

The Importance of Listening

- Listen to deeply understand what someone is saying
- Listen to empower the speaker. When we listen, the speaker tends to think deeper about what they are saying. The speaker is free to listen to them self instead of worrying about when they will be interrupted.
- Listen to deepen the relationship between the listener and the speaker. For example, in many corporations there are HR managed mechanisms for employee performance review, designed to be generally effective whether there is a good relationship between the manager and employee or not. How much better would the review process be if the relationship between the manager and employee were built on a mutual understanding supported by an appreciative listening practice?
- Listening is habit forming. After experiencing the power of good listening once, someone may find themselves seeking it again and again.
- “The great listeners have blessed lives because they are surrounded by people under the influence of their listening.” Doug Lipman

The Role of Appreciations

- Honestly finding and expressing what is good or what you like about what someone said.
“I liked how you described the sound of the road in the autumn.”
- Be specific about what was said.
“I liked how you specified the address of the showroom and described the surrounding neighborhood as gun finish grey.”
- Saying how what they said affected you positively.
“When you described feeling the hum of the engine throughout your body when you first drove out of the showroom, I felt it, too.”
- Saying how what they said affected the speaker.
“When you got to the part about how the curve of the hood looked so cool from the driver’s seat, something in your voice changed. I could hear how much you loved that car.”

Global or Specific Appreciations

| | What was said | Effect on the Listener | Effect on the Speaker |
|----------|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Global | Good thinking | That really made me laugh | Keep up the good work. |
| Specific | The part about... sounded great. | The part about X made me think deeper about the topic. | You really know how to address issues like these. |

Adapted from Lipman, *The Storytelling Coach*, listed on the references page

Guidelines for Listeners and Speakers

Listeners

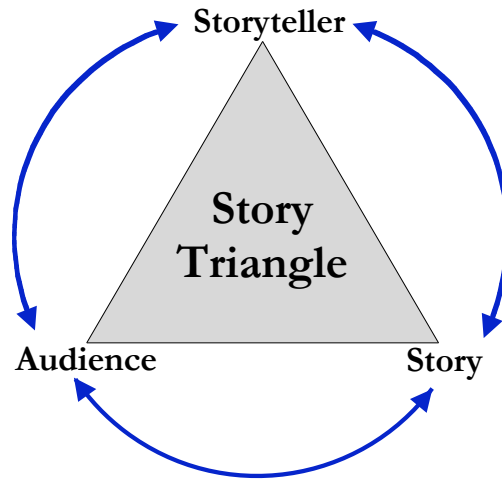
- In our society we don't usually get the appreciations we need, so someone may start behaving strangely when being appreciated. They may laugh, they may deflect, they may deny, they may even get emotional. This is a fact of our lives. All of this is normal and often a natural part of the process.
- When someone does get emotional, as listener, your job is not to fix them. You don't need to touch them or hug them, unless they ask for it. Your job is to listen.
- Don't be concerned about silences. Just offer the gift of being listened to without projecting any expectation toward the speaker. For the speaker, sometimes it's just easier to think when someone else is there.
- Sometimes taking notes for appreciations while listening (if not distracting) can help give more specific appreciations. The listener then has the option of giving some verbal appreciations, and even giving the speaker the notes. Also, for the speaker it is sometimes good to have an informal record that you were at least once really well listened to.

Speakers

- Trust your appreciator. When they say something is new or good, believe them. Sometimes we have to be reminded to SHUT UP and believe.
- The act of being well listened to, not the listener themselves, can help you think. The listener is NOT trying to think for you.
- Let the silences exist. Knowing that you have a receptive audience when you do have something to say is very empowering.
- When we are listened to and thus also listen deeper to ourselves, we naturally do more of what's good. We tend to use what works.
- Don't think that what is not verbally appreciated is bad. Focus on what IS verbally appreciated.
- Listening is just one tool among many tools. Your internal critic, good sense, and professional knowledge and experience are all good tools. Appreciative listening complements those other tools. It works as a balancing force.

The Story Triangle

The story triangle is a dynamic interaction between three elements – the storyteller, the audience and the story. These three elements interact in such a way that the story experience is different every time.



The Storyteller

The simplest definition of storyteller is one who interprets, shapes, and expresses the story. Whether they are telling their own material, a traditional story, or someone else's story, the storyteller's choice of words, tone and body language makes that story uniquely theirs. In doing their job of conveying the story to the audience, they must be sure to stay *out of the way* of the story. They must not block the impact of the story with their own presence.

The Audience

The audience takes in the story as told by the teller and uses the teller's words and performance cues in addition to their own life context to interpret the story. They react to the whole story and its individual parts by applauding, laughing, crying, being bored, yawning, etc. Their mere presence affects the storyteller and the story. While a story may exist before it is told by the storyteller, even in written form, the primary and most important place a story exists is in the individual minds of the audience during the story experience.

