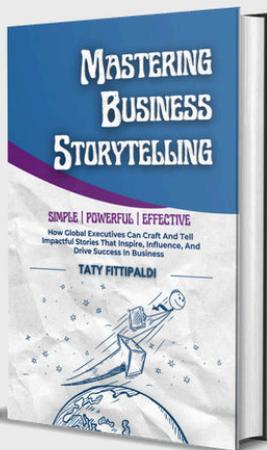




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Mastering Business Storytelling

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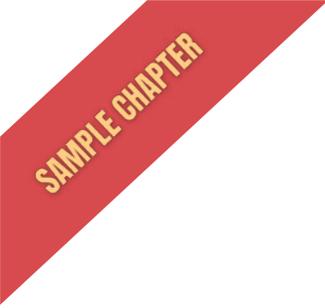
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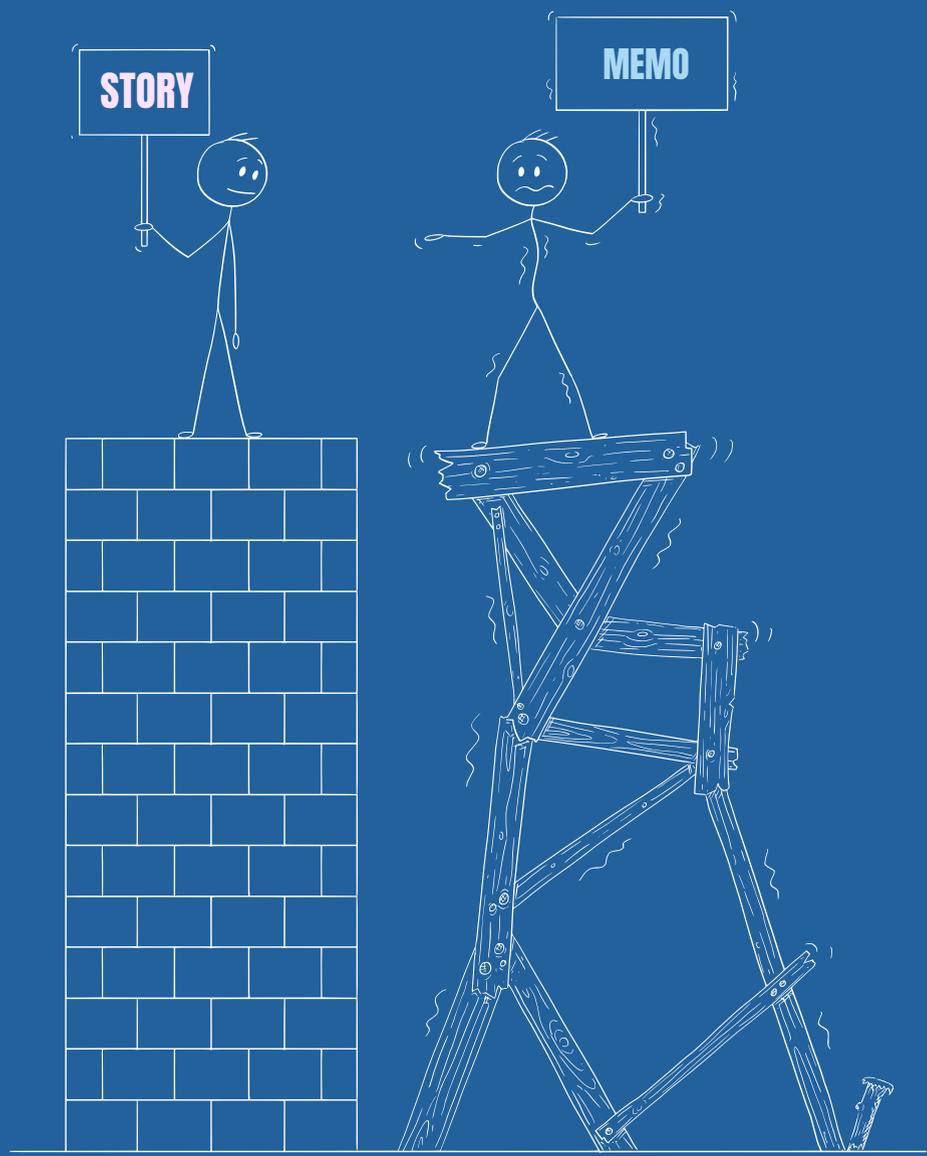
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SAMPLE CHAPTER

— CHAPTER 02 —







Narrative Versus Storytelling: Understanding The Difference

While many people use “narrative” and “storytelling” interchangeably as art forms, there’s an important distinction between the two. **A narrative** is a recounting of events, often factual and straightforward. For example, a sports commentator might create a narrative when describing what happened in last night’s football game, or someone might recount events to a police officer to explain why they made a call. These narratives provide information, but they lack the deeper elements that transform events into a story.

