

How to Share a Story

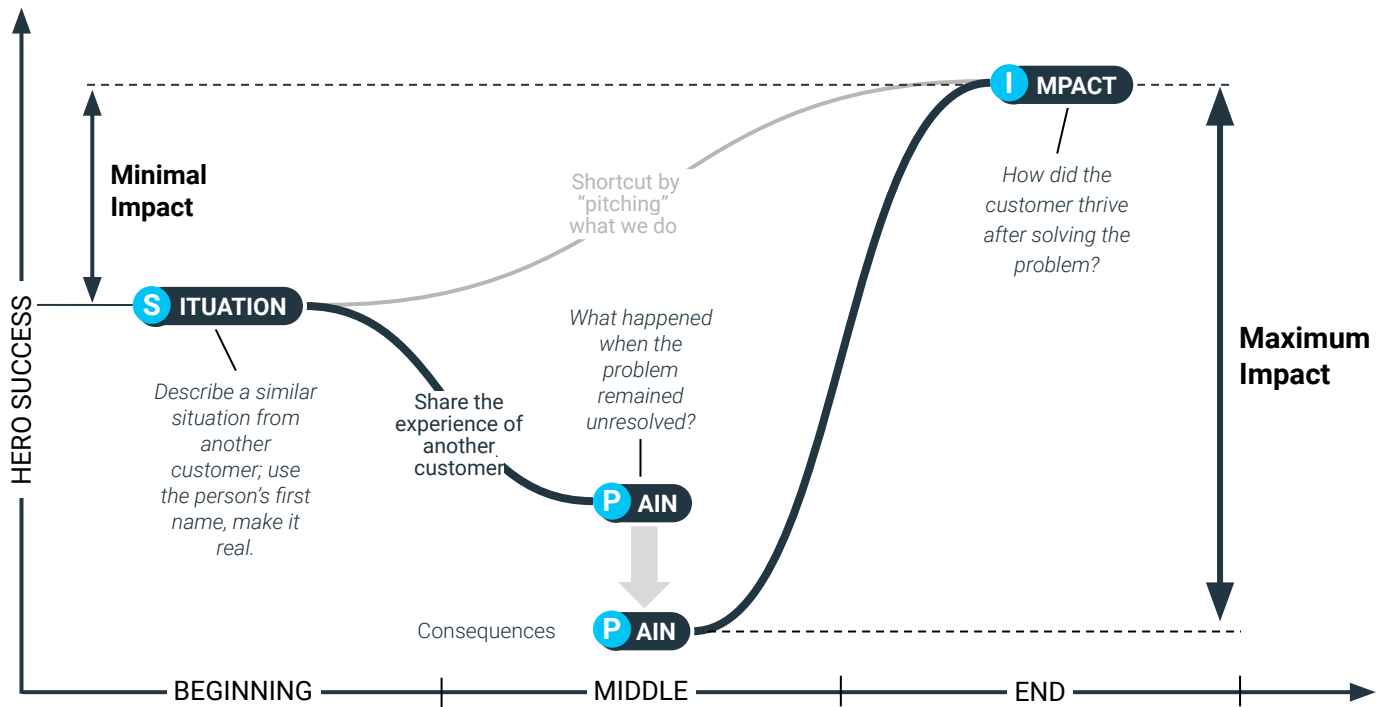


Figure 1: The Hero's Journey

The most powerful way to influence someone is through storytelling. Sharing with a prospect how you helped someone with similar challenges is persuasive; stories can plant an idea in their mind that can open them up to new possibilities. On the other hand, when you simply tell someone what to do or tell them to trust you, the opposite usually occurs.

The Science of Storytelling

The brain actively participates when listening to a story. The reason stories are so effective has to do with an idea called syncing: we as humans are particularly good at aligning our life experiences with other people, whether they're real or fictional. We put ourselves in their shoes and visualize what we would do or feel in that same situation.

