

SIX DIFFERENT TYPES OF STORIES COURT LEADERS OFTEN TELL

- (A) STORIES TO ENTERTAIN AND RELAX AN AUDIENCE
- (B) STORIES TO CONNECT AND BUILD TRUST
- (C) STORIES TO TEACH AND EDUCATE OTHERS
- (D) STORIES TO SUPPORT JUSTICE AND COURT VALUES
- (E) STORIES TO HELP SOLVE PROBLEMS
- (F) STORIES TO DRIVE BOLD CHANGE

(A) Stories to entertain and relax an audience

These types of stories allow you to connect and engage with an audience in a more authentic and empathetic way. The basis of your anecdote needs to be brief and audience-centric. Stories that expose our human flaws and vulnerabilities will humanize you to listeners. Often, speakers will recount humorous instances that will resonate with an audience. Here are some ways to do so

- Don't be afraid to chuckle at yourself. It signals everything is okay

(Griller example):

Born and raised in the Midwest, I had worked in trial courts for many years in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis / St. Paul. At a conference, I met the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in Maricopa County. A few months after the conference I received a call from a consultant at the National Center for State Courts asking if I remembered the meeting since his court was looking for a new court executive upon the retirement of the current executive. One thing led to another, and I eventually interviewed for the position and much to my amazement was selected. This was a new adventure for my family and me; sort of like the pioneers in 1800's heading west. We knew no one in Arizona. As we talked about how this was such an adventure for us, we got to talking about how our whole lives will be changing. I remember Helen, my wife, saying since no one knows us, we could even change our names. She always felt her name was so Victorian, so "old school." I asked her what name she would pick if she could. She thought for a moment and said, "I've always like the name 'Maggie.'"

Well, the drama increased when I left for Phoenix and Helen stayed in Minneapolis to sell the house and would follow with the kids a few months later. I immersed myself in my new job. The Presiding Judge and I worked closely together, and one day he asked me what my wife's name was. I paused and said, "Maggie."

When Maggie and kids arrived and we settled in our new home, the Presiding Judge and his wife invited us to their favorite restaurant for dinner. On our way to dinner, I remembered I had told him Helen's name was Maggie. Needless to say, she was a bit shocked but pulled it off beautifully. As time went on, the staff inquired as to my wife's name, so the charade started to grow. It became increasingly awkward since I would slip from time to time and refer to her as Helen, and have to quickly correct myself and say, "I mean Maggie." We began socializing with some of the leadership judges and I remember one judge turning to me at a restaurant and asking if I had ever seen the movie Sybil, about a woman possessed by 16 separate personalities. Eventually, at a holiday party around this time of year with a number of judges and senior staff, I came clean and confessed, telling them the background of Helen's two names. To this very day, many of the judges and staff gleefully refer to Helen as "Maggie."

- Self-deprecating stories sometimes work as lead-ins that you can counter with a message
- Laughter is disarming. Poke fun at the stuff everyone's worried about.

(B) Stories to connect with others to build trust

When you choose to share your story, you share a piece of yourself.

In doing so, you start to build trust and connect in more personal and authentic ways. Trust stories humanize you and allow you to “encourage the heart” of your listeners. You become a *real* person. One of the key features of impactful leaders is they know that people want to be led by a person, not a position.

Example of a trust story...

In March of this year, NAPCO presented a webinar entitled, “*To be Asian in America’s State and Local Courts.*” Leadership judges and court executives who were Asian Americans not only discussed the perceptions of the Asian American community as perpetually being seen as foreigners when encountering the courts but revealed their own experiences as insiders – judges and court executives – within the courts. One panelist mentioned that prior to her position as a judge, she was the only Asian lawyer in the jurisdiction and was frequently assumed to be an out-of-place spectator or interpreter.

When you demonstrate vulnerability by sharing a personal story, others are affected, influenced, and inspired to reciprocate, creating a bond of trust.

A culture of trust is crucial for a productive workplace. Trust is palpable. You can sense or feel its presence or absence in a relationship or organization. Simply put... trust means confidence. The opposite of trust is suspicion.

In simplistic terms, trust is composed of two qualities...

- Benevolence: the quality of putting other interests ahead of your own, whether they be the court’s, public’s, or someone else’s.
- Competence: the ability to deliver on what you say or promise.

Take a minute right now. Think of a person with whom you have a highly trusting relationship. Mentally describe it to yourself.

Now, think of a person with whom you have a low trust relationship. Think of how you would characterize that interaction. Trust and distrust is real.

Some possible questions to ask yourself...

