



Books for Venture Founders

# FOUNDERS ARE STORYTELLERS

*Be convincing, wherever you are*

WILLIAM KEYSER

# **Founders Are Storytellers:**

*Be convincing wherever you are*



## ***Books for Venture Founders***

Books for Venture Founders are aimed at people wanting to start a business or a nonprofit and those at an early stage of running their enterprise. The focus is on practical solutions to issues and dilemmas frequently faced by budding entrepreneurial types, as well as imaginative ways to help new ventures thrive.

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## Praise for Founders Are Storytellers

“This little book is like a giant tree. It has a substantial trunk filled with Will’s wise counsel, but it is the many branches to online references that make it the most comprehensive source on storytelling for startups. No startup founder will succeed without being able to tell their story. This book will help it have a happy ending. A picture is worth a thousand words, but a genuine story could be worth millions in capital.”

—Wayde Gilchrist, Host - [TechStartRadio](#) and Startup Consultant

“Entrepreneurs always ask me ‘what are you looking for in a pitch’ and I always say the same thing: tell me your story. Tell me what problem you discovered and how you will make money solving the problem and tell me why you and your team can solve this problem better than anyone else. This book helps an entrepreneur tell a story that will grab the attention of customers, investors and stakeholders.”

—Cairn G. Cross, Co-Founder and Managing Director, [FreshTracks Capital LP](#)

“A tactical gem. Will is a true entrepreneur himself, and is blessed with the ability to motivate others to bring their best work to the world in the form of new, sustainable businesses. He not only provides hands-on suggestions for cultivating interest in your start-up business through the power of stories, but he delivers the roadmap on crafting and telling your own compelling business story.”

—Beverly Winterscheid, PhD, Founder, [Center for Nature and Leadership](#)

“Whenever we want to tell something important about another person or an experience we tell a story. This is how we as human beings are wired. It’s also how we as listeners are wired to be motivated and emotionally involved. What can be more important to an entrepreneur about to start a new business than to have a great story to tell? Will Keyser gets into the details of how to build that story and brings up the other critical elements and inspires you with stories from real life startups. If you are contemplating starting a new business or are already starting one, you should read this book.”

—Sven Atterhed, Chairman & Co-founder, [The ForeSight Group](#), Sweden

“Will Keyser is one of those rare authors who has a special gift: the ability to take a complex topic that tends to get oversimplified—after all, how many startups actually succeed—and call out the essential elements into a recipe for success. He does this with wit, charm, and hands-on experiences... It’s like having a coach in your pocket with whom you can converse. You can almost hear him whispering in your ear as you get ready for the action... It took a lifetime of experiences to create and package the Keyser wisdom for the budding entrepreneur waiting to emerge in all of us.”

—Victor Rosansky, CoFounder, [TenXgrow LLC](#)

“This book is a must read especially for someone planning or in the formative stages of starting a business. Will has been providing much needed counsel and mentoring to me as I engage in starting my own business. But reading this book has been liberating. Liberating in the sense that my story telling skills have been honed and perfected. I see a lot that I have been doing wrong, my ducks are now in a row. I look forward to telling my story and getting results in the process. Will’s grey hair experience and wisdom really comes out in this book. Founders are indeed story tellers!”

—Bonang Sealetsa, Managing Director and Founder, [Institute of Entrepreneurial Development](#), Botswana

“A brief easy-to-grok guide on how to tell your story in a way that will capture the hearts of the people you need to engage. CSC has benefitted from using genuine voice and personal and powerful story telling to customers, investors and partners. This concise book and warm-hearted book helps anyone figure out how to tell their own story in a way that will count!”

—Rachel Maxwell, Co-Founder and CEO, [Community Sourced Capital SPC](#)

“I needed this book years ago, and still do today. As an entrepreneur building my third start-up, I have made all the mistakes Will Keyser identifies, focusing on the model, projections and the ‘how’—instead of sharing the ‘why’ through powerful storytelling. Storytelling is absolutely the most effective form of communication. Good ideas are plentiful, but turning an idea into a successful organization requires inspiring and convincing others, which is often challenging. I highly recommend *Founders Are Storytellers* to anyone launching a new business or nonprofit, as well as to seasoned entrepreneurs ready to hone their communication skills.”

—Ted Barber, Founder of social enterprise [Prosperity Candle](#)

Every 5 year old would rather hear a story than a lecture. Most adults feel the same way but are not willing to admit it. In *Founders Are Storytellers*, Will Keyser helps unmask the elements of what separates a great story from a boring narrative, and in the process challenges every entrepreneur to be their honest, authentic selves.

—Seth Goldman, Co-Founder and Chief TeaEO Emeritus, [Honest Tea](#)

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## Why Read This Book?

StartUp storytelling is the most effective form of communication available to the entrepreneur. It enables you to make 'me' into 'we': to achieve engagement with the audience to draw people into the significance of how your business will change the world.

Founders are good at this, at least the successful ones are. This book will help you understand why and how you can be a convincing storyteller yourself.

Convincing your audience in any circumstance is vital to the launch, and maintenance, of your startup. It needs almost to be an obsessive compulsive disorder. The trouble is OCD people can be boring to the point of people no longer listening. What you have to do is find a way to communicate obsessively.

Communicating what? Pitching almost everything to almost anyone, but certainly including:

- articulating your grand vision to everyone you meet;
- exciting listeners or readers about what is so special about what you're doing;
- offering a way of exhibiting your values without threadbare phrases;
- convincing partners to come on board;
- conveying to customers why your product or service offers them value;
- showing executives in equity finance how you will produce a return;
- reassuring loan providers that the business makes financial sense;
- persuading quality talent to join the company;
- giving suppliers good reason to do business with you.

Bits and bytes, bullets points and projections. Business audiences are overloaded with data. Data is necessary, but no longer sufficient to sell your idea for seeking sales, or finding funding. You already have what it takes, but your confidence may need a boost and your skills may need honing, but you are your biggest asset when it comes to conveying your story.

You'll have frequently heard the advice to build a business plan with all the bells and whistles when you make presentations to any of your stakeholders, but this book aims to convince you that going through that process may be necessary, but is not sufficient to engage the audience and get them to believe in your company almost as strongly as you do.

“The entrepreneur’s challenge is to effectively communicate their value proposition, not only to customers, but also to vendors, partners, investors, and their own team. Especially for technical founders, this is normally all about presenting impressive facts. But in reality facts only go so far. Stories often work better, because humans don’t always make rational decisions,” says Martin Zwilling



in Forbes.

Eileen Gittins, founder of publishing platform [Blurb](#), says, “...when you’re out trying to raise money, facts and figures are necessary because that gives people confidence that you’ll be able to execute. But the facts and figures alone don’t tell them why it is that you’re going to change the world.” No one ever starts a business for no reason; they do it to change the world to a greater or lesser extent. Story is about something changing. That is reason enough for entrepreneurs to tell stories.

If you kiss the frog, you'll get your prince charming. That's why it's important to keep the end in mind. The princess was surprised and delighted by the result she achieved. When she kissed the slimy creature, the end she had in mind was to retrieve her lost ball. A worthy end in itself, and if you keep your eye on the ball, you too, will be surprised by the even better results you achieve.

She cannot see the ball, but she clearly envisions it. As [Stephen Covey](#) said, the importance of keeping the end in mind is “based on the principle that all things are created twice. There is a mental (first) creation, and a physical (second) creation.”

Lisa Cron, author of *Wired for Story: [The Writer's Guide to Using Brain Science to Hook Readers from the Very First Sentence](#)*, considers story to have been crucial to our evolution. “Opposable thumbs let us hang on; story told us what to hang on to.”

Your StartUp story has to make clear what to hang on to—what is at stake. Einstein said, “...my particular ability does not lie in mathematical calculation, but in visualizing effects, possibilities and consequences.” Effects, possibilities and consequences are what entrepreneurs are good at, but all too often they tell people about their mathematical calculations. Sticking to the facts may not be convincing enough.

The successful entrepreneur is someone who knows what to hang on to and is dedicated to purpose. Let your story be as thrilling as that of the princess, by keeping the end in mind and then experiencing it transforming into something even better. She wanted to get her ball back and she'd do anything to get it. Keeping her own end in mind, she achieved her purpose and ultimately gained even more, by marrying the prince.

Touting my 50-page business plan to venture capitalists produced no results. Obviously something was wrong. I was selling the *what*, not the *why*. As soon as I realized that, I found a way to make my story produce results.

My new story was about the problem I had encountered, and why my solution would work, even though it flouted conventional wisdom. Bingo, the next approach was successful—first time. But the VC did not want to read the plan full of projections, but rather wanted to get to know me and become convinced that my story made sense.

I had captured his attention, and he invited me to reveal more.

That is what this book is about: how you can use storytelling to achieve the action you want. Not just to convince investors on your StartUp, but to reassure bankers, to

find partners, to launch the product or service, to get the best people, or to persuade skeptical suppliers, or any of the many reasons you have for getting people on board.

Most of all, your storytelling is vital to attract and retain dedicated customers, who will then voluntarily retell your story.

Kiss the frog, get the ball, and marry the prince!

Good entrepreneurs know all about getting their business model right and defining their value proposition, but writing them down and making PowerPoint slides for a presentation often fails to do the trick. Richard Branson who does not like PowerPoint, says, “I believe in conversation and eye contact.” Steve Jobs used that same practice and became a presentation mogul. Some storytellers like Branson and Jobs, just have a knack of making stories work, but it doesn't come naturally to all of us.

In short, tell the future story now (why the best customer bought); tell the story of the business meaning (why it's worth it); and tell the transformation story (why it will all be different).

Reading *Founders Are Storytellers: Be Convincing Wherever You Are* will help you

- appreciate the benefits of StartUp storytelling;
- figure out which stories to tell;
- learn how to make storytelling work;
- find media to support your storytelling;
- understand why your stories need to be truthful;
- use ways to evaluate and rehearse your story;
- build your storytelling confidence.

When you set out on your storytelling journey, I suggest you focus on

- whys and hows, more than whats;
- acceleration, not distance;
- expectations, not promises;
- what it means + who benefits.

But above all, enjoy doing it.

## Introduction

While writing this book for entrepreneur founders, I have learned much myself, as I attempt to share ideas with you. You should remember that you are the expert and you already have more skills than you know. As Winston Churchill said, “Experts should be on tap, but never on top.”

Research is showing that stories actually stimulate the brain and even change how we act in life. This startled me at first, but upon reflection, I realized how natural this is. Words like 'lavender' or 'cinnamon' immediately conjure up situational images and activate the senses of smell or taste.

That's why metaphors are so effective, too. If an entrepreneur says, “we're on the starting blocks,” we know that the StartUp is about to be launched. But using the language 'about to be launched' is not so striking.

[Research](#) by Greg Stephens, Lauren Silbert and Uri Hasson at Princeton has shown that during effective communication, a speaker's brain activity can actually be replicated in the listener's mind. Similar locations in each person's brain fire in unison in a phenomenon called “neural coupling.” They add, “This coupling vanishes when participants fail to communicate.”

They go on to say, “Moreover, though on average the listener's brain activity mirrors the speaker's activity with a delay, we also find areas that exhibit predictive anticipatory responses. We connected the extent of neural coupling to a quantitative measure of story comprehension and find that the greater the anticipatory speaker-listener coupling, the greater the understanding.”

In layman's terms, for successful communication we need to be *on the same wavelength*. StartUps can be disruptive and confront hitherto unmet needs. That's why so often pitches of the business fail to convince the skeptic.

Marco Iacobini, a pioneer in the field, showed that our mirror neurons fire when we watch someone do something that we do ourselves ([Mirroring People: The New Science of How We Connect with Others](#)).

In his motivational theory, David McClelland described how people have a need for achievement (success with own efforts), a need for power (domination or influence), or a need for affiliation (friendly relations with others), and in differing degrees. Typically, the entrepreneur has a high orientation towards achievement, rather than the other two.

This need for achievement can often get in the way of successful communication. Thus an entrepreneur's very passion may get in the way of selling the story. Often the entrepreneur is a lone ranger, with no need for others—and he rides off into the sunset, alone.

McClelland considered that entrepreneurs do things in better ways and make decisions in times of uncertainty. The dream to achieve big results overpowers monetary or other external incentives. Thus as dreamers, the great ones are very often great storytellers, too.



Vinod Khosla, the Indian-born co-founder of Sun Microsystems and now an investor and adviser at [Khosla Ventures](#) (click the link-there's lots of good entrepreneurial advice on his website), tells the story of how after Sun had become wildly successful, he took time off to learn hang-gliding and windsurfing and ponder why things had turned out the way they did. He concluded that it was all down to luck.

His first pre-business plan is brief, to the point and partly hand written, but he identified the opportunity spot-on, as well as the other players in the field, existing sales and how he'd achieve results. The brief document shows how he would produce a graphics workstation with the lowest chip count and therefore high reliability, using a hardware design that was proven and market-ready.

Luck? I'm not so sure. He was someone who, at age 20, tried to start a soy milk company to service the many people in India who did not have refrigerators, but failed, so he emigrated to the US instead.