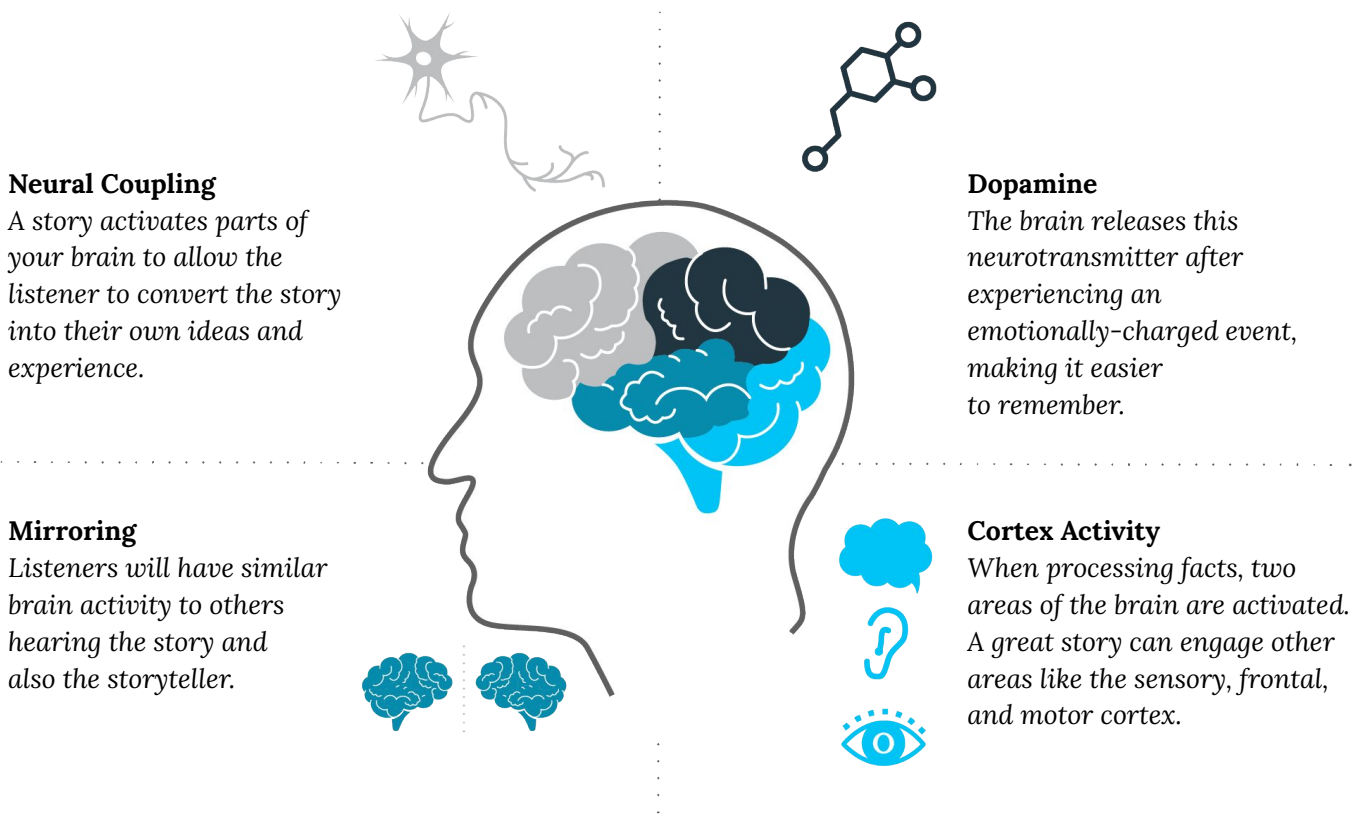


Figure 1. Four aspects of how our brains enable people to relate to stories

The process of neural coupling relates to how the same parts of the brain activate in both the storyteller and the listener when a compelling story is being told. The more emotional and moving your story is, the more your audience connects to you and your message. Here's how to apply this concept in business conversations.

The Simplified Hero's Journey in 3 Parts

Every great story follows a well-defined framework. You don't need a complex story arc like a movie or book, but there should be a beginning, middle, and end. In sales, simpler is better. Aim to have one or two sentences max for each part, and keep the entire story under two minutes.

➤ Part 1. Situation - Make it Personal

The purpose of the opening is to set the context so your customer can connect to the main character of your story. Make it relatable. When sharing customer stories with a prospect, don't just say your customer's company name (e.g., Microsoft).

Instead, describe a person at a company that's similar to the person you're talking to by using their name, title, and other relevant details. This could be an industry (retail, security), size (500-employee company versus a 50,000-employee company), or location (global vs. one-office HQ).

BEFORE

Too impersonal

That reminds me of one of our customers, Microsoft, who had a similar problem...

AFTER

The right mix of personal and relevant

That reminds me of Jill, who, like you, is the VP of Product at a public company based in the US...

➤ Part 2. Pain - Describe the Negative Impact of Not Solving It

Take your customer down the rollercoaster of emotions before describing the positive outcome. The lows make the highs higher, and ultimately, the story more memorable. Explain the challenges your customer had, and describe the negative impact they experienced.

Too often, we don't build enough drama between the pain and solution because we don't want anyone to feel bad. This shortcut makes for a mediocre story. Instead, paint a picture of the business challenges they faced and the negative impact they would experience if they didn't solve those challenges.

