



# Executive Book Summaries®



By Annette Simmons

## CONTENTS

### The Six Stories You Need To Know How to Tell

Pages 2, 3, 4

### What Is Story?

Pages 4, 5

### What Story Can Do That Facts Can't

Pages 5, 6

### How to Tell a Good Story

Pages 6, 7

### The Psychology of Story's Influence

Page 7

### Influencing the Unwilling, Unconcerned or Unmotivated

Pages 7, 8

### Storylistening as a Tool Of Influence

Page 8

### Storyteller Dos and Don'ts

Page 8

## Inspiration, Influence and Persuasion Through The Art of Storytelling

# THE STORY FACTOR

### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

*What's your story? Who are you? Where do you come from? What do you want?*

When you seek to influence others, you face questions like these. Whether you are proposing a risky new venture, trying to close a deal, or leading a charge against injustice, you have a story to tell. Tell it well and you will create a shared experience with your listeners that can have profound and lasting results. In this summary, you will learn how the art of storytelling will help you inspire, influence and persuade others.

✓ **You will explore the six distinct stories you must know how to tell.** These include, "Who I am," "Why I Am Here," "Vision," "Teaching," "Values in Action" and "I Know What You Are Thinking" stories.

✓ **You will learn what story is.** Stories, whether true or fiction, illustrate truths better than a recitation of facts. You will learn why stories connect on a human level and break through barriers facts never will.

✓ **You will learn how to tell a good story.** Storytelling is a skill you can develop. You will soon see how to tell a story effectively, using the right material, expressions and gestures.

✓ **You will discover how stories connect on a psychological level.** In the process, you will also see how you can use stories to connect with the unwilling, unconcerned and unmotivated people you need to influence.

✓ **You will see the power of being a listener as well as a storyteller.** Sometimes you can't influence someone until they have told their story and made you understand why they believe as you do. You will learn the tricks that make you a real listener, able to reach deep into your audience's psyche.

✓ **Storytelling Dos and Don'ts.** Finally, you will learn what you should and should not do as you tell the stories that inspire your audience to be influenced by your views and listen to your advice.



# THE STORY FACTOR

by Annette Simmons

## — THE COMPLETE SUMMARY

### The Six Stories You Need To Know How to Tell

People don't want more information. They are up to their eyeballs in information. They want faith — faith in you, your goals, your success, in the story you tell. It is faith that moves mountains, not facts. Faith needs a story to sustain it — a meaningful story that inspires belief in you and renews hope that your ideas indeed offer what you promise. Genuine influence goes deeper than getting people to do what you want them to do. It means people pick up where you left off because they believe. Money, power, authority, political advantage, and brute force have all, at one time or another, been overcome by faith.

Story is your path to creating faith. Whether you tell your story through your lifestyle or in words, the first thing people look for before believing in you is trust. There are six types of stories that will serve you well if you want to create trust and faith. These are:

- “Who I Am” stories.
- “Why I Am Here” stories.
- “The Vision” story.
- “Teaching” stories.
- “Values in Action” stories.
- “I Know What You Are Thinking” stories.

Before being influenced by you, your listeners want to know, “Who are you and why are you here?” If you don't take the time to answer, they will make up their own responses, usually negative ones. It's human nature to mistrust and to believe that others look out for themselves. You need to tell a story that demonstrates that you are different, that you are trustworthy.

A story lets listeners decide for themselves whether they should trust you. If your story is good enough, people — of their own free will — conclude they can trust you and the message you bring.

#### “Who I Am”

You don't have to tell a personal story as long as the story you do tell reveals something about who you are. For example, if you tell a story about Mother Teresa that reveals you understand gratitude and humility, you have told a “Who I Am” story. Your audience will con-

### Building a Cathedral

A man came upon a construction site where three people were working. He asked the first, “What are you doing?” and the man answered, “I am laying bricks.” He asked the second man the same question, and he answered, “I am building a wall.” He walked up to the third man, who was humming a tune as he worked. When asked what he was doing, he stood up, smiled, and answered, “I am building a cathedral.” If you want to influence others in a big way, you need to give them a vision story that will become their cathedral.

clude you aren't bound by ego. If the story you tell reveals you understand self-sacrifice, your audience will believe you can blend compassion with the desire for self-gain. If your story reveals you have learned to recognize your own flaws, they will believe you can be trusted to deal head-on with tough problems.

