

“Nossel shows how to apply the power of narrative to marketing, manufacturing, management, and just about every corner of your business.”

—Daniel H. Pink, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Drive* and *To Sell Is Human*

Powered by Storytelling

Excavate, Craft,
and Present Stories
to Transform

Business Communication

Murray Nossel, PhD

Cofounder and director of **Narativ**

**PRAISE FOR
POWERED BY STORYTELLING
AND MURRAY NOSSEL**

“If you think your enterprise doesn’t need great storytellers, this book will convince you that you’re wrong. With creativity and verve, Murray Nossel shows how to apply the power of narrative to marketing, manufacturing, management, and just about every corner of your business. If you want to become a better storyteller—and a better listener—Powered by Storytelling is the book for you.”

—DANIEL H. PINK, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Drive* and *To Sell Is Human*

“Knowing how to craft and tell a purposeful story is a seminal skill set for every business communicator. Powered by Storytelling offers a must-have methodology for anyone who wants to learn how to tell winning stories for business success.”

—PETER GUBER, chairman and CEO of Mandalay Entertainment Group and *New York Times* bestselling author of *Tell to Win*

“As our lives become more digitized, the power of storytelling will rise, elevating our humanity. No one captures how to harness this tool as well as Murray Nossel. This is a fabulous handbook on how to connect through storytelling and how to listen with intent.”

—FAITH POPCORN, founder and CEO of Faith
Popcorn’s Brain Reserve

“We are all overwhelmed by messages and content on various platforms, but what has not changed since our cavepeople predecessors is the importance and power of a great and compelling story. Stories are the key differentiator, and Murray Nossel’s listening and storytelling methods provide a straightforward yet ingenious way to create that differentiation. Murray’s method is the engine to foster the creativity and innovative thinking to tell a unique story. Powered by Storytelling is an indispensable asset.”

—JONATHAN D. KLEIN, cofounder and
chairman of Getty Images

“If you want to learn how to tell a great story, read this book. Murray Nossel, himself a psychologist and master storyteller whose own tales recall the best of David Sedaris, offers a unique method that is sure to work.

“Powered by Storytelling is much more than a how-to book about business communication. It’s an important

road map for anyone who wants to convey a point in a meeting, make a compelling argument to colleagues, and listen in a way that brings out the best stories in business and in life.”

—SUSAN ADAMS, senior editor at *Forbes*

“Murray Nossel presents a thoughtful guide, teaching us how to discover and tell the personal stories hiding within each of us—and he artfully illustrates how this brilliant tool can have a profound impact on group dynamics in any setting. If you’re looking to spark new talent within your organization, this book generously reveals how you can be Powered by Storytelling.”

—ROB SORCHER, global chief content officer of
Cartoon Network

“Murray Nossel has forever changed my understanding of communication and deeply influenced my ability to communicate. His insights for the teller and the listener are simple yet profound.”

—KATIA BEAUCHAMP, CEO of Birchbox

“Murray Nossel’s storytelling method acts like a laser beam in the hands of teachers and coaches. It pierces through the fog of the typical narrative to reveal the storyteller’s sense of herself in the world. Bring this method to

your work, and your students and clients will feel more in touch with themselves!”

—MIKE G. KATZ, founding director of the Interpersonal Development Program at the University of California, Berkeley, Haas School of Business.

“We live in an age of white noise, a constant barrage of messaging, most of which is completely ignored. The only thing that cuts through is effective storytelling. Murray Nossel’s Narativ method is a powerful, science-based, empathetic, and engaging process that enables anyone to excavate, craft, and present a story to form a deep connection with the listener.”

