

Basic rules of Storytelling and Organizations

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Mutual responsibility

When you listen to a story, you know that you´re having a constant influence on it.

It may not be something you notice consciously, but just the feeling of eye contact, the direct and clear communication between two people is enough for you as listener to feel that you are important in determining the direction the story will take.

Each of the people listening to a story affects how the story develops.

It is a strong feeling to transform into the real world: You helped shape the story - now go out and shape reality.

You have to experience it to understand it completely, how the almost hypnotic state a story can put a person in can stimulate action.

Dario Fo, from Italy, the winner of the 1997 Nobel Prize for Literature and a wonderful storyteller: *"The audience has always been my litmus paper, every second. Are you able to listen to them, does the audience conduct you like a conductor of a major orchestra? But sorry the storyteller that get flattered and carried away; the audience can also be your wild horse, that throws you off the saddle"*

The key word is interaction.

Interacting means a different approach to a lot of things in your daily life, not just concerning communication.

If you interact in your organization it means that

- your company enters into an ethical, social and environmental interaction with the society of which it is a part
- your company is in dialogue with your costumers and consumers
- your company is open about new products before the new products are released
- your leader offers concrete stories showing future opportunities and starts behaving according to these
- you and your colleagues must act in accordance with the values that are accepted in the company

King and servant

As a storyteller, you enter into an unpredictable dance between you and your audience that swift between the most powerful King (K) and the most humble Servant (S).

K + S: Before you start telling your story you have to consider: Are the listeners comfortable? Do they hear you? Can you see their eyes?

K: Your beginning is crucial. Go straight to the story. Let us hear: Where? When? Who? You know that your story is good. Show it! Be there for the listeners. You are a clever King.

S: In the silence you invite us into the world of your story.

You let us, as listeners, create both meaning, pictures and senses.

If you are uncertain, be honest. Don't shout, whisper. Instead of throwing more energy to a skeptical audience, you should try the opposite: Give less energy.

K + S: Tell us your story both as a king and as the most humble servant. It is a **complementary** movement between opposites.

K: When you finish your story, you are the king again. Just finish your story, don't apologize and don't ask for their sympathy. Just relax and let the listeners give their feed-back and wait for them to formulate the outcome: Did the story inspire action?

"Oops" Stories

We do not need to focus only on successes: on the contrary, remembering only part of the past only makes us poorer. It must be legitimate to tell about the "oops" mistakes we make: they happen to all of us.

In the beginning, this will cause a great deal of uncertainty and ethics rules should be introduced for this work – it is very strong forces we are unleashing when we do this. After a while, however, we can see that it doesn't hurt (all the time) and that it is an effective way to share knowledge.

The organizational tree

There are basically three kinds of stories you tell in your organization

- *I - stories – the roots of the tree:*
Every person in the organization is important and every voice should be heard. Some of these stories should stay hidden under the surface.
- *We stories - the trunk of the tree:*
Stories that create identity. Values become alive in these stories.
- *Future stories – the canopy and the fruits on the tree:*
Visions of what the immediate and long-term future will bring to the organization.

When you as a leader prepare a presentation for a group of employees, think of these three elements, connected to the I -, We – and Future - stories:

- Have you created trust by telling a personal story? Nobody wants to be lead by 'another suit'.
- Is there a element in your talk that involves a 'We'? Can you tell what the group have done in a positive way? If not, can you use a negative story to establish a desire for change?
- The last part of your presentation is crucial to the outcome of your encounter with your audience – do you leave them with hope? Is the vision understandable for the group? Is it desirable?

Future

A vision for the organization in the future is that its members are independent individuals able to make complex and far-reaching decisions. Networks form, bloom and are transformed into new networks. One of the prerequisites for a lively and chaotic system such as this being able to function is knowledge about and actual experience with stories that are told.



Svend-Erik Engh - born in Copenhagen in 1957 - started his career as a teacher at the Borups School for adults from 1993-1999. He tells stories professionally – likes to tell under the branches of a copper beech in Kings Garden in front of the Castle Rosenborg from 1606. He teaches storytelling at Gotland University and The Copenhagen Business School. He organizes seminars, workshops and other events. Since 2007 he is head promoter of a group organizing the Golden Fleece, Copenhagen – 2009 takes place at The Copenhagen Business School, the major business University in Denmark. 6.-7. of October, see www.storyatwork.dk Svend- Erik lives north of Copenhagen with his wife and three children. See more on www.historier.dk/english.htm