

Peanuts on Storytelling

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Lucy: "A man was born. He lived and he died."

Linus: "Fascinating. Almost makes you feel as if you knew the fellow."

Telling stories as a leadership practice is a powerful and compelling thing, made all the more compelling by the extent to which the teller takes the time to develop the story and build into it a rich layer of detail. To be effective stories must have an air of veracity about them – they must sound real and true to the listening audience. Otherwise they come off as shallow and contrived and serve no purpose other than to create distrust.

Lucy's story – and it is a story, however bare-boned – serves to illustrate the fact that the more details a storyteller hangs on the bare bones of the basic story the more real it becomes. What this really speaks to is preparation. If you are preparing a story to be used in a sales or marketing encounter, or to convey good or bad news, or to issue a motivational or compelling message, think detail. Who is the audience? What do they want to hear? Why do they want to hear it? What do I want them to do differently after they have heard my story? What story elements will resonate most loudly with this particular audience? Do I know enough about the audience to craft a message that will work with them? Do they have any particular expectations from me that I need to be sure to address?

Linus' response is equally telling. Even the simplest story, if told well to the right audience, can be compelling.

Thanks for reading.