#### “Why I Am Here”

Your “Why I Am Here” story needs to reassure the audience that you have good intentions. However, before you tell them what's in it for them, you must tell them what's in it for you. If you don't, they will suspect you have a hidden agenda. It's a big mistake to try to hide selfish goals. The CEO who makes 50 times the salary of his subordinates is foolish to begin a company meeting about the upcoming merger with a, “We are doing this for you” speech. People won't be influenced

(continued on page 3)

**The author:** Annette Simmons is founder of Group Process Consulting, which specializes in helping organizations build collaborative behaviors. Simmons is also the author of *Territorial Games* and *A Safe Place for Dangerous Truths*.

Copyright© 2001 by Annette Simmons. Summarized by permission of the publisher, Perseus Books, 11 Cambridge Center, Cambridge, MA 02142. 254 pages. \$25.00. 0-7382-0369-6.

**Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries** (ISSN 0747-2196), 10 LaCrue Avenue, Concordville, PA 19331 USA, a division of Concentrated Knowledge Corporation. Publisher, George Y. Clement. V. P. Publications, Maureen L. Solon. Editor-in-Chief, Christopher G. Murray. Published monthly. Subscriptions: \$195 per year in U.S., Canada & Mexico, and \$275 to all other countries. Periodicals postage paid at Concordville, PA and additional offices.

**Postmaster:** Send address changes to Soundview, 10 LaCrue Avenue, Concordville, PA 19331. Copyright © 2001 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries.

**Available formats:** Summaries are available in print, audio and electronic formats. To subscribe, call us at 1-800-521-1227 (1-610-558-9495 outside U.S. & Canada), or order on the Internet at [www.summary.com](http://www.summary.com). Multiple-subscription discounts and Corporate Site Licenses are also available.

### A Businessman at the Hospice Explains: ‘Why I Am Here’

A successful businessman who volunteers for an AIDS hospice uses a story about the Dead Sea to explain to other businesspersons why they should contribute their time and money to the cause. The Dead Sea and the very much alive Sea of Galilee are both fed by the same source, explains this businessman. However, the Dead Sea can only receive an inward flow, while the Sea of Galilee can flow out as well as in. Because the Dead Sea is prevented from flowing outward, the accumulation of salt has killed it. For this businessman, you can only be alive and thrive if you can give out as successfully as you can take in.

### The Six Stories You Need To Know How to Tell

*(continued from page 2)*

by those who treat them as if they are stupid.

#### “The Vision”

Once your audience is comfortable with who you are and why you are there, they are ready to listen to what’s in it for them. Your job is to take your vision and transform it into the audience’s vision. You have to take the time to find a story about your vision in a way that connects — a story that people can see. Tell it from a place of authenticity. Tell it with conviction. A real vision story connects with people in a way that shrinks today’s frustrations in light of the promise of tomorrow.

#### “Teaching”

Whatever your role in life, you have certain skills that you want others to have, too. Whether you need to teach someone to write a letter, design software, answer a telephone, make a sale, or manage a group of volunteers, story halves the necessary teaching time.

Use story to get your message across, especially when you need to show both what needs to be done and how it should be done. For example, telling your new receptionist where the hold, transfer and extension buttons are will not make her a great receptionist. But telling her that the best receptionist you ever knew was Mrs. Ardi, who could simultaneously calm an angry customer, locate your wandering CEO, and smile warmly at the UPS man, gives a better picture of the skills you want her to display. Later, under stress, your new receptionist will ask herself, “What would Mrs. Ardi do?” rather than, “Where is the hold button?”

