

May 12, 2021



Public Affairs
Council

Storytelling for Advocacy

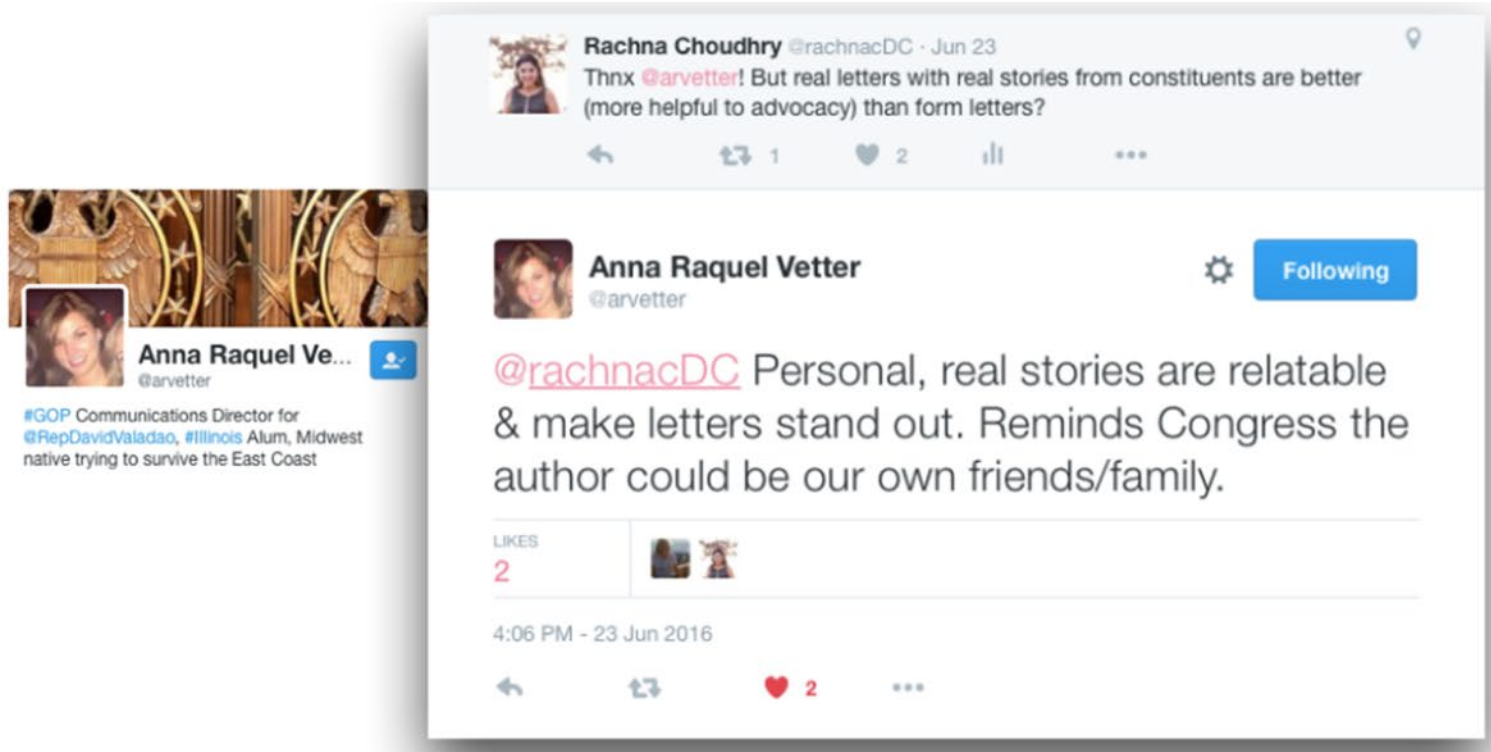
Stories and American Politics

Robert Reich, former secretary of labor, writes in *The New Republic* a persuasive case for applying narrative to the public debate:



“...people don't think in terms of isolated policies or issues. If they're to be understandable, policies and issues must fit into larger narratives about where we have been as a nation, what we are up against, and where we could be going. Major shifts in governance – in party alignments and political views – have been precipitated by one party or the other becoming better at telling...stories.” (*italics added*)

Policymakers Want to be Seen as a Problem Solver



Stories and American Politics

Great messages work because they tell a great story. And great stories work for a lot of reasons:

1. They help us interpret our world
2. They are familiar
3. We understand their structure
4. They are engaging
5. They get people to act

Parts of an Effective Story

1. Research
2. Context
3. Compelling narrative
4. Drama



Do the Research Up Front

Research can pinpoint holes in your arguments.

Failure to identify and deal with audience objections ahead of time is the primary reason that messages fail.

By having some idea of what they are, you'll be able to craft responses that inoculate audiences against them.

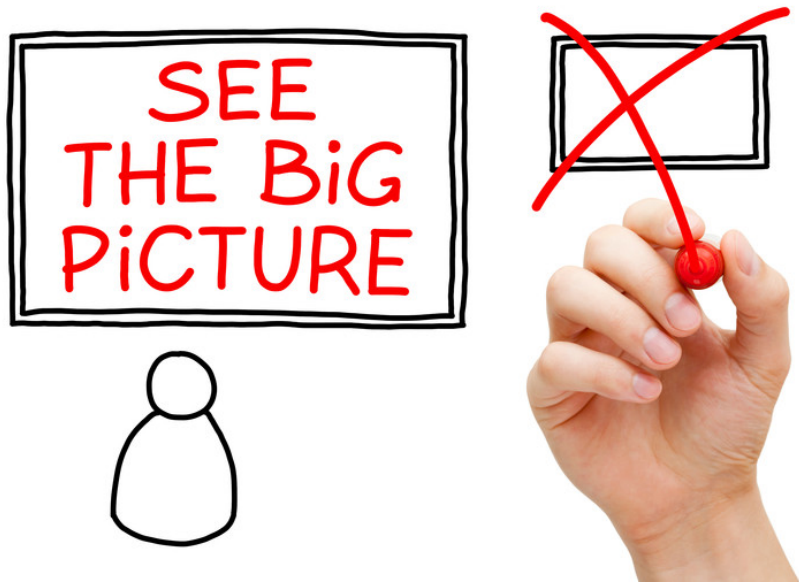
Do the Research Up Front

Remember these three things when researching your message:

1. *Don't assume you know everything.*
2. *Don't assume the audience knows anything.*
3. *You can always find a good story.*

Context in Messaging

Context establishes value, impact, and relevance for the audience.



Successful messages – in addition to doing everything they're supposed to do – also give audiences a glimpse of how the messenger feels about the big picture.

Context in Messaging

Define yourself and the opposition:

Anyone who wasn't "putting people first," one of Bill Clinton's primary messages in the 1992 presidential campaign, was in favor of putting someone else first – big oil, big business, big donors, anyone or anything but "people."



Compelling Narratives

Compelling narratives entertain and engage, and they use **emotion** to spur action.

Stephen Denning, the author of *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling*, emphasizes the narrative's ability to deliver an emotional shot to the heart:

“Analysis might excite the mind, but it hardly offers a route to the heart. And that's where you must go if you are to motivate people not only to take action but to do so with energy and enthusiasm.”