- How have you built trust through storytelling... In the courtroom as a judge leader? In one-on-one meetings with disgruntled judges over a new calendar assignment system. With funding authorities.
- How did you, as a court leader, strengthen rapport and trust among judges and court staff during the pandemic through stories and anecdotes?

(C) Stories to teach and educate others

Cassandra Brene Brown, American professor, author, and leadership expert, defines a leader as “anyone who sees potential in people and has the courage to develop that potential.”

Good leaders need to be good teachers. Stories allow you to simplify complex topics by providing easy-to-follow models to advise others about behavior and personal growth in becoming future leaders.

Story on Empowerment & Teambuilding – Griller’s example:

I spent over 30+ years as a chief trial court executive in two states, three large metro courts, and worked with 11 chief judges who had tenures ranging from two to five years. During that time, I hired a number of young professionals from law and graduate schools to work as court administrators and managers. In doing so, I assured them I would provide a variety of leadership experiences, and should they eventually want to leave or should they desire to stay, I would help them.

Since most large courts organize around cases types, there is often a lead or administrative judge that oversees a criminal department, a civil department, a family division, etc. In many ways, those organizational units mirror - in microcosm - the relationships that exists between the chief judge and court executive. So, I would say, “Watch how the chief and I operate as a team and learn from our example.” That approach tended to work very well until chief judge #9.

He had grown up in a very regimented family. Consequently, he was quite accustomed to a hierarchical operating style. In the beginning, he came to me on virtually every initiative or request and, in turn, I found myself constantly relaying messages and requests to departmental presiding judges and court administrators. All this caused the chief and I to sit down and chat about “empowerment.” I indicated I had no problem with him directly contacting departmental presiding judges and their court administrators if he believed I needed to know or should be involved, they would reach out to me.

I assured him the key to delegation with confidence – essentially empowerment - means...

- Open, free flow of information;
- Permission for people to operate independently within agreed upon boundaries, AND to be responsible for their decisions; and
- The ability to work in teams often across organizational lines that tend to breakdown silos which are one of the biggest inhibitors to innovation and efficiency.

(D) Stories to promote justice and court values

Part of good leadership is to model the way for others. “To walk the talk,” as some would say. This is especially true regarding the justice system and court values. Sometimes, that sentiment is captured in a tag line or vision statement. The Superior Court in Maricopa County AZ uses this language... *We are committed to excellence and the principles inherent in the Rule of Law ... every person, every day, every time.*

When co-authors Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner in their seminal book, *The Leadership Challenge*, set out to discover what effective leaders do when they’re at their personal best, they collected thousands of stories from ordinary people—the moments those people recalled when they were asked to think about what they observed in a leader when they were at the top of their game. Despite differences in culture, gender, age, organization type, and other variables, these “personal best” stories revealed similar patterns of behavior. A key conclusion was that when leaders experienced their personal best, they were focused on way people (constituents, peers, colleagues, and customers alike) should be treated and furthered those values in their organizations.

Leaders create standards of excellence and set an example for others to follow. They put up signposts when people feel unsure of where to go or how to get there.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF ABOUT MODELING THE WAY:

- How did I talk about court values and my beliefs with others today?
- Did I act on those values and beliefs in my interactions with others?
- Did I thank or recognize others who demonstrated core court values?
- Did I set an example for how others at the court should act?
- Did I champion someone for championing the court’s values as well as their own?
- Did I follow through on what I committed to doing?
- Did I share stories about how court staff are exceptionally displaying justice system values?

Griller story...

In 1990, a few years after I came to Phoenix from Minnesota to take the job of court administrator at the Superior Court in Maricopa County, the ABA completed a domestic relations study the court requested on self-represented litigants. The results were startling... 50% of the cases were lawyer-less, another 40% had a lawyer on just one side, and only 10% had lawyers on both sides. The leadership consensus was the court had to try something new, the old methods were not working. And to do so, we needed to see the world from the perspective of self-represented litigants in order to *demystify justice*. Our objective was to simplify the process... it was too slow, too complex, too mistake prone, and too “Latin.” It was definitely not user-friendly for non-lawyers to navigate on their own. Thus... the first court-annexed self-service center in America was born. Our role models were (1) the IRS which never gives out a form without easy-read instructions; (2) Home Depot which touts the fact that you don’t need to be a plumber to put in a sink, you just need to know where to get the parts and obtain helpful step-by-step guides on how to do it, and, lastly, (3) if you run into trouble, a way to get help which was a new approach to lawyering called “unbundled legal service,” that allowed lawyers to perform discrete services and tasks that a consumer (litigant) could pick and choose to purchase. The rest is history.