—MARK RANDALL, assistant professor of strategic design and management at Parsons School of Design

“Psychologist, actor, and corporate consultant Murray Nossel brings Narativ’s innovative practice of storytelling to the business community. Through a life lived onstage, in the academy, and in the boardroom, Nossel has discovered the enduring power of storytelling: one person describes an event in such sensory detail—what do I see, hear, taste, smell, touch?—that the listeners enter and experience the world of the teller. In his “What happened?” model, Nossel coaches his client groups toward empathy

for one another, trust for members of their team, and a shocking clarity for each storyteller. Powered by Storytelling is a beacon for those in search of a workplace of collaboration, effective teamwork, authenticity, and joy.

—RITA CHARON, MD, PHD, chair of the
Department of Medical Humanities and Ethics
at Columbia University

“In an era of increasingly loud echo chambers where genuine debate and dialogue are rarified, Powered by Storytelling not only gives the reader a compelling method to create cohesion and express sentiment but also to generate listening behaviors that break through silos and truly transform business communication.”

—JIM KNIGHT, The Rt Hon Lord Knight of
Weymouth, Chief Education Adviser at TES
Global, and former Minister for Schools (U.K.)

“Murray Nossel teaches companies that better performance lies not only in better processes but in more empathetic processes, not only in more efficient meetings but in more aware meetings. Bringing our stories into work is what we do anyway—this book teaches us how to leverage their power.”

—CRISTIAN LUPȘA, founding editor of
Decât o Revistă and founder of The Power
of Storytelling Conference

“We all have a story, but we don’t all know how to tell it. This book will teach you. Inside Murray Nossel’s sometimes hilarious, sometimes heartbreaking tales are the tools you need to craft your own narrative. I’m buying a copy for everyone I know. You should, too!”

—JANN TURNER, director on ABC’s *Scandal* and
NBC’s *Chicago Fire*

Powered by Storytelling

Excavate, Craft,
and Present Stories
to Transform
Business Communication

Murray Nossel, PhD



NEW YORK CHICAGO SAN FRANCISCO ATHENS
LONDON MADRID MEXICO CITY MILAN
NEW DELHI SINGAPORE SYDNEY TORONTO

Copyright © 2018 by Murray Nossel. All rights reserved. Except as permitted under the United States Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

ISBN: 978-1-26-001191-3
MHID: 1-26-001191-7

The material in this eBook also appears in the print version of this title: ISBN: 978-1-26-001190-6, MHID: 1-26-001190-9.

eBook conversion by codeMantra
Version 1.0

All trademarks are trademarks of their respective owners. Rather than put a trademark symbol after every occurrence of a trademarked name, we use names in an editorial fashion only, and to the benefit of the trademark owner, with no intention of infringement of the trademark. Where such designations appear in this book, they have been printed with initial caps.

McGraw-Hill Education eBooks are available at special quantity discounts to use as premiums and sales promotions or for use in corporate training programs. To contact a representative, please visit the Contact Us page at www.mhprofessional.com.

TERMS OF USE

This is a copyrighted work and McGraw-Hill Education and its licensors reserve all rights in and to the work. Use of this work is subject to these terms. Except as permitted under the Copyright Act of 1976 and the right to store and retrieve one copy of the work, you may not decompile, disassemble, reverse engineer, reproduce, modify, create derivative works based upon, transmit, distribute, disseminate, sell, publish or sublicense the work or any part of it without McGraw-Hill Education's prior consent. You may use the work for your own noncommercial and personal use; any other use of the work is strictly prohibited. Your right to use the work may be terminated if you fail to comply with these terms.

THE WORK IS PROVIDED "AS IS." MCGRAW-HILL EDUCATION AND ITS LICENSORS MAKE NO GUARANTEES OR WARRANTIES AS TO THE ACCURACY, ADEQUACY OR COMPLETENESS OF OR RESULTS TO BE OBTAINED FROM USING THE WORK, INCLUDING ANY INFORMATION THAT CAN BE ACCESSED THROUGH THE WORK VIA HYPERLINK OR OTHERWISE, AND EXPRESSLY DISCLAIM ANY WARRANTY, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO IMPLIED WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. McGraw-Hill Education and its licensors do not warrant or guarantee that the functions contained in the work will meet your requirements or that its operation will be uninterrupted or error free. Neither McGraw-Hill Education nor its licensors shall be liable to you or anyone else for any inaccuracy, error or omission, regardless of cause, in the work or for any damages resulting therefrom. McGraw-Hill Education has no responsibility for the content of any information accessed through the work. Under no circumstances shall McGraw-Hill Education and/or its licensors be liable for any indirect, incidental, special, punitive, consequential or similar damages that result from the use of or inability to use the work, even if any of them has been advised of the possibility of such damages. This limitation of liability shall apply to any claim or cause whatsoever whether such claim or cause arises in contract, tort or otherwise.