#### “Values in Action”

Without a doubt, the best way to teach a value is by example. The second best way is to tell a story that provides an example. Story lets you instill values in a way that keeps people thinking for themselves. “We value integrity,” means nothing. But tell a story about a former employee who hid his mistake and cost the company thousands of dollars or a story about a salesperson who owned up to a mistake, and earned so much trust her customer doubled her order, and you begin to teach an employee what integrity means.

A good test for yourself is to figure out how many stories you can come up with to demonstrate the values you profess to hold. This will be the first source of your “values in action” stories. You need as many stories as possible in your tool kit if you want to influence the values of others effectively enough to change their behavior.

#### “I Know What You Are Thinking”

Tell a story that makes people wonder if you are reading their minds. It isn’t hard to do. If you have done your homework on the group or person you want to influence, it’s relatively easy to identify their potential objections to your message. If you address their objections first, you disarm them. Often, the people you need to influence don’t trust you and aren’t ready to accept

*(continued on page 4)*

### The Piano Lesson: A Story of Values

Marti Smye, author of *Is It Too Late to Run Away and Join the Circus? A Guide for Your Second Life*, tells a values story based on the often neglected value of having fun at work. Marti’s story involves her brother, who was also named Marti, and her father (named — what else? — Marti). Clearly Marti (the father) was a bit eccentric.

The story involves the piano lessons that Marti and her brother were forced by their mother to endure when they were young. The piano sat on the back porch, and both children dreaded practice time. (Her brother even wore his football helmet during practice in silent protest).

The torture continued for months until one day, her brother came running into the house saying, “Mom, come look, COME LOOK!” Everyone ran to the back porch to see the piano engulfed in flames as her father watched. Turning to the rest of the family, her father calmly explained, “I want my children to know that if it ain’t fun, don’t do it.”

### The Six Stories You Need To Know How to Tell

(continued from page 3)

your advice. Instead, they may subtly attempt to sabotage your efforts. If you tell an “I know what you are thinking” story, you get to the heart of their objections up front and can begin building credibility that much sooner. ■

### What Is Story?

Clothing truth in story is a powerful way to get people to open their minds to you and the truth you carry. The naked truth sometimes must be dressed up to be seen. Consider what happens if you bluntly tell your boss his idea will never work. The reception will likely be less than gracious. Clothe your objection in a story, and it appears more gracious and prompts less resistance.

#### Story and Authority

Story creates power. You don’t have to be in a leadership position when you know the power of story. Like

the sword of Excaliber, story conjures a magic power that does not need formal authority to work. As a storyteller, you borrow the story’s power to connect people to what’s important and to help them make sense of their world. You temporarily hold the power to gather people together for a common cause.

#### Narrative Truth

A story is a narrative account of events — true or fictional. The difference between giving an example and telling a story is in the addition of emotional content and added sensory details in the telling. A persuasive story is any narrative account from your own experience, your imagination, a literary source or oral tradition that will accomplish any of the six story goals above.

Whether stories are factual or not, good stories always have an element of Truth in them.

Truth with a capital T is the kind of Truth we recognize and know without empirical evidence.

When you tell a

Truth story, it acts as a tuning fork. Your listeners resonate with that Truth; as they remember their own experiences, they tune in to you and your message.

Stories are “more true” than facts because stories are multidimensional. Truths like justice or integrity are too complex to be expressed in a law, a statistic, or a fact. Facts need the context of who, what, when, why and where.

Consider this example. If you tell a manager to “stop criticizing employees,” she may counter, “How else do I let them know they are making mistakes?” Your clear directive is superficial and without context. Your opinion does not communicate the Truth of treating people with respect and balancing positive and negative feedback. However, if you tell her, “In Washington, D.C., last week I had a Haitian cab driver who shared his grandfather’s favorite saying with me, ‘The man who beats his horse will soon be walking,’” you call her attention to a larger, deeper context — with a one-sentence story.

