

## On Finding Stories

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A good friend sent me this the other day – I can still hear her laughing. But it's true, isn't it? When was the last time you saw a movie or read a book that begins in a dark, smoky salad bar?



I'm sharing this with you to remind all storytellers of a couple of fundamental truths about the craft. The first is that context really, really matters. When you set the stage for a story it is crucial to surround the facts of the story with the right kind of environment to make it believable. Otherwise the listener or reader will make it their mission to spot flaws in the story instead of listening to your message. And what

this *really* translates into is personal credibility. For example, I can tell data center or central office or computer room or outside plant stories very effectively because I've done those jobs: In each case I know the environment and can therefore deliver a credible tale because I understand the environment I'm talking about. I know the people who do those jobs, I know how they talk, I know about the ins and outs of their daily jobs. On the other hand, I could no more tell a credible story about the life of a major league baseball player as I could flap my arms and fly. So when you undertake to tell a story to a would-be client, be sure that you do your homework. Learn everything you can about their world so that you can speak credibly about the environment that challenges and rewards them every day.

The second thing I want to remind you about is the importance of the actual process of telling the story. I recently went back and re-read William Noble's timeless "*Shut UP!*" *He Explained: A Writer's Guide to the Uses and Misuses of Dialogue*. This is a great book to have on the reference shelf (or on your digital reference shelf) if you ever find yourself writing dialogue or putting together a storyline that **MUST** hang tightly together for delivery. The point is that delivery is everything: An inferior story if properly told can still be compelling. The opposite, however, is not true. Even the best story, told by a poor or poorly-prepared storyteller, will have little

impact. So take the time to study good storytellers. Spend a couple of hours wandering around the TED Web site and listening to random presenters. Essentially 100% of the presenters are excellent storytellers. Why? Why is it that topics you have no interest in whatsoever are suddenly interesting when you find them at the TED site? *Because the presenters know how to tell a story. It's that simple.*

Thanks for reading.