Evidence Suggests that Storytelling Works

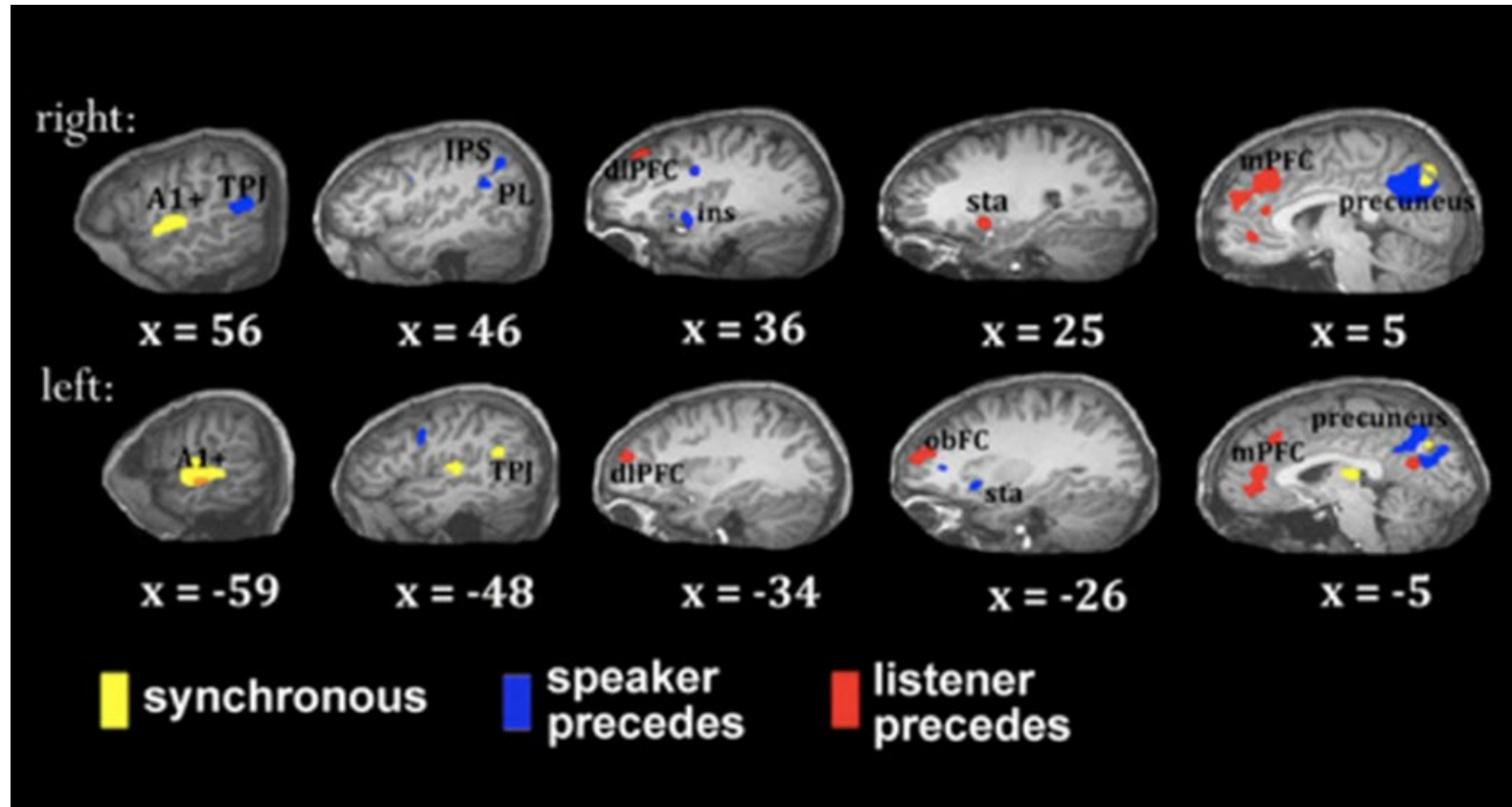


Image: Overlap between neural activation in speaker and listener./PNAS.

Types of Storytelling

1. The Hero's Journey (Why You Need to Act)
2. What is vs. What Could Be
3. Origin Story (Why I'm Here)
4. Impact Story (Why am I important, How do I help)
5. Objections Story (Why you are wrong)

SPARKLINES



Elements of a Story

1. Characters
2. Conflict
3. Tone
4. Authenticity
5. Meaning/Context



Compelling Narratives

Great stories all have one thing at their core: drama

What all great drama has in common is *conflict* – and the ability to create that conflict is essential to effective messaging.