Morph from Outside to Inside Purposes
A Poignant Story about How Organizations can Lose Sight of Their Core Values

Unfortunately, the natural tendency of most organizations – whether courts or other complex organizations – is to go through a metamorphosis over time and lose the essence of their real purpose; their reason for being. For courts, of course, it is to resolve disputes fairly and justly. Our purpose exists essentially outside ourselves. A trial court exists to perform a service for the community (society). Without that service, there would be civil disobedience, social chaos and vigilante justice.

Regrettably, most organizations over time lose sight of the fact that they exist for reasons outside themselves. They “morph” toward greater concern for the members of the organization and eventually become irrelevant to their original purpose. Consequently, it is important to constantly remind judges, court leaders and staff to observe their work and processes from the customers’ viewpoint, whether they be litigants, lawyers, witnesses, the public, or marginalized populations (i.e., the homeless, mentally challenged persons, etc.)

Here is a moving story that emphasizes the sadness of such backsliding
As a court leader, can you develop a justice system story that captures such a message?

“On a dangerous sea-coast where shipwrecks often occur, there was once a crude little life-saving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves they went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost.

Some of those who were saved and various others in the surrounding area wanted to become associated with the station and give of their time and money to support its work. New boats were bought, and new crews trained. The little life-saving station grew.

As time went on, some members of the life-saving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. They replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building.

Now, the life-saving station became a popular gathering spot for its members, and they decorated it beautifully and furnished it exquisitely, because they used it as sort of a club. Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on life-saving missions, so they hired lifeboat crews to do this work. The life-saving motif still prevailed in the club’s decoration, and there was a model of a lifeboat in the room where club initiations were held.

About this time, a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boat loads of cold, wet and half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick, and some of them had black skin and some had yellow skin. The beautiful new club was in chaos. So, the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where victims of shipwrecks could be cleaned up before coming inside.

(E) Stories to help solve problems

This is an interesting way stories can be used that many organization leaders never think about, but often unwittingly use in working with others.

It is premised on the fact that in facing complex problems and strategic decisions, leaders may often choose to solve the wrong problem.

They focus on symptoms instead of causes, base decisions on false assumptions, and overlook key effects on others. The answer researchers have found is for leaders to change the way the problem is defined.

By collecting and reviewing stories about the way various customers and stakeholders encounter a problem with a court process, procedure, requirement, or activity decision-makers – essentially the problem-solvers – can gain a clearer, multi-dimensional view of a problem. And as a result, have a better probability of addressing the root causes of the problem.

An example is the issue many courts faced in the 1980s and 1990s with an overload of self-represented litigants flooding courthouses with unrepresented consumer-related civil matters, most commonly marriage dissolution, child support and visitation cases. After hearing multiple stories from litigants, lawyers, judges, court staff and the public, many decision-makers concluded the problem wasn't a lack of legal resources for the lawyer-less. Rather, it was an organizational development problem for the court itself. Many then began to remake, improve, and demystify the way litigants without lawyers could more effectively make their own way through a legal process to obtain a fair, just judicial decision.

In simple storytelling terms in this example the "hero" is the litigant, the "quest" is how to make it through a legal labyrinth, and the "treasure" is a fair, just judicial decision.

How has storytelling and the analysis of stories helped you as a court leader solve the right problems?

(F) Stories to drive bold change

Once leaders map out a plan to make a major change in an organization, be it a court or any other operation, there's generally one more crucial step they must take: crafting a story so compelling that it will harness the court's energy and direct it toward change.

Storytelling has a remarkable ability to connect people and inspire them to take action.

An effective way experts recommend leaders do so is to follow four key steps...

1. *Understand the need for change within the court so well that you can describe it in simple terms*

Ask yourself: Can I capture my vision in a sentence or word

Once a philosopher apologized for writing a long article by saying he didn't have time to write a short one. That's the approach you need to take. Make the sentence or word memorable.

An example in remaking the self-represented litigant experience is a vision that your court is in the DIY business: **D**emystifying justice; **I**nstructing litigants; and **Y**es, we can provide information but not advice.

2. *Honor the court's past: Both the good and bad.*

In doing so, you acknowledge the good parts of your court's history. It's easy to be so focused on the things you want to change that you forget to communicate what you *don't* want to change. This certainly will show you truly understand your court.

You also need to honestly acknowledge those things that haven't been gone so well and take responsibility for them. Maybe they didn't happen on your watch, but they may have been tolerated far too long.

3. *Describe a persuasive mandate for change*

Share your rationale for creating a different future.

4. *Lay out a clear, vivid way to create a desired future*