how much research you have done about the organization. You must be able to articulate career plans which are compatible with the organization with which you are interviewing. Discuss what you have learned in researching the organization. Prove your interest.

How did you choose your major and/or your college? This question gives the employer a chance to assess your decision making process. You should stress the thought and research that went into making your decision. The employer is interested in how you conducted this research as well as the end result.

Tell me about yourself. The employer will want enough information about you as a person to enable him/her to make a comparison of profiles of successful company employees. She/he also wants to know what motivates you, how you will work with others, your enthusiasm, drive, and other JOB-RELATED traits. Be sure to stress the positive attributes, and confine your answer to career-related information.

What are your greatest strengths? This question enables the employer to determine what your self image is. Concentrate on strengths related to the work environment. Here is your opportunity to prove that you have the most important strength required for the position. Point out all the strengths you have acquired through your past jobs and

campus/community activities. You need to be able to relate these strengths to the employer's needs, so give this careful consideration.

What are your main weaknesses? Briefly mention a weakness which you have overcome or are in the process of overcoming. Do not dwell on negatives and avoid mention of a weakness which might be debilitating in the position for which you are being considered. This question is often referred to as a "fishing trip" for a turn-down reason.

QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW PREPARATION

1. What are your long range career goals, when and why did you establish these goals, and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
2. What specific goals, other than those related to your occupation, have you established for yourself for the next ten years?
3. Why are you interested in working for our organization?
4. What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
5. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths?
6. How would you describe yourself?
7. How do you like to spend your free time?
8. How did your college experience prepare you for a career?
9. What books, magazines, newspapers, or journals do you read?
10. Why should I hire you?
11. What qualifications do you have that make you think you will be successful?
12. Why do you think you would like this particular job?
13. In what ways do you think that you can make a contribution to our company?
14. What do you think determines a person's progress in an organization?
15. Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and subordinates?
16. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction and why?
17. Do you feel that you have the best scholastic record of which you are capable?
18. Why did you choose your field of study?

19. If you could do so, how would you plan your academic study differently? Why?
20. How would you Describe your most rewarding college experience?
21. Do you have plans for continued study? An advanced degree?
22. What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities?
23. In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
24. May we contact your previous employers for reference information?
25. What characteristics do you think are necessary for success in this field?
26. What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
27. Describe what you consider to be the ideal job.
28. Do you prefer working by yourself or with others?
29. What have you done that shows initiative or willingness to work?
30. What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?
31. What kind of boss do you prefer? What kind of people do you prefer to work with?
32. Do you have a geographic preference? What is it? Why?
33. What salary expectations do you have for this position?
34. Will you relocate?
35. What do you know about our company?
36. How do you feel about travel?
37. What major problem have you encountered, and how did you deal with it?
38. What type of person do you find most difficult to deal with?
39. What have you learned from your mistakes?
40. What have you learned from other jobs that you have held?
41. Tell me about yourself.
42. What motivates you on the job?
43. What has been your most creative project?
44. What was the most embarrassing thing that has ever happened to you?
45. What is your greatest weakness?

46. What are your long-range and short-range goals and objectives? When and why did you establish these goals, and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
47. What specific goals, other than those related to your occupation, have you established for yourself for the next ten years?
48. What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
49. What do you *really* want to do in life?
50. How do you think a friend or a professor who knows you well would describe you?
51. Why should I hire you?
52. How do you determine or evaluate success?
53. What qualities should a successful manager possess?
54. Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and those reporting to him or her.
55. If you were hiring a graduate for this position, what qualities would you look for?
56. Why did you select your college or university?
57. What led you to choose your field of major study?
58. What college subjects did you like the best? Why?
59. What college subjects did you like the least? Why?
60. If you could do so, how would you plan your academic study differently? Why?
61. What changes would you make in your college or university? Why?
62. How do you work under pressure?
63. In what part-time or summer jobs have you been most interested? Why?
64. What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?
65. What have you learned from your mistakes?