Compelling narratives with conflict follow a structure that we are familiar with. Because they do, they are **easy to follow**.

Compelling Narratives

Conflict is a function of four elements: plot, heroes (the good guys), villains (the bad guys), and consequences.

Compelling Narratives – Structure

The structure breaks into four parts:

1. **Background:** Establishes the current situation
2. **The Issue:** Brings in the opposition, explains what they're trying to do, and what that means to the state, and to your constituency.
3. **The Response:** Explains what you as an organization are doing to fight this, and what that fight is designed to achieve.
4. **Call to Action:** Tells readers what to do so that you and your issue will prevail.

Compelling Narratives – Structure

Effective grassroots action alerts – applying the narrative storytelling model.

1. They capture attention instantly in a screamer headline that positions the good and bad guys, the conflict, and the consequences.
2. They flesh that out with a brief, one-paragraph introduction that adds a bit of substance to the headline.

Compelling Narratives – Structure

Effective grassroots action alerts – applying the narrative storytelling model. *(continued)*

3. They structure arguments logically and in a way that creates “inevitability” – that is, they engender in readers the decision to act before you ask them to do so.
4. They have a call to action.

Gathering Advocate Stories

Working with Advocates

- Stories take time to come alive
- Practice is key to perfecting an advocacy story
- Provide storytelling training
- Develop a guide or questionnaire
- Show them examples of successful storytelling
- Expect imperfection, accept authentic stories

Working with Advocates

The Campaign For
COMMON-SENSE REGULATION
BROUGHT TO YOU BY AMERICA'S CREDIT UNIONS

TAKE ACTION NEWS **SHARE YOUR STORY**

SHARE YOUR STORY

Credit unions have disproportionately paid the price for the bad acts of big Wall Street banks. During the financial crisis, these big banks had to be bailed out by taxpayers, while financially sound credit unions were there to help their middle class members weather the storm. Despite not causing the problem, credit unions now face the same expensive regulatory burdens. If you have personally been impacted by additional regulations at your credit union, please share with us. Perhaps your mortgage wait time was prolonged, or costs associated with attaining that mortgage increased as a result of regulations. Some services or products may have been removed from your credit union because they were deemed too costly as a result of regulations. If your services have been impaired in any way and you are willing to share, we would like to hear from you.

EMAIL *

FIRST NAME *

LAST NAME


CITY *

STATE *

Alaska

HOW HAVE REGULATIONS PLACED ON CREDIT UNIONS NEGATIVELY AFFECTED YOU?

