



Leadership as Storytelling

One of a leader's key responsibilities is to engage people into a future – a future that most likely is different than the present. *Leaders of today are responsible for leading change, not keeping things the same.*



When leaders seek to influence others in an organization, they encounter resistance; this is to be expected, as the role of supervision is to keep things the same through process and efficient action. Thus, *resistance is built into the leadership/supervision model.*

Where to start with initiating a change? **Storytelling.** Humans live in stories. We are engaged by stories, make sense of the world by them, and encode memories with them.

Data can kill engagement and memory. My own career started as a financial analyst, and I became adept at seeing patterns in data and how they could inform decisions. People nodded politely and then didn't change. Lots of data didn't help. I later learned that the data stimulated only the logical portions of the brain; research finds that people forget 90% of what they learn in 30 days. Yikes! How can we increase engagement and memory?

The answer is storytelling. People recall information, initiate change, and take risks based on the *emotional* centers of the brain. Remember, change is risk. This is where storytelling comes into play. *Meaning is far more effective at creating memories than data.*

Effective storytelling engages people into a future. To be effective, the story must be:

1. **Short:** Ten minutes or less. Research shows that after 10 minutes, attention wanes.
2. **Descriptive:** Stories that include adjectives that people can relate to are more memorable. Use varied, specific, and unique descriptors. Saying the future will be "great" is a waste of the ten minutes; instead, create a mental image of the future.
3. **Multi-Sensory:** Memories are best encoded when they stimulate many of our senses. Judicious use of PowerPoint is helpful, if it is visually oriented to support the story; a few key data points can help, but a lot of data kills the story. Consider the venue you tell the story as part of the sensory process. And make it meaningful.

I could give you more tips, but the research says you will forget them in 30 days.