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Tell Your Story Newsletter (TYSN):

Specializing in Entrepreneurial and Organizational Storytelling

Let me tell your story!

Welcome Mid-July, 2020!

"Summertime, and the livin' is easy"

--Heyward and Gershwin

With the longest day of the year (June 20th) now behind us, I feel, as so many of you have expressed, that what we (not to mention the agricultural sector) need now is more sustained heat--those scorching summer days common to childhood decades ago, where the concrete felt hot enough to fry an egg!

This year, due to Covid-19 (and its current resurgence), summer has seen many festivals and outdoor activities cancelled or moved online. A recent Facebook meme, sung by two animated dinosaurs, rewrote Heyward and Gershwin's famous lyric: "Summertime, and the livin' is surprisingly complex!"

But with or without sustained days of 30 degrees Celsius, the season of summer (in a pandemic year) lends itself particularly well to reading and listening to stories. Thank you to readers who wrote in after reading last month's collection of sources on (entrepreneurial) storytelling. I continue to refine and add to that collection, and hope it will appear as an earticle/ebook, this fall/winter.

In this month's issue, I continue to engage the concept of storytelling in article one, by revisiting Nancy Duarte's powerful article (from the June 21, 2018 issue of the "Harvard Business Review"), "How to Identify and Tell your Most Powerful Stories." She offers powerful suggestions for mining stories from our memories that you may find helpful and inspiring, for what you are writing or speaking about. Do please read my summary of her article and share your responses with me.

In "Storyteller's Corner," I return to the Romantic poet John Keats' concept of "negative capability," as it pertains to the broader issue of knowing (and not knowing) as a factor in

communication (storytelling) and leadership. The latter is a concept I discussed deeply in my blog posting, earlier this week. (Please see www.storytellingcommunications.ca/blog for details!)

While the backdrop of Covid-19 and its dreaded resurgence worries so many of us, medical science's research, experiments to find a vaccine and resulting "stories" provide us with the best guidance we can find, as the world struggles to contain world-wide illness and death.

As writers log in long hours at their keyboards and journalists and musicians (amongst others) hit the air waves, it has become clear that the complexity, horror and even rare joy that come from the pandemic are best expressed through storytelling.

What stories will you tell colleagues, clients, friends, neighbours and family about your living through the worst pandemic in 100 years? Will the experience be, as Tomos Roberts writes, in his recent poem/story, "The Great Realization" (see last month's issue)? And what happens if/when the "realization" that he refers to, is lost?

<https://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/books/the-great-realisation-why-this-british-writer-s-pandemic-poem-caught-the-eye-of-jake-gyllenhaal-1.1015262>

As always, I welcome your comments, good readers. May your summer be as happy as possible - a time of needed calm and rejuvenation, before any "second wave." One thing to remember and cultivate, through both happy and unhappy days, is that both will always provide wonderful resources for storytelling, and thereby for personal and organizational growth.

With warmest regards,
Elizabeth

Principal
Storytelling Communications

www.elizabethshih.com

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Article One: How to create your own story collection, with Nancy Duarte

In the June 21st, 2018 issue of Harvard Business Review,” professional speaker Nancy Duarte shared a great article on how we as business communicators can identify and tell our most powerful stories.

Duarte writes that when she asks executives to name their favourite speech, they all answer [“Steve Jobs’ Stanford commencement address,”](#) due to the stories it contains and the bitter irony that while Jobs spoke of narrowly escaping death to pancreatic cancer a few years earlier, his spectacular career would be ushered to an end by another, related bout of cancer, only six years after he gave that speech.

A side note: readers may find some of their favourite speeches in the form of TED Talks, given by the likes of Sir Ken Robinson and Seth Godin (on creativity); psychologists Amy Cuddy, Shawn Achor and Angela Duckworth (on finding personal success, happiness and grit); writers, Anne Lamott and Elizabeth Gilbert (also on creativity), to name a few.