Life is more complex than ever. People construct walls to keep you out, no matter how well-intentioned you are. They simply don’t want to learn about yet another thing they should be doing. Already overloaded and confused, they assume that your added request will only make things worse. Frustration and apathy is the norm. Here you are, trying to influence people who have defaulted to basic self-interest. They are either

*Whether stories are factual or not, good stories always have an element of Truth in them.*

### Avoiding Alienation

Clear guidelines and rules alienate creative thinkers. Take, for example, an airline with rules about who gets bumped from a flight and who flies. If the airline has a formula based on frequent flier miles, fare categories and order of arrival, airline employees aren’t exactly being invited to come up with creative solutions. When faced with an obviously angry customer, they have no option except to recite “the rules.”

What if the training of airline customer service employees focused more on stories illustrating creative solutions to problems and less on the rules? The training, for example, could include the story of a counter person who was bullied by a man demanding, “Do you have any idea who I am?” The counterperson grabbed a loudspeaker and announced, “We have a passenger who doesn’t know who he is. Could anyone who might help identify this passenger please come to the counter?”

The passenger in this story laughed. Of course, he could have become more angry. Whatever the outcome, the point would be made that when dealing with passengers, the airline expects its personnel to be creative — and even use humor if they believe it might be effective — rather than mindlessly intone rules.

(continued on page 5)

### What Is Story?

(continued from page 4)

content in their little world or apathetic, frustrated and secretly cynical about you and your goals.

But when you offer a story that makes them feel curious again or helps them make sense of their confusion, they will listen. A story can transform the hopeless into a band of evangelists ready to spread the word. ■

### What Story Can Do That Facts Can't

A subtle but powerful shift occurs when you seek to influence people to make wise decisions rather than “right” decisions. When you decide to awaken sleeping wisdom rather than convince others you are right, you produce a much more powerful experience. If you trust that the wisdom is in the room, then your only job is to allow this wisdom to flow freely.

*And the wisdom is in the room.*

What people don't need are more facts. Instead, they need help finding their wisdom. Contrary to popular belief, bad decisions are rarely made because people don't have all the facts. They're made because people ignore the facts, don't understand them, or don't give them enough importance. Basic human emotions like anxiety, greed, exasperation, intolerance and apathy have hijacked their brains and directed them to the easy way out. More facts won't help them regain perspective. A story will. A story will help them figure out what all these facts mean.

People are not rational. Many decisions are based more on feelings than on rational, logical thinking. People decide they like a piece of art because someone they like likes it. They will select one item out of ten identical items and give a list of rational-sounding reasons why it is superior to the other nine. They then explain these decisions in a way that makes them seem rational — they irrationally believe they are rational.

### Story First, Facts Second

People have a natural tendency to interpret facts to fit their preconceived notions of how things work. These notions are the stories they have come to believe. If you present facts first, followed by your story, your audience will interpret the facts to validate their existing beliefs. But if you present the story first, and then the facts, the audience is more likely to fit the facts into your story.

### Japanese Businessman's Rational Approach Fails

A Japanese businessman learned a valuable lesson in the use of facts when he sent a memo to his American female counterpart advising her about appropriate attire for her upcoming visit to Japan. He provided her with the fact: “Do not wear red, tight-fitting clothes or low-cut blouses. Do not wear hosiery that is patterned or brightly colored. Do not wear perfume or heavy make-up. Do not wear dangling earrings or heels over two inches.” She was miffed, to put it mildly. Her American “story” told her that this sort of communication was disrespectful. He would have been better off telling her the story of the woman who visited their office in a red dress and long earrings who was hit on by the Japanese men who assumed she was “easy.”

### Ten Situations Where Facts Are Inferior To Story

● **One-D to Three-D:** You probably will seem very one dimensional to the people you want to influence, especially if they don't know much about you. Reciting a lot of facts about your educational and work background isn't going to help much. To come alive in 3D, your best bet is to tell a story that reflects who you really are. For example, if your role is to create a team, a story about how you grew up in a family of 12 and learned about teamwork firsthand will go much farther than reiterating that the company organizational chart shows you are the team leader.