CONTENTS

PREFACE

ix

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

xv

INTRODUCTION

1

1

WHY STORY? WHY NOW?

15

2

IDENTIFY OBSTACLES TO LISTENING

31

3

RELEASE OBSTACLES TO LISTENING

63

vii

4

REMEMBER YOUR HERITAGE

103

5

TELL WHAT HAPPENED

121

6

FIND YOUR ENDING

163

7

CONNECT WITH YOUR AUDIENCE

189

EPILOGUE

207

NOTES

211

INDEX

213



1
WHY STORY?
WHY NOW?

.....

Why are you choosing to tell a *story* out of the many different ways human beings communicate? And why now? Why is this the moment to tell your story?

There is no right answer to these questions. They are meant to initiate an inquiry into your communication process. You might be telling a story to portray the best way to make a sales call, or to humanize a manager to a team that has faced crisis, or to depict pivotal moments that led to the formation of your enterprise so that new hires know who you are and why you exist as a company. Communication may have collapsed in a department, employees may be saying that they are unclear about the reasons for a merger or acquisition, or you may need to dramatize how policy changes in government will affect your client base. In answering these questions, you'll discover two consistent components: a rationale for storytelling and a call to action.

The Narativ approach to storytelling offers a step-by-step framework in which to excavate, craft, and present a story, beginning with this pair of questions. The

more precisely and deeply you are able to answer them, the greater the focus of your storytelling effort will be.

I begin every corporate training with my origin story, my AIDS Day Program story, because it is a direct response to the questions *Why story? Why now?*

The story begins in 1990. I walked into a social services building on Willoughby Street in Brooklyn, down the stairs to the basement, looking for the “AIDS Day Program.” On one of the doors was a white laboratory specimen box that said in red letters: “Danger. Hazardous Human Waste Material.” I met with my supervisor, Dr. Mike Katch, who had a bushy gray moustache and one blue and one green eye. He told me that I was to give the clients what they needed, psychologically and emotionally. I shared an office with other social work interns. There were blue vinyl floors, and fluorescent lights buzzed overhead. There were no windows. Paintings made by the patients adorned the walls.

Ronald, my first client, sat across my desk.

“How are you?” I asked.

“I’m dying,” he said.

“What do you need?” I asked.

He told me he wanted to marry his girlfriend, Yvonne.

I told Dr. Katch that Ronald was delusional as a result of suffering from lethal cryptococcal meningitis. As a clinical psychologist, I was trained to work with patients

who would gain insight and grow from reflecting on their experiences. “He’s got no insight,” I said.

“It’s not about insight,” Katch replied. “It’s about being alive in this moment. If Ronald and Yvonne want to get married, that’s their choice. In social work we start with the client, not with fancy psychobabble. There’s no time to reflect. Their story is happening now, in this moment.”

Some weeks later I looked down into Ronald’s open casket. He was dressed in a gray suit, a white shirt, and a red tie with a yellow rose in his lapel. Yvonne came up to me. “I just got married, and I’m already a widow. At least he died knowing he was loved.” Ronald’s name was engraved on a brass plate that read: “In Memoriam.” The plate was the size of a packet of chewing gum, and it was hammered onto a wooden board with at least 50 other names at the entrance to the AIDS Day Program building.

