

Experiential Flow

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I spend a lot of my time thinking about the origin of stories. This intrigues me because one of the most common questions I am asked is, “where do all of your stories come from?” And much to my frustration I have never been able to come up with a satisfactory answer to what is by all rights a simple question.

There are easy (although incomplete) answers to the question. First, I’m a voracious reader of a ridiculously wide array of things. In the past week I have read John Grisham’s newest novel, *Sycamore Row*; Michael Connelly’s latest *Lincoln Lawyer* novel, *The Gods of Guilt*; *In Search of Nature*, by entomologist E. O. Wilson; and *Still Life With Turtles* by David Carroll. This list doesn’t include newspapers, journals, magazines or those things I have “read” by listening to them as Podcasts. Incidentally don’t be impressed by the volume of stuff I consume; the nature of my work dictates that I spend a lot of time on airplanes and in hotel rooms; what better way to consume the time than by reading?

Second, I’m a good listener. I enjoy hearing stories as much as I enjoy telling them, and I fundamentally believe that everyone has a story to tell – and they will, if you give them the chance. So I encourage people, through casual conversation, to tell me their tale.

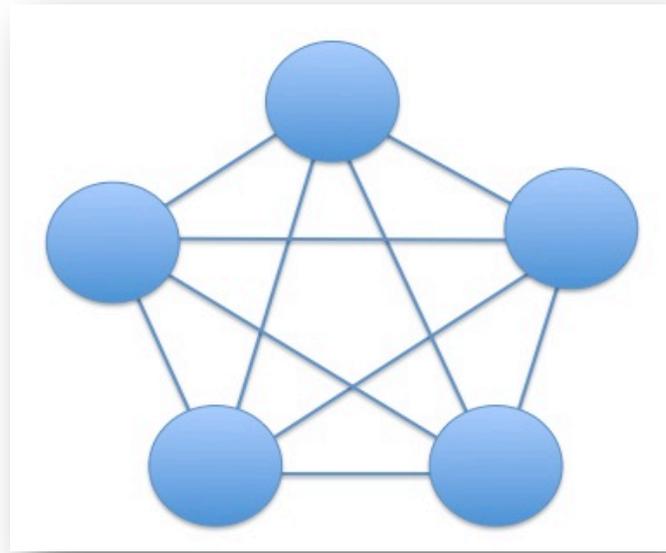
Those are incomplete responses to the question. *Part* of my storytelling collection technique comes from reading and listening. But there’s another piece of the story, and that is the power of connections – not the stories themselves, but the connections between them. I’ve referenced this before, but let me add some richness here.

In or around 1974, technologist Bob Metcalfe invented a networking technology that we have all come to know called Ethernet. Metcalfe was passionate about the power of the network (this was back in the days when the local area network was just beginning to show promise) and along the way he had something of an epiphany, which came to be known as Metcalfe’s Law. Mathematically it looks like this:

$$P(x) = n^2$$

In English, Metcalfe’s Law states that “The power of a connected network is equivalent to the square of the number of nodes in the network.” Not much clearer, you say? OK, let’s do it this way. See the star on the next page? Each of the circles that make up the star is connected to every other circle that makes up the star. Let’s now imagine that each of those circles represents

a database of knowledge. Each knowledge store in and of itself has value, but imagine the



increased value when each of the knowledge bases is connected to all of the others. Imagine the degree of richness and nuance that results.

Want a real example? Think about the power of the World Wide Web.

Each of the resources that are on the Web has value, but the real power of the Web lies in the ability to derive knowledge from a vast array of knowledge elements to create inference and insight. *This* is the real value of Metcalfe's Law - that the power of the network doesn't lie in the nodes, but rather in the connections between them. And the same is true of storytellers.

Good storytellers create experiential flow by connecting one story to another in a series that turns into a journey of observation and discovery. The key to being a good storyteller doesn't lie in your ability to collect and store a treasure trove of stories; it lies in your ability to create linkages between the stories that cause them to be relevant and meaningful to the person you're telling them to. Regardless of whether you are recounting a story to tell a child to make a moral point, or engaging with an enterprise customer in an attempt to influence a buy decision, the connection is what will drive the outcome.

Thanks for reading.