● **Bear-Trap Questions:** The people you wish to influence have egos. If you get on the wrong side of one of those egos, he or she may set out to discredit you with a bear-trap question. If you respond by saying something unpopular, you are trapped. For example, if you are telling a group that “telling the truth” is going to improve work performance, you will be asked, “Are you saying we should always tell the truth?” A yes or no answer will either sound naive or sound as if you condone lying.

A story can defuse the situation and get the discussion back on track. You could talk about the time that a co-worker was about to give his first presentation and asks you right before he takes the stage whether you think he will do a good job. Even if you have your doubts, you would tell him “yes” since this is neither the time nor place to say otherwise. Your story illustrates that you understand the nuances of truth-telling.

● **Tunnel Vision:** The people you want to influence

(continued on page 6)

### What Story Can Do That Facts Can't

(continued from page 5)

often suffer from tunnel vision. The facts you throw at them bounce right off. To help them, tell an extreme story. For example, a marketing executive might tell a “disaster story” about a delivery nightmare to make his world real to the manufacturing executive who doesn't want to look at marketing. Or a parent who tells his teenager about a friend he lost in high school in a car accident is more effective than one who recites accident statistics.

● **Saying It Without Saying It:** There are times you want to say something, but direct communication is unwise. For example, perhaps there is information you would like to share but confidentiality prevents you from sharing it. Story lets you communicate in the gray area by saying it without saying it (see box at right).

● **Stop Asking Me!** When you are in a leadership position, sometimes you find that your group depends a little too much on your advice. You cannot succeed in the long run if all you do is serve as the decision-maker. The others will never learn to make independent decisions. Tell a few stories that steer them in the right direction without giving them the answers.

● **Giving a “Demo”:** Selling a product is much easier when you can give a demonstration. When you are selling an idea, a good story becomes your “demo.” Take a trainer in a gym. Exercise is a tough product to sell. Health facts don't help. Everyone knows exercise is good for you. Success stories explaining before and after results are an ideal demo.

● **Telling Your Superior He Is Wrong:** There are times you can see a problem your superior doesn't see. Since it's a rare human being who warmly welcomes negative feedback, directly delivering bad news can be dangerous. A story can respectfully deliver bad news safely.

● **Don't Tell Me What To Do:** When faced with an impasse, the worst thing you can do is give directives. In fact, many people will technically comply with a directive in a way that assures failure. A passive-aggressive response is the likely outcome. A better approach is to tell a story that illustrates why you want things done your way.

● **Reasons Why Stories:** There are times you have to say “no.” Telling a story *before* you say no will help the person who wants only to hear “yes” see your “no” in a different light.

● **Did Somebody Die?** A bad mood is like a bad smell. It can't be ignored and it can ruin a group's efforts. A story can go a long way toward destroying a bad mood. ■

### How to Say, “OK” Without Saying It

A manager in a telecommunications firm was hampered in Asia because of his firm's limits on his expense account. The manager could not entertain his Asian customers in the manner to which they were accustomed. The manager's boss commiserated, but could not tell the manager to break the rules.

The manager told his boss a story of how a salesperson in another firm was able to circumvent a similar problem by turning in his expenses after the sale was made. “Sounds like a smart guy,” said the boss in response to the story. The message was clear: If the manager broke this particular rule but made the sale, he would probably be forgiven.

### How to Tell a Good Story

You can entice, inspire, cajole, stimulate or fascinate your audience, but you can't **make** someone listen to you. Instead, what you want to do is create curiosity. You want to catch and hold someone's attention. To prepare, you can develop the basic instruments of communicating. When you tell a story, your body and voice become the stage, actors, costumes, music and props.

Practice the skills that make up your presentation and you will be well on your way to being a great storyteller capable of influencing your audience.

#### Oral Language

One of the first skills you must pay attention to is your use of oral language, including the use of gestures and facial expressions. Your face is a communication tool that transcends language and cultural barriers. You can communicate emotional content in a split second, whether you want to or not. The secret is that to deliver the appropriate emotion, you must feel it. Actors have long ago learned that they must conjure up joy in their minds before they can show it on their face. Don't bother to tell a story about hope unless you feel hopeful. Practice getting in the right frame of mind.

