



CUSTOMER DISCOVERY: Module 2, Episode 1 – Storytelling

TITLE:

The Science Of Storytelling

DESCRIPTION:

Defining why storytelling is important and why it's relevant to your startup's success

[LEARN@LIFT Episode Intro]

Welcome everyone to the Storytelling module for LEARN@LIFT! For those who may not have heard Module 1: Customer Discovery: An Iterative Process, my name is Patrick Riley, and I am very excited to share this bootcamp journey with you.

This module is all about how to craft an excellent story. Some of you might wonder what storytelling has to do with your startup. Well, it has everything to do with it, and you're about to find out why.

To get us started, I'd like you to imagine something for me. Think about the first or the last great movie you watched, or novel you read. Remember how captivating it was? Were you hanging on the edge of your seat, anticipating the story's resolution? Did you stay awake hours past your bedtime to keep turning the page so you could finally find out, "what happens?"? Were you so transported that when it ended you needed a moment to enter back into your own reality?

This is what good stories do: They captivate us. They take us out of our own world and into someone else's. They move us. They change us.

It turns out that humans are designed for stories. Not because they've been told for millennia. But because story is actually what our brain does. Story is the result of how our brains evolved and function.

Brains love story because brains are obsessed with change. And they have to be. According to Will Storr, our senses are, to put it kindly, really not that good. If you look at your thumb at arm's length from your face, your thumbnail is the only thing that is actually in focus. If you think about that for a second, your eyes, for all that they can "see", are giving your brain very partial information. Beyond the only thing in focus (your thumbnail), everything is fuzzy. Everything else is not what you are giving your primary attention to.

Evolutionarily speaking, this is terrible.

Except, that our brains and senses are extremely well adapted to notice and respond to changes in our environment. The smallest change to our senses sends a thrilling message to the brain: "What was that?" it asks. Within a tiny fraction of time, your high-definition focus is being redirected to investigate what has happened. Your problem-solving brain is on high alert to define, categorize, and calculate a response to the change. This process is called a disorienting response: it's a moment of unexpected change that throws you out of your current focus, into investigation mode to determine the cause of whatever disturbance you experienced.

It is precisely because of the brain's response to unexpected events that story exists.

The brain stitches each unexpected change into a narrative, moving from one sequence of cause and effect into another, weaving a story around the change it experiences and its ability to re-adjust after the change event has passed.

What the brain craves after a disorienting event is to know what it is supposed to do next. Think about it: if you're a human 20,000 years ago, sitting quietly by a river weaving a basket and, out of nowhere, the sound of a branch cracking interrupts the gentle pitter patter of water falling on pebbles, the gentle rustle of the trees, and a bird chirping far away. Your

brain springs into action. It quickly needs to know: is that sound friend or foe? Do I run, do I hide, or do I fight? Am I close enough to call on others? Is this it for me?

The deep satisfaction that comes from concluding a good story is due to the brain's inherent need to know how change is resolved.

The brain categorizes a successfully resolved change as a survival win. It can now add it to its repertoire of: "if that event happens again, you've now learned of a method to survive it."

And that is, inherently, what good story is about: it's about how the protagonist experiences and resolves change and learns from it. Whether the change is internal, external, because of a friendly relationship or an antagonistic one, story is about a sequence of cause and effect moments that lead our main character through change and come out of it - alive - and better adapted to their life.

Why is it important to know this?

It turns out that, because our brains want to know how to resolve change, stories are our best form of communication. With the added benefit of empathy - being able to imagine being in someone else's shoes - our brains learn from others' responses to disorienting experiences. We don't have to experience the disorienting event ourselves to learn about how we could respond. By sharing stories about them, it's like we are there and we can learn the survival recipe just as well.

So, as one of our best survival tools, we are hard-wired to learn from stories. And, the ones that make us feel like we are there, in that moment, with our protagonist, are the ones that stick with us, that we learn from, that trigger action in our brains.

So, what does this have to do with you? You might be asking yourself right about now: "Why am I listening to the human evolution of story on a podcast about startup success?"

The answer is that it has everything to do with your startup.

How many of you have built pitch decks to communicate what your startup does? How many of you have tried to describe to a friend or family member what it is you are trying to solve with your startup? How many of you have tried to recruit someone to work for you and explained why they should be excited to join your startup?

How many of you used powerpoint slides to do this? How many of you spent 10 minutes blabbing kind of incoherently about what you're trying to accomplish and watched your friend's eyes sort of glaze over? My guess is that it's quite a few of you. And, rest assured, it's very normal.

But, given what we now know about story, don't you think you should reconsider your startup's narrative and how you present it so that you can leave the best impression possible?

Because, don't forget, the person you're sharing your story with is also human. Behind their eyes is a brain, just like yours, that's craving resolution to change. It's waiting to pounce at the opportunity to spring into action when a juicy disorienting experience is set before it, calculating the best way to resolve its predicament.

As an entrepreneur, you're going to share your story thousands of times. Every time you do is another potential opportunity: for investment, for customer feedback, for sales, for attracting talent.

And so, you have to know the formula that will help you win their brains over. You have to tap into human evolutionary psychology to figure out just how much to say, in what circumstances, to keep your audience hanging on the edge of their seats.

Remember how you felt while watching or reading your last favorite story? You want to leave your audiences just as moved: You want to captivate them. Take them out of their world and into yours and your customers'. You want to change them. So that when you offer your solution, they're already there with you. Joining you on your startup's journey - in whatever capacity they can - is already a no-brainer for them.

Learning how to craft these kinds of stories is what we're going to do in the next couple of episodes on Storytelling. We'll talk about what elements comprise a great story, and then we'll apply these elements to crafting your startup's story. The accompanying exercises will also help you visualize and put into practice the lessons you learn.

I'm excited to share this journey with you and expect that we will come out of it, changed. See you next time.

[Insert episode closing]