I sobbed in Katch’s office. He gave me a tissue. “At least Ronald had Yvonne. Most of these patients are dying, leaving nothing behind. Nothing. Everything they own ends up in black garbage bags. And no one ever comes to claim their belongings.” Their stories were all they had, and they were dying without having told them. I told Katch that I wanted to start a storytelling circle so that the clients could leave their stories behind to be retold and passed on by others. And those who live can carry others’ stories into the future.

I went into the dayroom where all the patients congregated and said, “I’m starting a storytelling group.”

“What the f--cking hell, Murray, what are they teaching you in that social work school? What are you talking about? I don’t have a story. I’m a crack addict,” Sharon responded. “Do you understand? This is how I got infected.” She had no teeth. She wore gold rings on every single one of her fingers. She said, “I’ve spent my whole life in the alleys of Brooklyn scoring crack.”

I said, “Yes, that’s your story. That’s what I want to hear. Just tell me what happened to you. That’s what I want to know. What happened to you?”

By Christmas 1994, my storytelling group was filled with people. One of the clients, Harriet, said to me, “My daughter, who is three, will never really know who I was because I’m going to die before she can hear my story. Would you mind if we made a videotape of my story? So that I can leave her that videotape as a legacy of who I am after I die?” We did. After that, all the clients in my program wanted legacy tapes.

Newspapers published articles every single week on the number of people infected with and dying of AIDS. By 1995, the *New York Times* reported 159,000 people had died.

At that time, the Department of AIDS Services of New York announced cutbacks, and this affected people in my program. Everyone gathered in wheelchairs or bent

over canes, they got on a bus, and they went up to the state capitol in Albany. They left videotapes of their legacy stories on the desks of the legislators, accompanied by a handwritten note:

Listen to these stories. Listen to my story. Listen to what happened to me, and then tell me that I don't deserve services. As the numbers you read every day in the papers continue escalating, they become increasingly meaningless. Those in power who are supposed to be affected by these numbers are in fact not responding. The mayor of New York is denying what's going on. The president is denying it. Organizations aren't responding fast enough. Pharmaceutical companies aren't doing research fast enough or presenting medications fast enough. But we are not numbers. This is our lives!

The legislators listened to their pleas for civil rights and funding for AIDS research. Laws were enacted that prohibited discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS in all workplace settings, state and municipal services, public accommodations, commercial facilities, transportation, and telecommunications. *This happened because people told their stories.*

My experience during this unprecedented epidemic inspired me to distill all I knew about listening and

storytelling into the Narativ method. I understood that at a particular moment in time, there is always a reason to use a story rather than graphs, statistical charts, PowerPoints, and all the other forms of communication. Stories are powerful. They change lives. I tell the AIDS Day Program story because it exemplifies the emotional impact of story, the social and cultural role of story, and its practical efficacy in creating change. It is also my origin story; it shows how storytelling became the focus of my 30-plus-year career.

Drawing on that experience, I developed the prompt Why story? Why now? to use at the start of every storytelling engagement. It pulls us out of vagueness into specificity; it helps us identify and pursue our storytelling objective. Let's look at an example.

Craig Kostelic, the chief business officer of Condé Nast's Food Innovation Group (FIG), views every member of his team as a storyteller. He told us, "It's the common trait that links every job. Whether you're in editing, telling stories to consumers, or you're in sales, telling a story to a client or marketing team or closing deals or getting authorizations, or you're in creative services, telling stories to bring numbers to life, we are *all* storytellers." For Craig, storytelling is "the most important and transferable skill set that we all have as part of our professional development."

As we spoke with Craig, he shared an unequivocal understanding that storytelling joins the head to the heart—it brings to life with emotional power the data, facts, and figures embedded in concepts such as cost-benefit analysis and return on investment (ROI). These stories engage and connect. Connection builds audiences and gets them on board. Why story? was abundantly evident for Craig.

But Why now? Why engage Narativ to help FIG tell better stories right now?