Facial expressions reinforce the emotional content of your message. Raised eyebrows and a roll of your eyes can substitute for, “I thought he was crazy,” while a surprised look and dropped jaw means, “I was speechless.” A good technique to master delivery is to watch a recording of yourself telling a story with the sound turned off.

#### Bring in the Senses

Sounds, smells and tastes can also make their way into your stories. If there is wind in your story, purse

(continued on page 7)

### Story and Change

When a small southern town sets out to decide which street to develop first as part of its redevelopment plan — Martin Luther King, Jr. Street or Elm Street — an epic battle begins. The racially mixed city board has to deal with emotions and relationship dynamics going back 300 years. If the executive director forces a decision, she will likely find that months later nothing in the “approved” strategic plan has been accomplished. A better approach would be to give voice to all the divergent interests, including the community’s. A quick decision does not allow the parties to test out the new story of downtown development. Instead, the constituents on each side of the controversy will come to believe that their representatives have sold out to the other side. A better approach would be to allow the stories of racial tension that surface as old wounds are opened to be told publicly until healing can take place.

#### How to Tell a Good Story

*(continued from page 6)*

your lips and make the sound of wind. Chattering teeth make it cold. Mentioning chocolate chip cookies baking evoke childhood smells and tastes. Other storytelling devices include the use of timing and pacing. For example, a pause gives people a chance to think about what you just said and what you are going to say next. Silence acts as an amplifier for the sensory and emotional aspects of a story. ■

#### The Psychology Of Story’s Influence

At the core of the psychological models of how we influence others is the concept of self-interest. The self seeks to achieve what it wants — whether it’s profit, destruction, justice, martyrdom or whatever. The psychological goal of influence is to connect your goals to your listeners’ self-interest. Advertisers understand this. The story they tell is, “Buy our product and you will get what you want.”

From a junkie to a multimillionaire to a soccer mom, people want what they want and their wants fuel the momentum of their thoughts and actions. The goal of an influential story is to connect their momentum to your goals. The jargon we use when talking about influencing people demonstrates this. We try to “hook them” and then “reel ’em in.” However, if (to continue the metaphor) the fish don’t bite, do you blame the fish? No, you look for better bait. By its ability to tap into the

human needs we all share, a story makes excellent bait.

#### Connect Before You Convince

Genuine influence occurs between people who feel comfortable with each other. Regardless of our differences — money, status, race, gender, experience, culture — as human beings, common understandings flow beneath our superficial differences. Telling a story that connects to any of these allows you to connect with any human being. The myths and fables that have lasted thousands of years lasted because people connect with them at a personal level.

One universal “want” is the desire to belong and to be acknowledged and seen. In our technological economy, human attention is a scarce resource. People need it, crave it, and will pay for it with their cooperation. When you tell a story that touches someone, you give the gift of human attention. Once you have connected, you are ready to move your listener, step by step, to see the world as you see it. ■

#### Influencing the Unwilling, Unconcerned or Unmotivated

Your desire to influence is born of some belief that you know a better way. The firmer your conviction that you are right, the more susceptible you are to labeling those who disagree as wrong. People, of course, don’t respond well to someone who believes they are wrong.

For example, environmentalists who don’t want an incinerator for chemical wastes on the army base in their community calls the army a bully insensitive to the needs of the community. Yet the army needs to dispose of the chemicals, and have concluded the process is safe. To them, the activists are reactionaries.

A “we are right, you are wrong” approach will sabotage your ability to connect with the other side of the argument. You only have a chance of influencing the other group if you come to believe that they are honorable in their beliefs. That won’t happen if you demonize them. Redefine the adversary as within your community. Find a story that acknowledges their point of view and good intentions; only then can you begin to break through their barriers.

