

## Everybody Has a Story to Tell

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In Ken Robinson's now famous 2006 TED talk about the future of creativity, he makes the case very compellingly that everyone has a story to tell. I believe this wholeheartedly - and that one of the greatest gifts you can bestow upon someone is to let them tell it. Stories run profoundly deeply with people. They are as old and as deeply seated as childhood memory and are part of who we are as human beings. As a consequence, any opportunity that you have to allow a person with whom you are engaging to go into storytelling mode will always work in your favor. As they say in west Texas, "Never miss a good chance to shut up." People don't typically *want* to tell a story - they *have* to tell a story. They have a fundamental need to get it out there, to share it widely, to be heard. Why not give them the chance?

I do a lot of work in generational theory, studying how different generations (Baby Boomers, Gen-Xers, Millennials) engage with the world, with each other, with technology. One of the things I have learned over the years is that Baby Boomers crave control: They want to be in-charge (think Alexander Haig, for those of you old enough to remember his famous quote), and to be seen as the ones most capable of making the right decision for everybody. So it is particularly hard for them to let go, to turn the reins over to someone else, to cede control of the conversation to the other party. The thing is, though, they have little choice. Stories are meant to be told, and given the fact that it is so important for individuals to have their story heard, why would anyone take that away from them, especially if that person is a colleague or, more to the point, a customer? Not only will the person's need to be heard be satisfied, but by "shutting up" and listening, you'll gather valuable intelligence about and insight into the other person.

For this reason alone, I want to make the argument that storytelling is a powerful and strategically competitive tool: especially when you let the customer tell the story.

Thanks for reading.