Seth Goldman started out brewing the tea in his kitchen and storing it in thermoses. Only five weeks after quitting his fund management job, he perfected the brewing process and brought samples and a mock-up label to a meeting with the company that is now Whole Foods Market, hoping that they would place a small order. They asked for 15,000 bottles. The company he started, Honest Tea, is now the top-selling bottled organic tea in the US. In 2008, Coca-Cola took a 40 percent interest for \$43 million and bought the rest of the company in 2011.

John Mackey, co-founder of Whole Foods Market, tells the story of how he and his girlfriend opened their first store in an old house with seed capital of \$45,000 from friends and family. He says, "We were both very young (I was twenty-five and Renée was twenty-one) and idealistic, and we started the business because we wanted to sell healthy food to people, earn a decent living, and have fun doing both."

Fifty-page business plans full of optimistic 5-year projections and big screen presentations did not figure in either case. When Sun was launched, PowerPoint had not been invented. Selling a trial batch of tea was all that Goldman brought to Fresh Fields (later Whole Foods). Mackey, its co-founder, wanted simply to feel good about what he did, while making an honest living.

[Seth Godin](#) tells would-be entrepreneurs, "Invent stuff worth talking about; tell stories about what you've invented." He also says, "Great stories make a promise. They promise fun, safety or a shortcut. The promise needs to be bold and audacious. It's either exceptional or it's not worth listening to. Great stories are trusted. Trust is the scarcest resource we've got left."

As Eamonn O'Brien of The Reluctant Speaker's Club (Dublin, Ireland) says "Stories are more engaging than 'information' because those who hear them tend to become more involved-becoming more active than passive listeners."

I can hear you saying, "I can't tell stories. I'm not creative." Not so, since the idea of storytelling appeals to you and you are reading this book. You are also starting a new business, or developing an early-stage one.

So, if you doubt your ability, just do a little exercise with yourself: figure out a way to teach a bushman how to ski. Not on the ski slope, but in the Kalahari Desert. You, of course, speak English and this imaginary Batswana (a person from Botswana) only speaks Setswana. Mmm.

Consider what's at stake. That's what storytellers focus on.

*Founders Are Storytellers: Be Convincing Wherever You Are* is in two parts.

The first five chapters offer general guidance on StartUp storytelling, tells you why you should *keep the end in mind* and how to do it.

The second part gives specific tips on the ways you can make sure that the story and its telling are fully effective.

There is also a Postscript, which you do not have to read unless it calls you. It's about you and how you can prepare yourself before embarking upon storytelling and sustain yourself through the process once or many times.

There's a Brief Bio about me, which you can easily skip.

The last section is my Acknowledgments for the people who have helped me write and edit this book. They have all been my teachers.

You should be able to read the whole thing in 1-3 sittings. Make light of it.

## How The Book Is Structured

There are two parts of the book.

**Part One** aims to show you why storytelling can make or break your new business. I don't think any StartUp is going to make headway or gain traction without good storytelling. That's why I called the book, *Founders Are Storytellers*.

**Part Two** is more about how to go about telling an effective startup story. We all tell stories, but mainly without thinking or planning them in advance. Here in this part of the book, you will learn technique.

At the end of each chapter, there are **five key takeaways** for the chapter, to serve as a reminder of the key points you have just read.

When you get to the Postscript, among other ideas, you'll find a simple graphic on the Story Sequence, as a reminder that you might want to print as a 'flash card'.

There are lots of hyperlinks for you to follow.

You should be able to read the whole book in a one to three sittings. Have fun and try out some of the ideas as you go along. Practice is all.

There are a wide range of storytelling methods and techniques described in the book and there are links to many created by other people. There are four key tools you may want to copy and keep by you, as you develop your own stories. They are:

1. The 6-box Storyboard (Chapter 2)
2. The Message Map (Chapter 9)
3. The Startup Storytelling Rubric (Chapter 10)
4. The Story Sequence (Postscript).

I am very open to comments and suggestions to everything in the book, so feel free to write to me at [will@startupowl.com](mailto:will@startupowl.com).

## Chapter 2: Create Expectation: Desire Consequence



If you think of the great stories of your childhood, you will be reminded of how they created expectation. Both your own stories, and the ones you read, led you to believe something would happen next. And remember, as Keith Johnstone says, “the audience is part of the show.”

This chapter shares ideas about how you can design a way of telling your story that leads naturally to the kind of action you seek: the next step in the sales process; agreement to consider the funding of your business further; commitment to examine more closely the strategy you propose, for example.