#### Influencing the Cynical

You may find yourself trying to influence cynical people who doubt your sincerity, your competence or your ability to deliver. You need to tell a story that proves the cynics wrong. Assurances and promises aren’t enough. If you don’t practice what you preach, you can forget about influencing the cynical.

Dick Mueller, CEO of the software company MTW

*(continued on page 8)*

### Influencing the Unwilling, Unconcerned or Unmotivated

(continued from page 7)

Corporation, knows that top-notch IT personnel tend to be demanding employees who value a good working environment — and are cynical of corporate promises. One way that Mueller uses to combat this cynicism is a story about health insurance.

Mueller describes the dread he used to feel when reviewing insurance providers every year. No matter which provider he chose, there were always complaints. Eventually, Mueller decided to delegate the choice to the employees who cared the most. He put the people who were the most unhappy with previous choices on a team and gave them 45 days to make the choice. Then he sat in a meeting room and learned about their decision with everyone else in the organization.

### Influencing the Resentful

Another tough audience are the resentful. This crowd nurses old injustices and uses them as justification for inaction. If you want to influence an individual or group mired in resentment, tell them a new story. They don't need a better understanding of the system, clearer instructions, more data, or a vision statement — they need to let go of their resentment. A story featuring a significant role for a peacemaker often helps bridge the gap resentment builds.

### Inspiring the Hopeless

Depression is at epidemic levels. A societal crisis of

meaning has left many of the people you want to influence secretly hopeless about positive change. Whatever cause you are promoting, they believe that someone else besides themselves has the power to make change happen. They feel powerless.

Your job is to help them see their power, then influence them to use it. Find a story that sustains your own hope. Prepare for the long-term commitment needed to change a habit. Breaking out of feeling hopeless is hard. One classic hope story is the tale of Rosa Parks, who sat down in the white section of a Montgomery bus. Her action wasn't planned; her feet simply hurt and she needed to sit down. But her arrest and the subsequent boycott orchestrated by Martin Luther King, Jr. was enough to change segregation in the south forever. When others see that a small act can have profound impact, they begin to feel hopeful and powerful again. ■

## Storylistening As a Tool of Influence

New ideas need room to grow. When old beliefs crowd new ideas out, the new ones wither and die. Listening to people lets them pour a little of the old thinking out so they can make room for new thinking. Most people who think they listen don't, or are doing it badly.

Genuine listening has a deep, transformative power. Try to remember the last time someone truly listened to you and you probably remember your mental defenses slowly fell away. As they did, you began to wonder about your uncertainties. Influencing you then became much easier.

Listening is hard. A good listener asks questions that are designed to make the audience revisit their beliefs, look behind their conclusions about how things are and work, unravel those assumptions, and draw new conclusions.

A car salesman trying to sell a lease will probably find listening more effective than persuasion. If the customer says he hates leases, the salesman asks why he feels that way and what specific experiences he has had with leases or what horror stories he has heard. If the salesman can stay quiet long enough, he will at least know what the customer's objections are and at best hear the customer ask why this lease is different. Listening is a great way to earn your turn to talk.

Some people are poor listeners because they think that asking too many questions is good listening. But asking lots of questions is a good way to destroy the flow of someone's story and the introspection the narrator is engaged in. Instead, let the stories flow. At the very least, listening to stories will make you more knowledgeable about the mental terrain of the individuals you want to influence. ■

### Storyteller Dos and Don'ts

Storytelling can be done well or it can be done badly. When it is done well, the storyteller sometimes gets a big head. But storytelling carries with it responsibility. After all, telling a good story will help you influence people. Don't misuse the skill. If you use story to cheat people out of their money, get someone fired, take rewards you don't deserve, or influence in an unethical way, your story will have a bad ending. Other dos and don'ts include:

- Don't act superior. Any act of superiority is an overt act of disrespect.
- Don't bore your listeners. Don't tell a story that's too long or goes nowhere.
- Don't scare people or make them feel guilty. Stories that use fear or shame to mobilize action can be counterproductive over the long run.
- Do intrigue and captivate.
- Do connect at the level of humanity.
- Do leave them feeling hopeful.