But in the world of business executives, few people whom Duarte has encountered want to deliver the kinds of stories and speeches that Jobs did. Why? She says that her listeners want to avoid exposing their “flaws and . . . struggles.” Paradoxically, then, the vulnerability that many of these stories lay bare makes them helpful and inspiring; and refusing to share them would be a “missed opportunity to connect” with your audience.

Duarte is most memorable for offering three fields of effective techniques for excavating stories that well up from “a deep place of personal conviction”:

(1) She says it’s crucial to **trigger your memories of stories by recalling earlier times** in one’s life. Instead of trying to remember the past chronologically, she suggests sitting with scrap paper and thinking through the “nouns” (people, places and things) that have shaped your life.

(i) Regarding **people**, try this exercise: write your name in the centre of a piece of paper. Then sketch out the different relationships with family, friends, co-workers, etc. “Each time think through the relational dynamics and emotions,” because therein lie your stories.

(ii) Regarding **places**, recall places that have mattered to you, such as the high school hallway by your locker, the cabin at camp, the baseball diamond, a specialist’s medical office, and so on. Think back on what happened in those locations and move through each of them, in your mind. Retrace your movements and conversations to trigger “scenes, sounds and scents.” This process loosens memories that will in turn reveal to you long forgotten events and interactions that matter.

(iii) Regarding **things**, take note of objects with symbolic meaning to you, such as favourite gifts, awards, books, movies, etc. Draw pictures of them and recall what made them emotionally intensive for you. Ask yourself why?

(iv) From the exercises of (i, ii, iii), look at the “story kernels” you have formulated and summarize them in one line, each. Duarte says you may find in the process that some stories are too personal to share (e.g. losses, traumas). But you may uncover some anecdotes that could become the foundation of an important story you can return to.

(2) **Create a “story catalogue”**: Once you’ve collected some stories that you can use in various situations, take your list and create a “story catalog” you can turn to— an alphabetical journal or spreadsheet with summaries. You may want to sort your stories by situation, theme, mood or moral or by what is most valuable to you.

Lots of speakers and writers draw on a story catalog when they confront their own mortality (e.g. Steve Jobs). Duarte says that by taking stock of essential stories in your life now and cataloging them while you still can, you’ll have access to them when a crisis time occurs, so that then you will “live more fully and have a greater impact on others.”

(3) She also recommends that you **choose stories with your audience in mind**. Remember who will receive the stories that you tell. Some stories may be lighthearted, even hilarious; others will be painful; some may stir hope. Different listeners will respond differently. Consider who is in your audience and what their values, goals and interests are. Choose a story that fits that persona best.

For instance, Duarte discusses the influence of your audience’s gender and race as factors influencing how you choose your stories: women audiences like to hear stories of a person overcoming childhood adversity, for instance, because it encourages resilience in the face of suffering.

By contrast, men can be appealed to through stories that evoke quests for empathy. Duarte says that when she speaks to Asian audiences, she chooses stories of failure, of protagonists overcoming hardship to succeed at something (i.e. cautionary tales about what you learn from failure).

What market pressure is on the minds of your audience? What issues are current in their industry? Duarte recommends reading what your audience is blogging about and what news is developing in their organizations or niches, to see what obstacles they face.

The next time you need to speak, Duarte says, ask yourself why you are uniquely qualified to be the guide of your particular audience. How can you guide that audience?

Identify stories from when you were on a similar journey, faced parallel kinds of obstacles and emerged anew or resilient—“and find the courage to share them.”

I'll close this summary of Duarte's article with her own words on the value and power of accessing one's deepest stories:

"Telling a personal story from a place of conviction is the most powerful communication device you have. [It's] what the greatest and most loved communicators do. They risk transparently revealing their vulnerabilities so that they can be mentors and guides who relate to people from places of universal needs and hardships. They connect to the audience and remind us that we are all human."

Who can imagine a better pursuit or use of time and storytelling than that?

<https://hbr.org/2018/06/how-to-identify-and-tell-your-most-powerful-stories>

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STORYTELLER'S CORNER



STORYTELLER'S CORNER: What is negative capability?

Readers of my blog this week will recognize the concept of "knowing" and the importance of "not knowing" everything, when we lead ourselves and others through entrepreneurial work. Many of our most inspiring stories as entrepreneurs or business owners arise from our failure to know everything. When we drop that pretence, we can open our minds to a higher level of feeling, thinking and sharing.

So in this issue of "Storyteller's Corner," I continue to reflect on states of not knowing.

The English Romantic poet John Keats found great value in the mind of a creative storyteller who didn't strive to know (or to claim knowledge over) everything and everyone:

Keats famously wrote in a letter to his brothers (dated December, 1817) that a true poet (or storyteller) needed to achieve what Romanticists describe as a quality of "selfless receptivity" (Baldick, *Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 167):

He said that Shakespeare possessed this quality "enormously--I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."

Keats was referring to a poetic ability "to efface one's own mental identity by immersing it sympathetically and spontaneously within the subject described" (Baldick, 168).

He found that capacity, which is similar to what we would term empathy, in Shakespeare but in few other great writers and storytellers. It is not an easy space to occupy.

This capacity of poets (or other storytellers) for "negative capability" is not about them claiming knowledge in an imperializing gesture of control over other people and things, but on the contrary, is about sharing stories that enable us as readers (or listeners) to find our thoughts and feelings reflected encouragingly in them.

What stories of your life and work can you share, as an entrepreneur or leader, that show that you do not "know everything," but instead offer empathy (or "negative capability") that encourages the reader or listener?

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SHOP NEWS:

I continue to be particularly grateful this month to American Marketing specialist (and e-newsletter guru) [Michael Katz](#). Michael's webinar on "storytelling" last February has inspired me to think more deeply about storytelling in an entrepreneurial context.

As a result, my blog postings recently have been anchored in life's daily stories and how we can find meaning in them. . . .

I was delighted to find that Michael (who is both shrewd *and* hilarious) also appreciated Nancy Duarte's article (see "article one"), as it offers all communicators (including especially business ones) a method for plumbing our minds and memories for valuable stories.

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Heartfelt condolences and thoughts go out to my long-term mentor and friend, Monica Kreuger, CEO of The Praxis School of Entrepreneurship, on the recent passing of a close family member.

Monica continues to be a tremendous beacon of light and inspiration to so many in this entrepreneurial world, and beyond, including me. But the lights have dimmed and our hearts grown heavy from this loss.

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This month, special thanks go to Rev. De Sandoli and the staff at St. Andrew's Presbyterian, as well as colleagues and friends at NSILC and Praxis for helping to provide quiet office space, during an unexpected summer season of renovations to my current office space.

Being able to think by escaping the noise of workers drilling through concrete is a huge blessing! Thank you to all involved.

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And special thanks to you, my readers, whose emails and text messages remind me that you are still engaged by this newsletter, some nine years since its genesis (the last seven of which have been indexed on my current website).

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And thanks to readers who will excuse any typos and formatting errors in this issue, as spelling and related checking processes have not been working fully in my iContact and WordPress accounts.

A manual review of spelling and grammar have had to suffice, this month, although it is seldom "perfect."

Thank you for your patience!

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ABOUT US:

Between 2011 and December 2018, Elizabeth Shih Communications chronicled the stories of B2B marketing and communications on the Prairies and across the country.

Effective January 1, 2019, I rebranded as "Storytelling Communications." I now write marketing and communications documents that help small businesses close more sales by communicating more effectively; I help newcomers to Canada to secure better jobs; and I tell the legacies of major companies.

Interested in learning more? Please contact me through my CASL-compliant website (www.elizabethshih.com).

After I receive your message, I'll be pleased to discuss projects with you!

Please visit my website for more information(www.storytellingcommunications.ca).