The Story

The story itself has a life apart from both the teller and the audience. Stories are both *containers* and *triggers*. As containers, they carry and convey characters, experiences, events, and even worlds to a listening audience. As triggers, they set off sparks and flashes of recognition and meaning within the minds of the audience. Like a molecular reaction, stories can bond to the life events of the audience, which allow stories to feel more authentic. By identifying with the characters and events of a story, we sometimes have the opportunity to see our own lives differently. We see what the characters see – we learn what the characters learn. Stories fulfill both container and trigger roles simultaneously. They have the capacity to present both the new and the old, the novel and the recognizable to an audience.

Storytelling and Design

Listening, creating mental or material images and incorporating perspectives are all elements of the design process.

Listening

- We listen to users when collecting user research
- We listen to other designers as we collaborate
- We listen to engineers – their technical concerns, limitations, and implementation stories
- We listen to the vision, direction and concerns from management

Imagery

We collect, manage, and understand the images of

- User need
- How users want to or will use our products
- The context within which they will use it

Perspectives

- We need to acknowledge the various perspectives of whom we are designing for.

Use stories to paint a picture of the design

Stories provide a left/right brain balance to a technology design and design process.

References

Books

- Birch, Carol L., & Heckler, Melissa A. (Ed.). (1996). Who Says? Essays on Pivotal Issues in Contemporary Storytelling. Little Rock: August House.
- Bradbury, Ray (1989). Zen in the Art of Writing - Essays On Creativity. Santa Barbara: Joshua Odell Editions, Capra Press.
- Brown, John Seely and Duguid, Paul. The Social Life of Information. Harvard Business School Press, 2000
- Cambell, J. The Hero with a Thousand Faces Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1942 reprinted 1972
- Carroll, J.M. ed., Scenario-Based Design: Envisioning Work and Technology in System Development. Wiley, 1995
- Denning, Stephen. The Springboard: How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organizations. Boston, London, Butterworth Heinemann, October 2000. Steve Denning's web site www.stevedenning.com
- Erickson, T. Design as Storytelling. Interactions Volume 3, Issue 4, July/Aug. 1996 Pages: 30 – 35
- Erickson, T., "Notes on Design Practice: Stories and Prototypes as Catalysts for Communication" - www.pliant.org/personal/Tom_Erickson/Stories.html
- Goldberg, Natalie (1986). Writing Down the Bones. Boston: Shambhala.
- Klein, Gary, Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions. The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 1998.
- LaMott, Ann (1994). Bird by Bird. DoubleDay, NY.
- Lipman, Doug. (1995). The Storytelling Coach - How to listen, Praise, and Bring Out People's Best. Little Rock, AR: August House, Inc.
- Lipman, Doug. (1999). Improving Your Storytelling: Beyond the Basics for All Who Tell Stories in Work or Play. Little Rock: August House.
- Livo, Norma J., & Rietz, Sandra A. (1986). Storytelling - Process & Practice. Littleton, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, Inc.
- Maguire, Jack (1998) The Power of Personal Storytelling. Tarcher, Putnam, NY.
- McCloud, S. (1994). Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art. New York: HarperPerennial.
- Mellon, Nancy (1992). Storytelling & the Art of Imagination. Shaftesbury: Element.
- Murray, Janet H. Hamlet on the Holodeck : The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace. MIT Press, 1997

Storytelling – Perpetual Design

Pearson, Carol S. (1989). *The Hero Within: Six Archetypes We Live By* (2nd. ed.). New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Pruitt, J and Adlin, T. *The Personas Lifecycle*. Morgan -Kauffmann, 2006 (Chapter 9: "Storytelling and Narrative" – Whitney Quesenbery) -- you can grab an image of the cover from my web site.

Simmons, Annette. (2001). *The Story Factor - Inspiration, influence, and persuasion through the art of storytelling*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.

Vogler, Christopher (1992). *The Writer's Journey - Mythic Structure for Storytellers & Screenwriters*. Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions.

Links

A nice though slightly dated collection of storytelling and business references
<http://www.media.mit.edu/~brooks/storybiz>

The League for the Advancement of New England Storytelling
<http://www.lanes.org>

The National Storytelling Network's Storytelling in Organizations website
<http://storytellinginorganizations.com/>

STC Usability SIG – Topics in Usability: Personas resources page
www.stcsig.org/usability/topics/personas.html

Grobstein, P. "Seeing more than your eye does"
<http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/bb/blindspot1.html>

IBM Research Knowledge Socialization Project.
<http://www.research.ibm.com/knowsoc/>

IBM Research Knowledge Socialization Project. Why Stories.
http://www.research.ibm.com/knowsoc/project_whystories.html