Storytelling for Advocacy

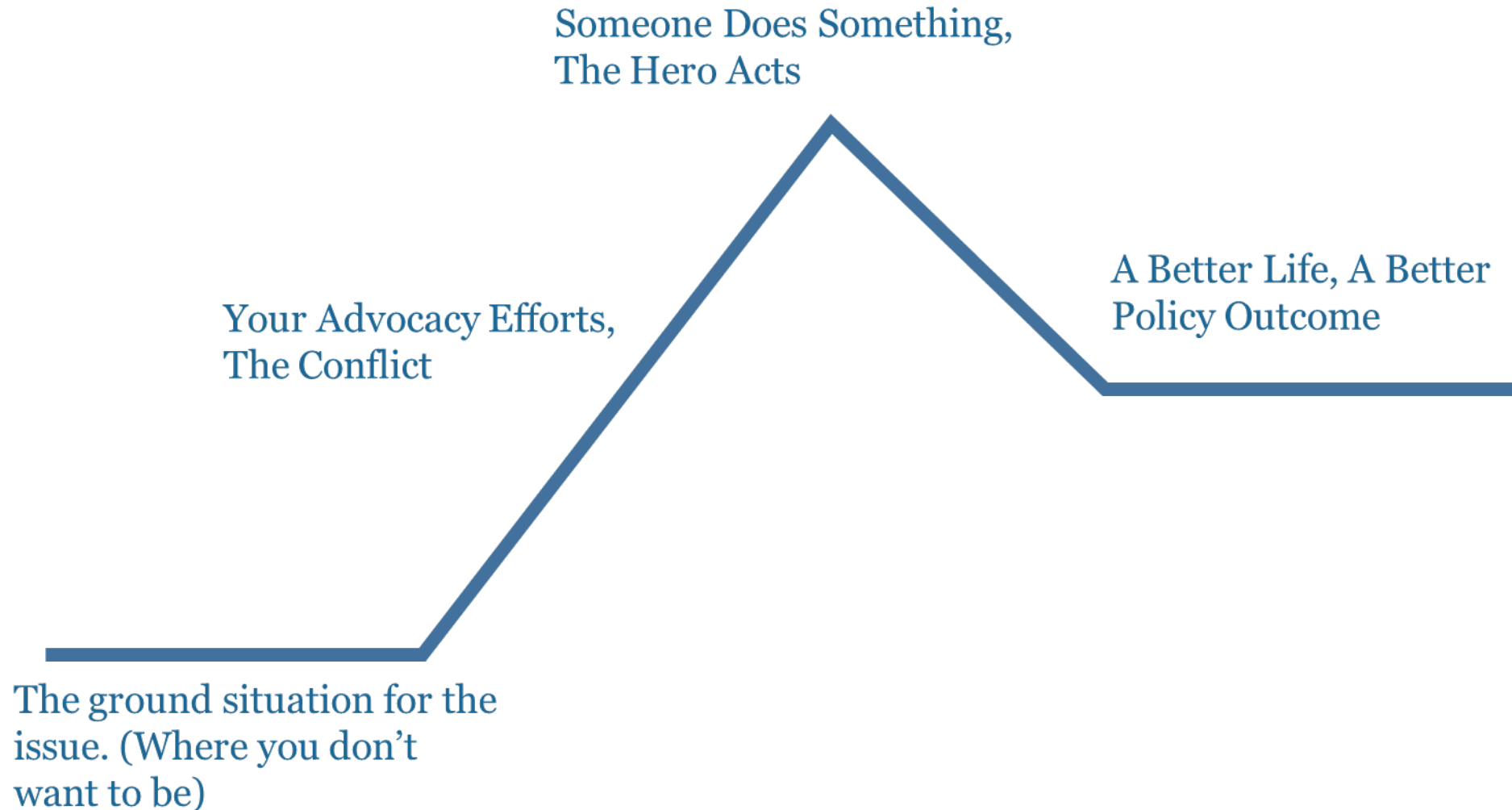


NAMI - YOU ARE NOT ALONE

The video or short story you tell can be the difference that lets someone know that they are not alone.

[SUBMIT YOUR VIDEO, PICTURE OR STORY!](#)[SUBMISSION GUIDELINES](#)[ARCHIVE](#)

Storytelling Model for Advocacy



Make a story personal, relatable, or unique

The Ground Situation: Where you are	Your story
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The world is digitizing... – Truck weight limits make shipping less efficient... – For many, recycling is burdensome... 	
The Conflict/Adversity: Your advocacy efforts	Your story
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – We want prevent deforestation and make sure our product is sustainable – We are trying to promote environmental conservation – We want to easily export around the globe to serve customers in all markets 	
The Heroes: Someone/Legislator does something	Your story
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Thank you for helping to stop illegal logging efforts... – We are able to reach more customers now because... – We were able to increase our recycling efforts... 	
The Policy Outcome: Where we are now	Your story
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – We can help resolve the problem by... – We can now sell more paper products because... – We are now able to employ more constituents 	

Storytelling Steps

1. Choose one story to tell – keep this to 3 minutes or less.
2. Make your story relatable, personal or unique.
3. **Connect your individual story to the policy ask.** Data helps here, so it's ok to memorize one data point
4. Relax and have fun. You are the expert now.

Unique and relatable detail:

One piece of data to connect to the bigger story: