

Introduction

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I have always loved stories. I love to tell them, I love to hear them, and I love to watch how they affect people around me. Over the years I have collected thousands of stories in dozens of countries and languages, and I have learned much about why we tell them.

We are, after all, human, and one of the defining characteristics of being human is a desire to find commonality with other people. We seek out the things that we have in common, and those things create collective purpose, friendship, and trust. Stories serve as the intellectual and sometimes spiritual ligament that ties together the human experience skeleton. The first cave paintings that depict crudely drawn herds of bison changed the conversation from "I" to "we." *We* hunted those. *We* built that building. *We* defeated the forces of evil. *We* created political change. *We* made a difference for that customer. We is ALWAYS stronger than I.

Stories, when told well, are one of the most powerful leadership tools that we have, because they give us the ability to create a vision in the mind of another person of a more desirable future than the one the person envisions today. "Let me paint you a picture of what could be" is the professional equivalent of "Once upon a time." Stories allow us to deliver one of the most meaningful gifts that we could ever give: Permission to suspend current reality, if only for a few minutes, to consider *what could be*, not *what is*. As people we cling to what we know because – well, because we *know* it. Letting go of what we know to reach out for the unknown is frightening. Storytelling offers a safe way to do exactly that.

Harlan Cleveland is the author of "Nobody in Charge: Essays on the Future of Leadership." From 1965 to 1969 Cleveland was President Lyndon Johnson's ambassador to NATO as well as a prolific author and educator. He once observed that "It's only by using your imagination that you can escape the thinking person's most dangerous mindset: To consider only those futures that can be readily extrapolated from where we are today." This is what storytelling is all about: the powerful ability to give people an escape to a better reality than the one they have today. And that's what this series is about. I will post insights, stories and anecdotes that will help you develop your own storytelling craft. If you have a good story to tell, share it with me – with your permission I'll share it on the site.

Thanks for reading. Now, let's go tell some stories.