



Asset-Based Storytelling for Nonprofits

2022 Give Local Workshop

Agenda

10:00 – 10:10 Welcome and introductions

10:10 – 10:40 Framework

10:40 – 11:10 Breakout session

11:10 – 11:25 Report back + Q&A

11:25 - 11:30 Close

"We are story animals!"

Our stories...

Express our most deeply held values and beliefs

Reinforce shared identity, purpose and experience

Are both product (i.e. text, visual, audio) and process



The background of the image is a dense, overlapping collage of numerous newspaper clippings. The clippings are of various sizes and are scattered across the entire frame, creating a textured, layered effect. They appear to be from different publications, with some showing headlines and others showing body text. The overall color palette is muted, with various shades of beige, cream, and light brown, suggesting aged paper.

..are unfinished, complex,
subjective

FRAMING

The process that determines what to include and what to exclude in your story through the use of a variety of devices



Think of framing in terms of a camera lens.

What do you include in the frame?

What are you cropping out?

Your choices provide the context.

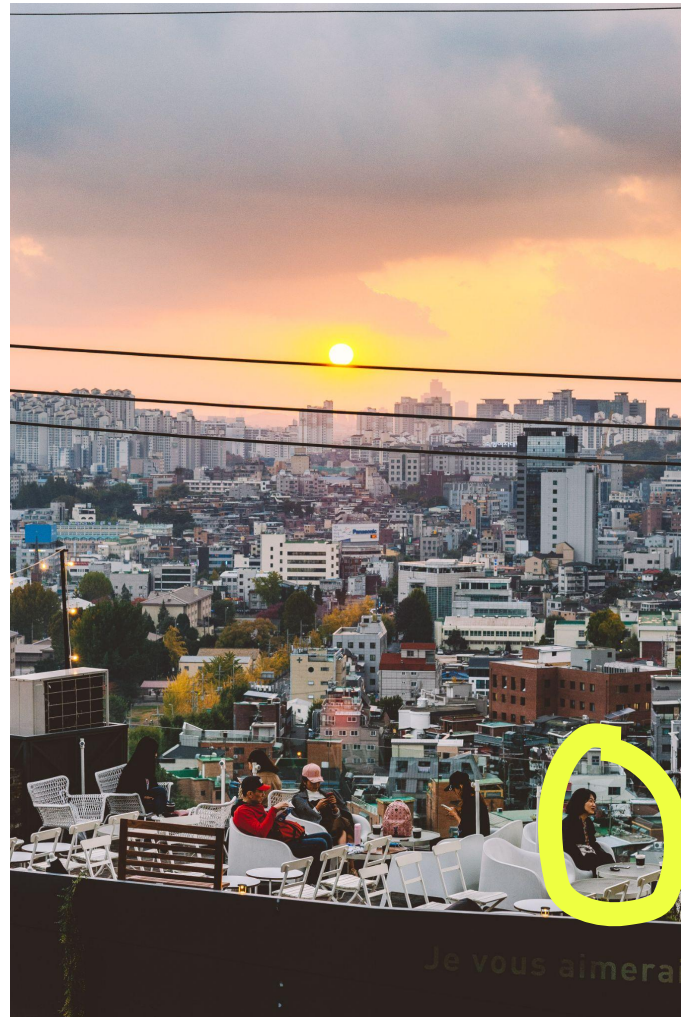
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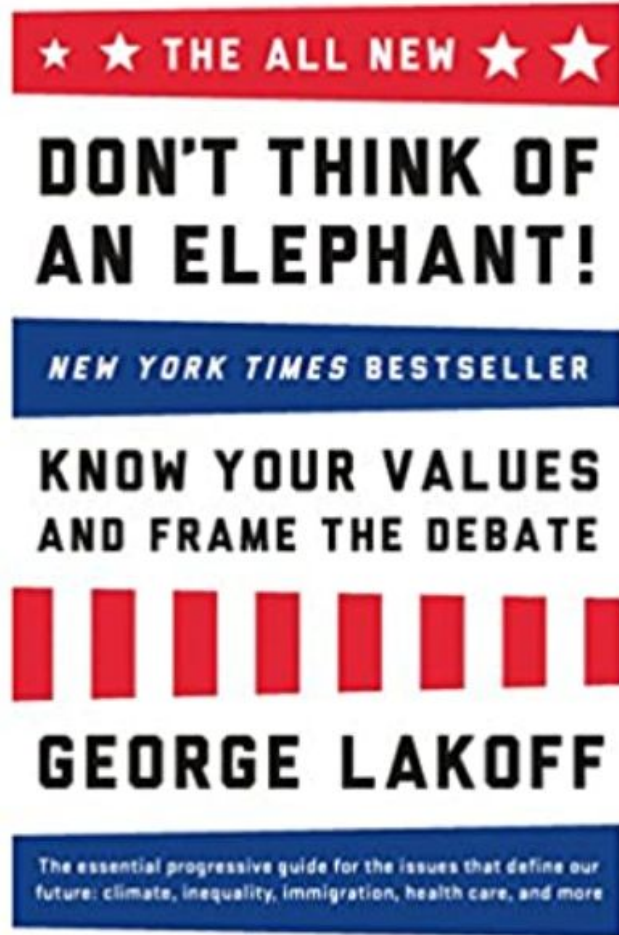


Communal



Political





Lakoff defines framing as: “mental structures that shape the way we see the world.”

We set goals and define success based on these mental models. Our frames:

- Evoke ideas and metaphors.
- Activate core values and beliefs.
- Gain strength + power through repetition.

Our frames are our fundamental worldview.

Framing Taxation

“Taxation is an affliction. And the person who takes it away is the hero, and anyone who tries to stop him is a bad guy.” (Lakoff pg. 2)

Answer / Frame: Tax relief. We need relief from this affliction.

“Taxation is paying your dues, paying your membership fee in America. If you join a club or a community center, you pay fees. Why? You did not build the swimming pool. You have to maintain it...Otherwise it won't be maintained and it will fall apart. People who avoid taxes, like corporations that move to Bermuda, are not paying their dues to their country. It is patriotic to be a taxpayer. It is traitorous to desert our country and not pay your dues.”
(Lakoff, pg. 23)

Answer / Frame: Taxation is patriotic. We must pay our fair share.

What do these frames evoke?

“Mistake on the Lake”

[Pushing for Progress Blog](#)

Not Another Mistake on the Lake



“Views on 5th”

[King 5](#)



What's the dominant frame - value or belief - that's activated most often in American storytelling?

Individualism

“In research with more than 500,000 participants across a wide variety of social issues, FrameWorks researchers find **Individualism to be among the deepest, most pervasive and stubborn cultural models that Americans hold**, shaping thinking about a vast array of social issues from aging to housing and public safety.”

From: “The Case for Explanatory Stories” by Susan Nall Bales, Founder, Frameworks Institute

Individualism

20% of the world, mostly European cultures, have an individualistic culture:

- Focuses on independence and individual achievement
- Emphasis on self-reliance and the belief that one is supposed to take care of themselves to get ahead
- Learning happens through individual study/reading
- Individual contributions and status are important
- Competitive
- Technical / Analytical

From: *Culturally Responsive Teaching & The Brain* by Zarette Hammond

Individualism in nonprofit & legislative
storytelling = success or “portrait” stories



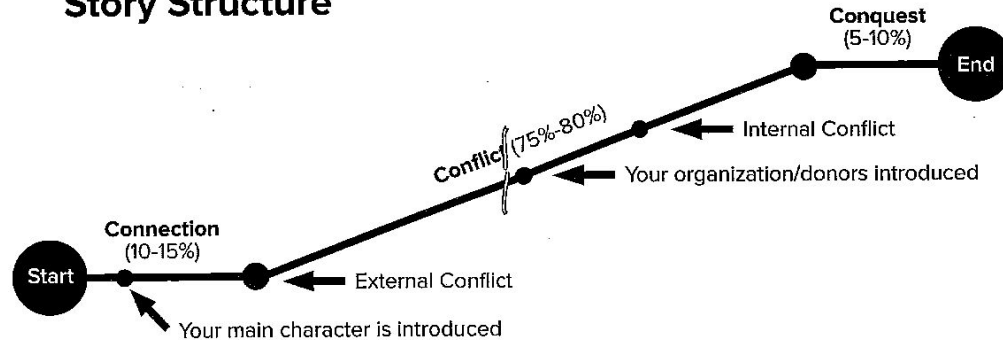
Story Elements in “portrait” or individual success stories:

<p>Characters <i>Who is this story about?</i></p> <p>An individual who is experiencing multiple challenges (i.e. “man in a hole”)</p> <p>The organization, and its donor, are the hero and often presented as the “expert”</p>	<p>Conflict <i>How is the problem explained?</i></p> <p>Often “crops out” or simplifies context - social, political, structural root cause of the problem</p> <p>Focuses on personal conflict (i.e. addiction / domestic violence) more than external conflict (i.e. systems)</p>	<p>Resolution <i>How is the solution presented?</i></p> <p>Emphasizes organization / program as urgent interventions</p> <p>The process—how the work got done and by whom—is simplified, left out, or doesn’t invite engagement</p> <p>Assets presented as the organization, the donor, the individual’s self-determination</p>
<p>Setting <i>Where does this story take place?</i></p> <p>Organization - office /program Person’s home, community, very narrow frame.</p>	<p>Theme <i>What have we learned from this story?</i></p> <p>Celebrates independence and self-sufficiency</p>	<p>Point of View <i>Who is telling the story?</i></p> <p>Told from the POV of the client, with the organizational voice as the “expert” in the problem.</p>

As applied to nonprofit storytelling

-From *Nonprofit Storytelling Training Guide* by Christopher Davenport

Story Structure



Connection/Character - Here is where you begin to connect with your audience. Your main character is also introduced. This part is usually only 10-15% of your overall story. So, for a 10 minute story, you would spend about a minute or so on connecting with your audience.

Conflict - The bulk of your story (75-80%) should be made up of the different types of conflict. The external conflict comes first. Once your audience fully understands the

conflict (the problem), then you introduce your organization and/or donors as the hero of the story.

Usually, introducing the internal conflict comes after your organization has been introduced into the story.

Conquest - This is the wrap up to your story. Show how your main character's life is now improved because of your organization. This should only be about 5-10% of your story. If you take longer than that, you risk losing some of the emotional impact of your story.

The impact?

Portrait storytelling reinforces the frame of individualism, and...

Evokes emotions of pity, fear, sympathy, or guilt that often lead to fatigue and disengagement over time.

Results in a singular transaction (i.e. one-time gift) or achieving narrow goals (i.e. # of people served) over deep analysis and transformational systemic change

Individualizes issues that are systemic.

"If we rely on our default understandings of narrative, we will end up telling stories of individuals who success or fail based on their choices and efforts."

From: "The Case for Explanatory Stories" by Susan Nall Bales, Founder, Frameworks Institute

“If we want better stories for social change, we must retool the architecture of storytelling to get more of the “social” into the story.”

From: “The Case for Explanatory Stories” by Susan Nall Bales, Founder, Frameworks Institute

Let's widen the frame to
collectivism!

and emphasize
relationships,
interdependence,
cooperative learning.



Collectivism

80% of the world - Latin American, Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and many Slavic cultures - practice a collectivist culture:

- Focused on interdependence and group success
- Emphasizes reliance on the collective wisdom or resources of the group and the belief that group members take care of each other to get ahead
- Learning happens through group interaction and dialogue
- Group dynamics and harmony are important
- Collaborative
- Relational

From: *Culturally Responsive Teaching & The Brain* by Zarette Hammond

Story elements in “landscape” or stories of collective impact...

Share a collective vision.

Show cooperation, assets of a community, and the many assets it takes to make social change.

Get “under the hood” of a social issue to reveal how particular systems or structures produce the conditions that need to be changed.

Explain how ordinary people come to do extraordinary things when working together.

From: “Framing Success Stories” from The Frameworks Institute

They widen the frame to emphasize the context and the collective, and ask questions like...

The Problem: What serious challenge needs to be addressed?

Context: What is the size and scope of the problem? What is the background?

Solution: What assets are available to solve the problem? How can progress be made using those assets?

The Collective: What group of people came together?

The Process: What work was done, using what assets, and what did everyone contribute?

The Leader(s): Who brought people together?

The Lessons Learned: What obstacles were overcome? What trials-and-errors were encountered?

The Climax: What changes were achieved?

The Epilogue: Where do things stand now? What is better than it was?

The Takeaway: What can we learn from this story?

The impact?

1. Landscape or stories of collective impact **amplify the assets or cultural wealth** of the individual and their community(ies). Assets include:

Places - land, buildings, transportation, and facilities that contribute to community strength

Economic- what people produce and consume in the community, in both formal and informal ways, through local businesses, or bartering and trading relationships

Orgs & institutions - Volunteer-run or paid that uplift the community

Stories - Stories carry the memory of a community and can describe the potential of a community based on previous times as remembered by those who live there.

People - Skills, experiences, capacities, passions, and willingness can contribute to community strengthen

2. Educates community about the context of the problem

Ties individual story to those larger systemic inequities. Systems can be presented as the characters that need “fixing,” instead of the individual.

3. Invites donors to be a part of a shared sense of purpose and hope.

More potential to result in long-term engagement (funding, volunteerism) because the frame is rooted in “we” instead of the “other.”

The context we provide defines whether an issue is public or private.

Portrait = Private / Personal
Landscape = Public / Collective

We are more likely to hold institutions / systems accountable for solving problems and take collective action when we widen the frame.

Breakout Room Activity

1. Each group will need a notetaker and person(s) to read the stories.
2. Read the two examples of the same story (portrait/landscape) and compare how each unfold. Consider:
 - a. What did you notice about these two approaches to the same story?
 - b. What did you learn about the problem from each story?
 - c. What impact did it have on your engagement or understanding about how change happens?
3. Then discuss:
 - a. How might you use the landscape / collectivist story elements to “widen the lens”?
 - b. Brainstorm some ideas in relation to a success story your organization may want to tell.
4. Report back to the main group.

Keep in touch!

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