In an explosive period of growth in Condé Nast's recent history, the Food Innovation Group was blazing a path ahead in digital storytelling, and FIG had become somewhat renowned inside the company. Craig sought out Narativ for a keynote speech to help take FIG's storytelling to the next level. He also saw story as a way to communicate the power of belonging and teamwork within FIG. He felt that belonging and teamwork had been essential to their success, so it was a message he wanted to reinforce and celebrate.

Every company that approaches Narativ has a different response to Why story? Why now? Storytelling and stories are two sides of the most important competency in business communication. Storytelling puts all of us in the position to know our work more deeply and intimately through a story. Meanwhile, stories themselves

work all kinds of magic on communication, from delivering emotional relevance to bringing data to life to transferring knowledge in an engaging and memorable way. In the following chapters, you'll read about how companies have successfully applied the Narativ method to achieve their business communication goals. Here are some examples that will be explained in detail:

- A social media company's marketing teams were promoting its business globally, but within the company the marketing teams were not always seen as being as essential as the engineers. As a result, they wanted to communicate their stake in the business and show their value in an impactful way. That was their answer to Why story? Why now? Then came a second answer: "We need to be better listeners." We designed training that was entirely about identifying and releasing obstacles to listening so that everyone in the entire department could be better listeners within their various teams and to their business partners, which paved the way for powerful stories to emerge. You'll read more about what happened in Chapter 2.
- A tech company was pivoting, which required reorganization and rethinking, and this made waves in its management culture. We were asked

to create a listening and storytelling environment in which to identify and release obstacles that were preventing clear and clean communication, and then develop a new, forward-thinking story to help them move ahead. Chapter 3 goes into depth about the application of our method for navigating crisis.

- A media and entertainment giant was bringing together 140 employees from 47 emerging market countries for a corporate retreat. The manager wanted an event that would “break down boundaries among people.” The manager told us that the event had to be “really good because some participants were from countries whose governments hated one another.” Their Why story? Why now? revealed an intense need for collaboration and connection in order to tackle the enormity of their assignment. Read about it in Chapter 4.
- A national medical insurance company was trying to change the perception that the company was a large behemoth out of touch with the customers’ real needs. For this company’s leaders, the questions Why story? Why now? revealed that it was in fact a customer-centric company that wasn’t putting a spotlight on how its

customer service department responded to real client needs. Over the years, the company had invested significantly in training to go beyond the call of duty and exceed expectations. The question made us turn to the managers and employees in the call centers that addressed clients directly. This led to excavating stories of actual customer experiences that brought to life how the company was making a difference in the lives of its customers, challenging the narrative that had been in the media until then. You'll read their story in Chapter 5.

- A multinational pharmaceutical firm's sales and research teams frequently made dry, fact-filled presentations that were so data heavy that it was hard to read what was on each slide of the decks. Some decks were 80 slides long! Their Why story? Why now? was at first related to standard presentation concerns: they wanted to tell stories that engaged, and they adapted presentation decks to those personal stories. And then, as often happens in the process of answering these questions, a second reason arose, even more powerful than the first. The research and sales teams had different agendas and purposes, yet

they had to find a common language so that the whole enterprise could move forward.

“What stories can we tell that would help us be better collaborators and therefore create better presentations?” they asked. Find this also in Chapter 5.

- The chief business officer of an iconic publishing brand sought to craft a story to rouse his team and form stronger bonds. I worked closely with him to create his story, and in Chapter 6 you’ll observe the real-world process of excavating, crafting, and preparing for presentation in minute detail.
- A luxury brand’s legal team was often seen as creating headaches for the multitude of businesses the company held, and the team members needed to position the team as a business partner to the rest of the company. The team’s answer to Why story? Why now? was to change that perception by telling powerful stories that would touch people’s hearts and get past preconceptions. You’ll read their story and its surprising twist in Chapter 7.