The themes can be of infinite variety and only limited by your own imagination. It might be 'slaying the dragon'. In my own StartUp context, the dragon might have been the fact that every so-called expert that I consulted, told me that the business concept would never fly. These experts included management academics, senior managers, professionals, bankers—and even my own Dad. Needless to say, I slew the dragon by opening the business with three clients already signed up.

You have your own stories. You just may not have seen how to make them useful in your communication with others. Think about themes such as:

- a news story,
- a romance,
- a thriller,
- a quest,
- a fantasy,
- a revelation,

- a fable, or even,
- just a *funny* story.

How do they translate into your business context or a new product story? You know your own stories, but you may not yet have figured out how they will make your communication come alive. Feel comfortable admitting frailty. For example, as you planned your new business, you no doubt had some difficulties. Articulate them, but be sure to show how you overcame them or turned them into opportunities.

I suggest that one kind of storytelling could be a funny story. I have a strong word of caution about humor, though. Don't force it, if you are not already accomplished as a humorist or funny story teller. You are likely to be like a bad stand-up comic whose jokes fall flat. I am the archetypal 'forgets the punchline' joke teller. I can manage one or two jokes that my father told when I was a kid, but no more. On the other hand I don't at all mind telling funny stories about my own misadventures. Pick your ground.

Here are some simple steps to help you in the process of defining your stories.

Decide who the *characters* are. It may be just you, but if it involves others, don't make the list too long. Then decide on the *setting*. Keep this simple, too. Be clear about *who* the characters are and *where* they are. You set the *problem*, and describe the *events* that lead towards the *solution*.

When you state the problem, do it so that a positive answer is implied. Bob the Builder has a good approach. "Can we fix it?" he asks, creating the expectation that "yes, we can." As you set out to tell your story, and ask a question like Bob's, you begin to get the audience on your side. Anticipate the answers to your own questions.

When founders present, they are often tempted to go straight to the solution, because they are so in love with it. Thereby they risk "breathing their own exhaust", in the expression of Lisa Gansky, author of [\*The Mesh: Why the Future of Business is Sharing\*](#). She says, "When you create something, you can fall in love with it and aren't able to see or hear anything contrary. Whatever comes out of your mouth is all you're inhaling..."

If you move away from making a declaration to asking a question, you'll get away from breathing your own exhaust. It will take you away from the 'what' to the 'why'.

To create an expectation, first ensure that your story has a good basic storyboard. Emma Coats, a former Pixar story artist (on the film *Brave*, for example), suggests that you do it like Pixar does. In the time honored fashion, start off with, "Once upon a time there was \_\_\_\_\_. Every day, \_\_\_\_\_. One day \_\_\_\_\_. Because of that, \_\_\_\_\_. Because of that, \_\_\_\_\_. Until finally \_\_\_\_\_."

Why would a storyteller need a storyboard, you may ask, knowing that storyboards were invented by the Walt Disney Studio way back when, as graphic organizers in the form of illustrations or images displayed in sequence for the purpose of pre-visualizing a cartoon. The principle remains the same for a StartUp

story. I insist, it's vital to *keep the end in mind*, as you build the storyboard.

You can of course use a simple 6-box grid like this, if you are a visual person:

<b>Once upon a time</b>  <i>the youngest and most beautiful daughter of the king</i>	<b>Every day</b>  <i>went to the well deep in the forest, where she played with her golden ball.</i>	<b>One day</b>  <i>she tossed the ball into the air and it fell into the well when she failed to catch it, and burst into tears.</i>
<b>Because of that</b>  <i>a frog offered help to recover the ball, if only she would love him dearly.</i>	<b>Because of that</b>  <i>she saw her chance of help and agreed, so the next day the frog turned up at the castle to claim his inamorata.</i>	<b>Until finally</b>  <i>the king commanded she keep her promise; so she kisses the frog who promptly changes into a prince.</i>

Of course, that is the very simplified version of the fairy tale, but it should give you a model. Here, on the other hand, is a storyboard version of one of my StartUp attempts that never got off the ground:

<b>Once upon a time</b>  <i>there was no way of forecasting the propensity of a person to later contract Alzheimer's, or the suffering involved.</i>	<b>Every day</b>  <i>individuals and their families were devastated and impoverished by the consequences of a disease that has no cure.</i>	<b>One day</b>  <i>an ophthalmologist saw misfolded proteins in some eyes-the body's only transparent organ-indicating inflammation.</i>
<b>Because of that</b>  <i>and the correlation with inflammation undetected elsewhere in the body, he confirmed it with blood work and other tests.</i>	<b>Because of that</b>  <i>he suggested changes in diet &amp; behavior to reduce inflammation to avoid the worst effects of potential neuro-degenerative diseases, like Alzheimer's.</i>	<b>Until finally</b>  <i>early detection of the risk of such diseases occurring later, and their treatment could reduce much family misery and millions of dollars in cost.</i>

Naturally your storytelling does not win every time. We did not. Our StartUp never took off. It may have been that our timing was out. We put it down to VCs wanting *cures*, not *diagnoses* of Alzheimer's. Misfolded beta amyloid proteins in the brain form clumps called plaques seem to block communication between neurons and tangles of another protein called tau kill brain cells, knocking our memory, then speech and thinking. That's what 'cure' researchers are looking to find, but we felt



that prevention might be less costly than cure, and while *not* curing people afflicted we might reduce the incidence, but there's less money in that. Jay Ingram, author of the book, '[Fatal Flaws](#)', agrees that the slowing or even prevention of the disease's progress, "...the societal benefit would be incalculable."

On the other hand, we might have just not told a good enough story. Several years after trying to establish our business, called Eyes2Health, another eye-based StartUp for predicting Alzheimer's, called [Neurotrack](#), has a means of early detection of Alzheimer's through optometry, called Imprint™. But their target market is the pharmaceutical industry—to identify good drug test candidates—not suffering patients, as was the target market of our unrealized StartUp.

Currently there are about 5 million Americans with Alzheimer's, forecasted to rise rapidly in the coming years. The Rand Corporation (New England Journal of Medicine, April 2013) suggests the disease costs the US as much as \$153 billion already and they expect this to double by 2040. We may not have had the fundamentals of our StartUp right, but we know we *did* fail to get our own story right.

Here is another story of failure (!) in a storyboard—a business strategy story:

Once upon a time	Every day	One day
<i>Kodak was a company, formed by George Eastman in 1880, that dominated the photographic market world wide and their name was synonymous with photography, as well as cinematography.</i>	<i>people all over the world were taking photographs and making movies using Kodak film and radiographers did the same with x-rays; in its heyday Kodak employed 140,000 people. Most images were commercially processed.</i>	<i>a Kodak employee, Steven Sasson, invented the digital camera (1975); the word 'pixel' became widely known, though published by Fred Billingsley at the Jet Propulsion Lab ten years earlier, as a contraction of 'picture' and 'element'.</i>
Because of that	Because of that	Until finally
<i>the invention spawned new companies anxious to take advantage of digital imagery. Top management at Kodak failed to appreciate the potential of the patent they held, and these newcomers could bypass Kodak's distribution network, 'processing' their own images.</i>	<i>the use of the new electronic technology grew massively as the predilection for hard prints waned rapidly. Users found new applications, as Kodak maintained its attachment to legacy assets and entrenched culture, failing to develop a meaningful strategy for change.</i>	<i>showing how easy it is to get things wrong, and miss opportunities, Kodak went into bankruptcy in 2012; attempts to sell its digital imaging patents had largely failed. The company emerged, much chastened and smaller (4,700 people) about a year later.</i>

Take a look at Emma Coats' [\*22 Rules to Phenomenal Storytelling\*](#) in an excellent Infographic. A very handy piece of 'equipment' is the [\*Presentation Zen Sketchbook\*](#). This storyboarding sketchbook is like a journal for presenters of all types—it's an analog place to go and sketch out presentation ideas. There are blank pages in the Sketchbook for jotting down notes, creating mind maps (a diagram used to visually outline information, often created around a single word or text, placed in the center, to which associated ideas, words and concepts are added), or using whatever brainstorming techniques you find helpful.

A storyboarding technique presenters often use, involves writing down ideas on sticky notes and then arranging them as they build the structure of their presentations. You could jot the heading for each of Emma's six-box storyboard on each one. Some of the pages contain blank boxes that are sized for small sticky notes so you can use this technique to storyboard your own presentations.

On the basis of two heads are often better than one, you might get even better results if you try this approach (it's called affinity diagramming, by the way) with colleagues or friends. Affinity diagramming is devastatingly simple. It was devised by Jiro Kawakita in the 1960s. Some things other than hippies happened back then! Jiro is an amazing fellow who devised his KJ Method, based on what he called the Key Problem Approach, largely as a result of his experience dealing with an ecological disaster in a Himalayan village in 1951 (the Sikha Valley Project) after finding dissatisfaction with other anthropological field techniques. His life's work has been about creating harmony from chaos.

You can do the process solo or in a group. Generally it works best in a group. The dynamics and feeding from others' ideas is really stimulating. You may want to start by using brainstorming to get the ideas out into the open.

1. Record each idea or piece of data on index cards or sticky notes;
2. pin or stick them up on a board; look for ideas or data that seem to be related;
3. sort the cards or notes into clusters of ones that seem to be alike in nature;

Then you may start to see patterns that enable re-grouping, or creating new sub-groups. After this the story may emerge without effort.

**Characterization:** characterization is the art of creating characters for a narrative. You build the characters by means of description, through their actions, speech, or thoughts. Use the storyboard as a way of keeping the character(s) in note form, or graphic form, if that's your thing.

The characters will start as ideas in your head, but they'll evolve as you repeat the story, get feedback from others, or simply as they grow. Even when I tell stories about myself, my self-characterization evolves. I'm not inventing, but bringing out aspects of myself that will help the story flow. You need to know the name(s) and physical appearance, if not known already.

The characters may, of course be generic, such as politicians, Texas residents, or teenagers, in which case, that may be their definition. In any case, they all have

thoughts, feelings, speech and actions. Other peoples' reactions to them help define them, too. The characters are key, and they have to fit into a plot, with a beginning, middle and end.

**Scene Setting:** The plot of the story takes place somewhere specific, or at least the conditions surrounding the characters or even the juxtaposition of two characters. Maybe the secretary finds a stiletto in the boss's filing cabinet, or the lawmakers of Texas introduce legislation banning lollipops. The scene may be a place or just the characteristics of the place. Does it involve the city or the countryside, the boardroom or the boardwalk?

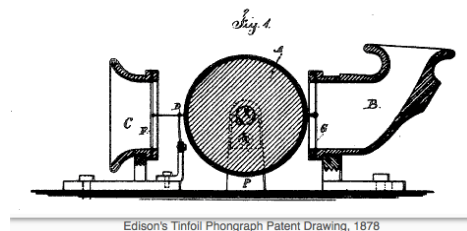
**Problem Definition:** The second aspect of plot concerns the issue. It can arise from the characters themselves, or the data or experience they confront. In the case of the Texas lawmakers, it might concern the skinny or obese ones, or research showing that lollipops have led to violence because their sticks resemble gun barrels, or a lawsuit brought by PE teachers against a school district following a lollipop stick piercing a gymnast's foot.

**Description of Events:** The things that happen on an entrepreneur's journey define how the problem is solved, or the world can be saved. The events part of storyboarding is the core of the plot. It's the events that bring the whole thing to life.

The first great invention developed by Edison was the tin foil phonograph. While working to improve the efficiency of a telegraph transmitter, he noted that the tape of the machine gave off a noise resembling spoken words when played at a high speed. This caused him to wonder if he could record a telephone message.

**Problem Solution:** The solution is the payoff that leads irrevocably to the frog turning into the prince. Edison began experimenting with the diaphragm of a telephone receiver by attaching a needle to it. He reasoned that the needle could prick paper tape to record a message. His experiments led him to try a stylus on a tinfoil cylinder, which, to his great surprise, played back the short message he recorded, "Mary had a little lamb."

T. A. EDISON.  
Phonograph or Speaking Machine.  
No. 200,521. Patented Feb. 19, 1878.



This is frequently where the problem-to-solution idea leads the entrepreneur to define the value proposition: why the customer believes that value will be experienced. It also enables the narrator/presenter to ask for a further action, like investment in the business, the purchase of product, or even simply a commitment

to take the next step, such as a date for a further meeting.

As you work towards such an end, or 'ask', each stage of your story should be building anticipation of what will happen next. Even in movies or animations, it's important to 'set up' to 'pay off.' When you think about movies you have really enjoyed, that anticipation may have occurred almost without you noticing, but it's anticipation that keeps your attention. That anticipation draws you in and keeps you focused. A boring recital of business data or product features, will not.

One of the key components of the learning-by-doing that Toastmasters uses is to create anticipation to turn audiences from observers into participants and they stress the importance of a 'call to action'.

During an interview with poet Carl Sandburg, a reporter asked, "In your opinion, what's the ugliest word in the English language?" The poet frowned. "The ugliest word in the English language?" he repeated, furrowing his brow and staring in the distance. "Ugliest?" he muttered to himself. "Ugliest. The ugliest word." He reflected awhile, face knotted in thought. After a long, pregnant pause, Sandburg's eyes brightened and returned to the reporter's. "The ugliest word is - 'exclusive'."

In this story, notice that the poet uses facial expression, pauses and repetition to keep the audience guessing. I bet at the time, the reporter was supplying the 'ugliest word' in his mind, waiting on the poet to answer. Think of the Three Little Pigs story and how it builds anticipation. Saying that bricks are best for house construction would not have cut it.

An article published by West Side Toastmasters in Los Angeles suggests that the three main ways of creating anticipation are:

- repetition and surprise;
- emotional and sensual detail; and
- foreshadowing.

Foreshadowing... what's that? If you hint at what's come and deliver later in the story, then your audience is already primed for the answer and thus ready to accept and believe it.

When I tell the story of my first StartUp, I begin with the fact that I had failed a couple of times before and when I finally thought I had the right idea, nobody agreed. That generally created a reaction of, "So, what happened, since you are here to tell the tale?" I begged the question and I had gained a certain amount of sympathy with my failure sob stories and then that 'everyone was against me'. The audience was (a) sympathetic and (b) wanted to know what came next.

Then, of course I moved on to some cliff-hangers about the early days of coming to the brink of going bust. Those incidents enabled me to describe the positive consequences in a way that was believable, since they were indeed, foreshadowed. In the story of little red riding hood, it really helps that you get goose bumps when you learn about the big bad wolf and can picture him in grandma's bed and nightcap, so that you are on the edge of your seat to know what happens when the child opens

the door of the cottage. The context, too is very important in the Brothers Grimm story, since you gain the picture of the safe village from which the girl sets out and the intimidating forest she has to cross to get to grandma's. Oh yes, and along the way, don't forget the great branding of the little red hood!

The Grimms were good at beginnings, middles and endings: scene-setting, consequences and convincing endings. Grandma come safe out of the wolf's belly and is reunited with her grand-daughter. The rocks that the woodcutter puts in his belly in her place, mean that he can't get away unscathed.

## **Chapter 2 Takeaways**

- 1. Use storyboarding: 'Once upon a time, there was... Every day... One day... Because of that... Because of that... Until finally...'***
- 2. Try brainstorming and affinity diagramming.***
- 3. Decide on the characters that fit the plot, and set the scene of the story.***
- 4. Define the problem or opportunity in terms of what's missing; create anticipation.***
- 5. Describe the events that lead to the pay-off solution, or the delivery of the value proposition.***

## Brief Bio of Will

*Founders Are Storytellers: Be Convincing Wherever You Are* is the first eBook I wrote, in what will become a series called Books for Venture Founders. I have been writing since I was a teenager: novels (all unpublished), poetry (minimally published), non-fiction (many books published on public enterprise), articles, websites, blogs... and I had to tell stories a lot in my early work career in advertising and public relations.

But my passion is entrepreneurship: as a writer, mainly through articles and my website, [Startup Owl](#); a professor teaching strategy and new venture creation on an MBA program for seven years; and as a consultant to StartUps in many fields, both in the US and Europe over the last 20 years. It sounds pretentious to describe myself as a StartUp mentor, but essentially that's my role in any of the functions I perform.

With my partner in 1982, I started, built and sold (for a symbolic £1 Sterling) my own business after eleven years, and some others, as well as having tried and failed to start others, plus I am not immune to the idea of being a recidivist entrepreneur, even as a septuagenarian.

My entrepreneurship experience has been enhanced over the years by many experiences, like being on the Board of a regional venture capital company, on the boards of many non-profits and a \$16 million food cooperative, but the main one of which has been through having excellent teachers among my students and clients. I have also offered informal coaching to dozens of would-be entrepreneurs.

I have been an adviser to business students on establishing their own StartUps, both while they were studying and since, sometimes as an advisory board member. I stay connected with several clients long after having worked with them in a formal relationship. Right now I am preoccupied with being project mentor to a new Institute of Entrepreneurial Development in Botswana in Sub-Saharan Africa.

I have lived and worked in the UK and France and have been in the US for many years, splitting my time between Vermont and Texas. My Startup consulting practice is [Venture Founders LLC](#), where my work concentrates on issues of business planning and development.

Feel free to contact me at [will@startupowl.com](mailto:will@startupowl.com) on anything you've read in the book. I shall enjoy hearing from you. If you'd be interested in having me run a StartUp Storytelling Workshop in your organization, let me know. I have a model I could send you.



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I also deeply appreciate Guy Kawasaki for having written [\*APE: Author, Publisher, Entrepreneur—How to Publish Your Book\*](#) with Shawn Welch, which I read in the Kindle edition. If I had not started by reading the book, I would have wasted huge amounts of time and made even more errors than I have.