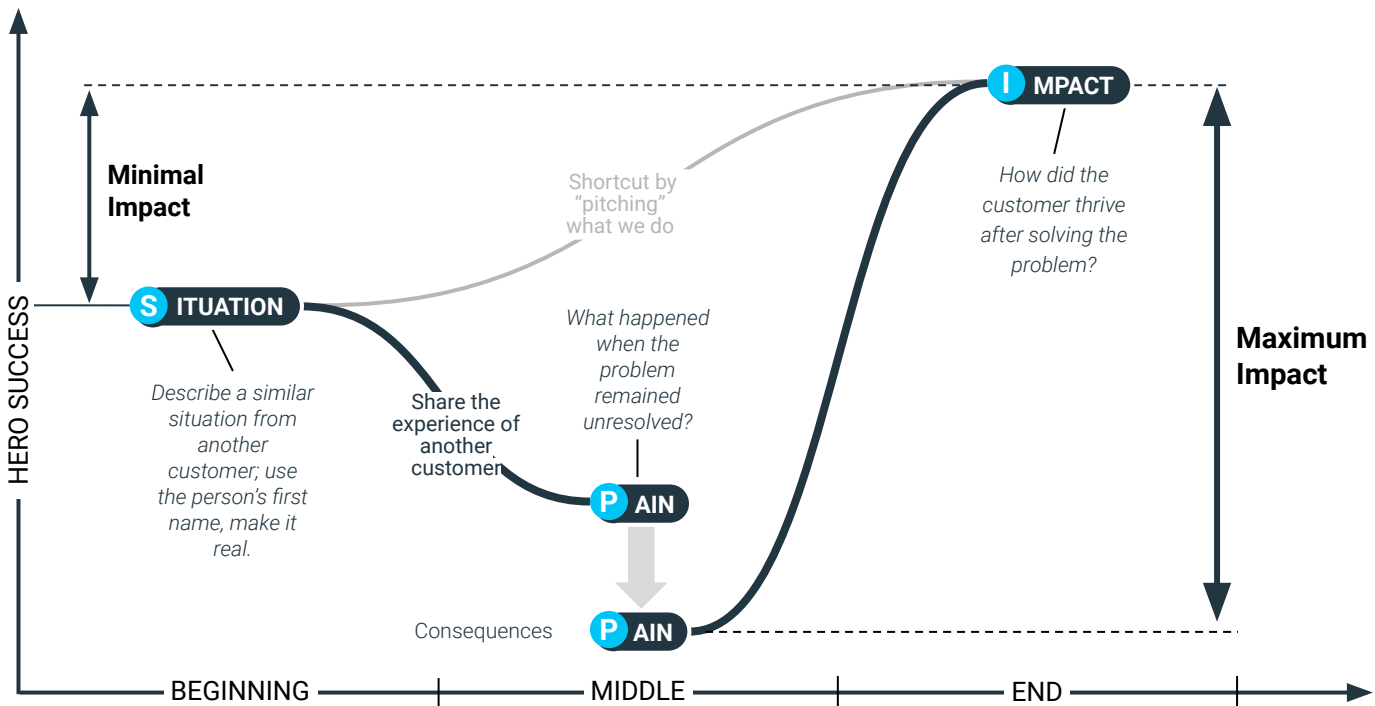


Figure 2. The simplified hero's journey

BEFORE

Shortcut - Too little pain

They struggled with not knowing which products to focus on for their customers...

AFTER

Describe the negative impact

She had no visibility into the data or features her customers were requesting. This led her team to build the wrong product and waste three months of time...

➤ Part 3. End - The Solution and Positive Impact

Make sure your customer is the “hero” in the story you’re telling, not your own company. The ending of your story needs to leave an impression that your company assisted the customer, like Yoda assisted Luke Skywalker, or Dumbledore assisted Harry Potter. Describe how your customer thrived after solving the problem.

When you say, “After using my company, Acme...,” your story feels like a sales pitch. Instead, make it about the type of solution you provided to build intrigue and neural coupling with the listener’s own experience.

BEFORE

Avoid pitching

After using my company, Acme, they were able to make a lot more money.

AFTER

Your customer is the hero

After integrating a digital feedback system into their workflow, Jill’s team was able to prioritize the most important feature to create, which resulted in a 30% increase in revenue. Would that be helpful to you?

When done correctly, your prospect will say, “That’s exactly what I’m looking for! How did Jill achieve that?” to which the answer is, of course, your solution.

Imagine a stranger walking up to you and explaining that they can help with your business because they are “trustworthy” or an “expert.” You’d be wary. Anytime someone tells you to “trust them,” the exact opposite happens.

Sharing a Customer Story

Using case studies as third-party references drastically increases the impact of your storytelling. In the example below, you can see a hard pitch followed by a rejection. This can put a quick stop to a conversation. If you do this two or three times, you will quickly see that your pitch won't resonate with your audience.

Sales Centric

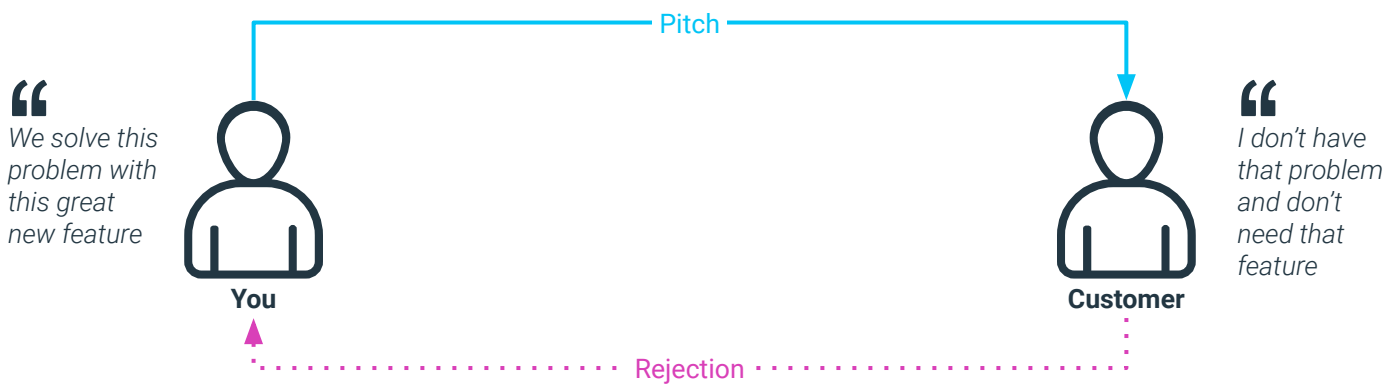


Figure 3. Direct pitching to a customer causes issues

Using a third-party reference through storytelling has several advantages over pitching:

- It doesn't tire as fast (e.g., you can tell multiple stories and give multiple examples)
- It provides value with your statement (e.g., explains how others do this)
- It makes you look like an expert (e.g., you know people, you understand their situation)

When you use a third-party reference, you address the following: who experienced the problem (the person, not just the company name), what problem they experienced (with context), and the impact they achieved.

Customer Centric

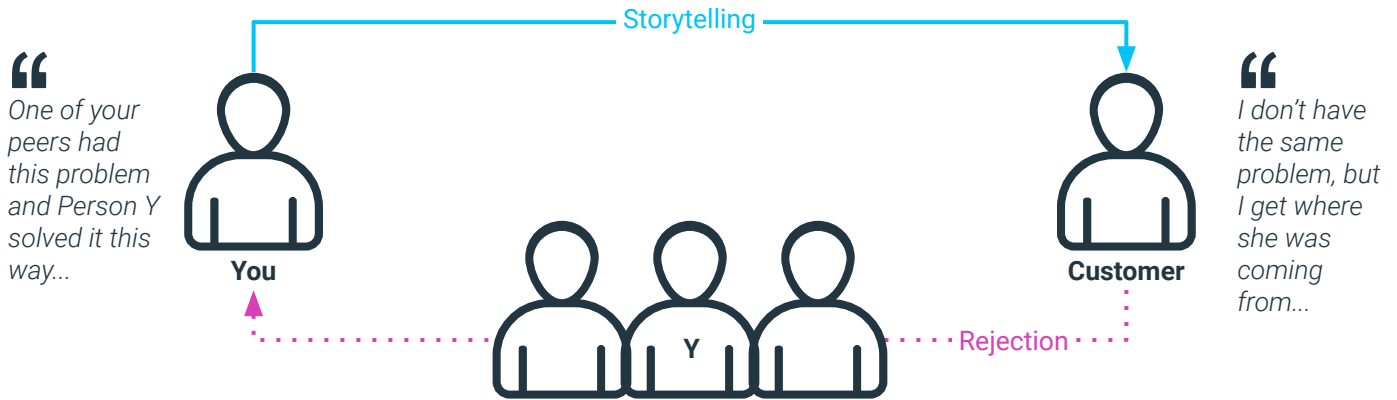


Figure 4. Customer-centric storytelling using a third-party reference

This reminds me of Mark, the new VP of Sales at ABC Enterprises. He had recently hired a new team of SDRs to add to his team of twenty. He was hoping they'd level up his sales team and take some of the workload off his AEs.

Mark's problem was that his team was young and rather untrained. To make matters worse, they were distributed all across the country. Customers started complaining about unprofessional messages and behavior.

Mark implemented a sales academy program that offered online training with recurring weekly drill programs and detailed playbooks, using a train-the-trainer model.

After implementing this training program, Mark measured improvements across the board: the number of SQLs went up 30%, but what he had not anticipated was that they started to close deals faster. His team and customers were happier and more successful, and Mark was promoted six months after the launch.

Would that type of program benefit your team as well?

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