There are common themes and purposes that emerge from asking the questions Why story? Why now? Here are some of them. Feel free to add your own:

- Demonstrate leadership
- Explain a raison d'être and purpose
- Increase collaboration or teamwork
- Generate empathy
- Inspire change
- Resolve conflict
- Humanize or dimensionalize an issue or audience
- Share learning or training
- Celebrate and build culture

Now, take a moment to reflect on a project or initiative at work, some relational issues within a team, or a newly identified target audience. Why would you use story to support that work? And what about this moment in time requires the story to be told? Explore the center and edges of those questions. You will gain greater insight the deeper you probe.

As we move forward from this starting point, excavation evolves into a process of exploration and discovery.

Roll up your sleeves because stories require some digging. They are not ready-made, a product you pull off the shelf. In fact, viewing them that way diminishes their return. A good example is formulaic training material or a clichéd inspirational phrase. They lack the direction and urgency of Why story? Why now? and the vitality of a good story. Work needs to be done to get to the heart of the matter. There've been no surprises yet. We haven't pushed through any boundaries. And this is precisely why we must suspend judgment for a period of time: so that we don't cut short the creative process of excavation and miss out on stories that lie just below the surface. The obstacles that stand in the way, which we explore in the next two chapters, turn out to be part of the creative process itself.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Murray Nossel, PhD, is the founder and director of Narativ. He sees every situation and every interaction as an opportunity for listening and storytelling, and he has taught storytelling for 25 years in more than 50 countries to more than 10,000 people. He believes that something personal and expressive lies deep within each of us—and that we all have a story to tell.

Nossel is on the teaching faculty of the Program of Narrative Medicine at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. He has taught storytelling at London Business School, City University of New York, The New School, Baruch College, Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, and the University of Maryland.

Narativ, the company Nossel cofounded, has worked with corporations as diverse as the Walt Disney Company, Time Warner, New York Habitat, UNICEF, Radisson Hotels, the Open Society Foundations, Birchbox, and Twitter.

Nossel has applied his listening and storytelling methodology in the theater and documentary filmmaking. *Two Men Talking*, a performance of his listening and storytelling method developed with Dr. Paul Browde, has been performed in the West End of London and Off-Broadway in New York. His film *Why Can't We Be a Family Again?* was nominated for a 2003 Academy Award. Nossel is currently producing and directing *Sala: The Letter Carrier*, a documentary film about a Holocaust survivor who resolutely chose not to tell her story until advanced age prompted her to speak.

Nossel is the founder and director of the World Mother Storytelling Project, a listening and storytelling movement that seeks to capture the stories of mothers around the world.

He lives with his partner, David Hoos, a physician, in New York City.

ABOUT NARATIV

Narativ, a communication consultancy with offices in New York and London, specializes in storytelling in a business context. Its consultants work with clients around the world, some of which include Prudential, Cigna, Time Warner, Disney, Twitter, Medium, Chanel, and Boehringer Ingelheim.

Narativ delivers its listening and storytelling method on-site in group workshops to audiences as large as 500 and as intimate as 12. These workshops improve connection and communication in teams while offering the many additional benefits explored in this book: deep listening, editorial thinking, audience awareness, and presentation skills.

Narativ offers online workshops for individuals who understand that a personal story plays an important role in defining one's history as well as one's career goals. In Origin Story workshops, participants have developed stories for use in podcasting, filmmaking, raising capital, business development, authorship, leadership, job

applications, speaking engagements and presentations, and self-discovery.

Narativ utilizes the practices that lie at the heart of listening and telling—interviewing; story excavating, crafting, and presenting; recording; and impact analysis—to build training and knowledge-sharing programs for corporations. Clients have used this solution for onboarding and sales preparedness training. They report that storytelling makes training content more memorable, relevant, and enjoyable.

Narativ resolutely believes that listening and storytelling are the optimal means to make a connection between two people and within teams, organizations, and society as a whole. Its vision has always been a world connected by listening and storytelling—a vision the world needs now more than ever.