A story goes beyond simply stating facts; it draws us in, engages us emotionally, and often leaves us with insights or lessons. To achieve this, a story needs essential components:

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- **A Protagonist or Character:** Every story centers around a main character, the person through whom we experience the journey.
- **A Setting or Context:** The backdrop against which the story unfolds, giving us a sense of time, place, or situation.
- **A Journey or Plot:** The protagonist embarks on a journey or faces a series of events, often spurred by the conflict they must resolve.
- **A Conflict:** A challenge or obstacle that disrupts the protagonist's world, prompting action or change.
- **A Change or Resolution:** The protagonist undergoes a transformation due to the conflict, emerging changed or with a new understanding.
- **Lessons Learned or Takeaway:** Through the journey, both the protagonist and the audience gain insights or lessons that give meaning to the experience.

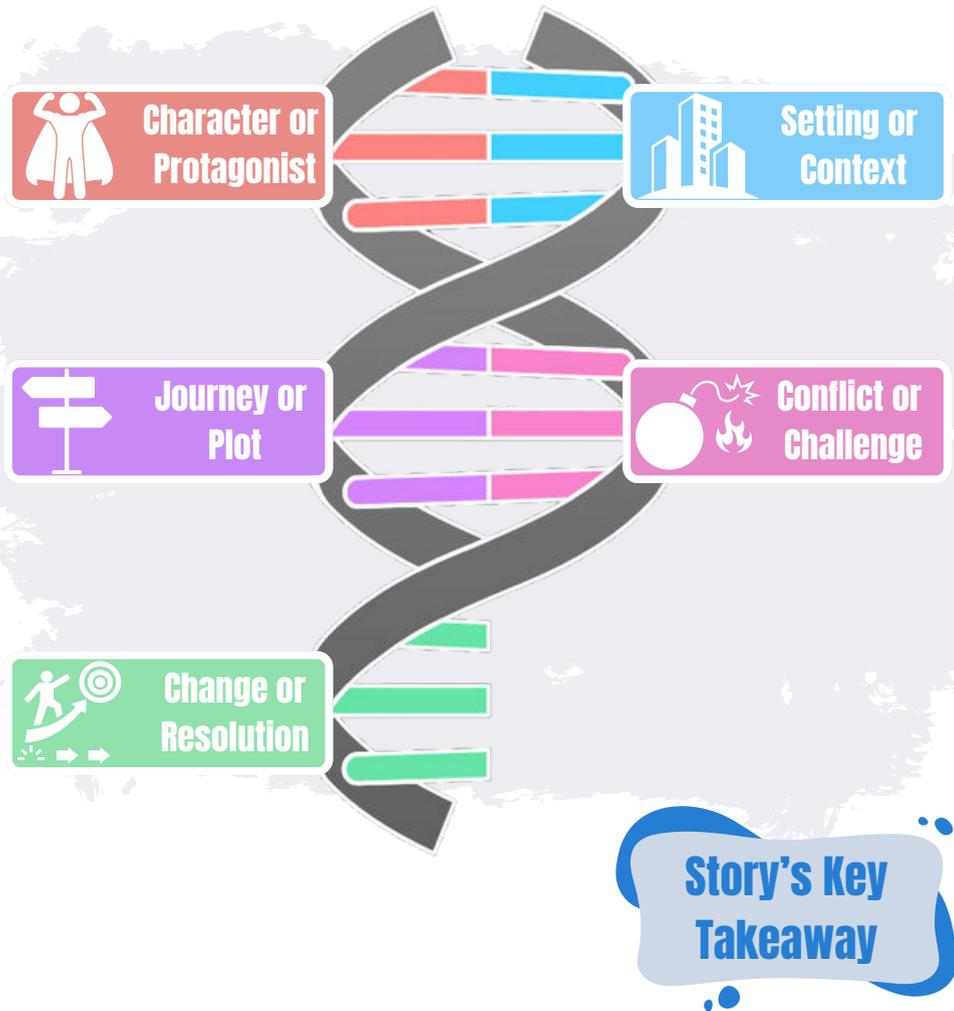
What Are The Three Forms Of Storytelling

According to scholars, storytelling can be communicated through three primary formats: oral, visual, and written formats. Over time, these traditional methods have evolved, giving rise to digital storytelling, which leverages modern tools to craft narratives that blend multimedia elements like text, images, video, audio, and interactive content.

A great example of this evolution can be seen in how a YouTube channel originally focused on visual storytelling expanded into digital storytelling. By integrating multiple media formats, it created an engaging, multidimensional narrative experience. You can explore one such example here: [YouTube Channel MokomiKids](#).

BUSINESS STORYTELLING

THE DNA ELEMENTS OF YOUR STORY



Effective business storytelling turns challenges into insights and decisions into inspiration, guiding teams toward shared vision and action.

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For this and other amazing links to digital storytelling, don't forget to download our free [PDF companion](#).

Storytelling journeyed 100,000 years ago from oral storytelling traditions to today's realm of digital storytelling, where classic elements — protagonists, context, and conflict — are now brought to life with motion graphics, visuals, and interactive experiences, making stories even more engaging.

What Are The 5 P's Of Storytelling?

A similar and helpful framework for crafting powerful stories is the **5 P's of Storytelling**: People, Place, Plot, Purpose, and Point. Each of these elements plays a crucial role in making a story meaningful and impactful. Here's how they connect to the essential components of storytelling:

-  **People:** Every story needs a main character or protagonist. The protagonist is the person through whom the audience experiences the journey, making them relatable and helping us emotionally invest in the story's outcome.
-  **Place:** The setting or context gives the story a backdrop, a place or situation where events unfold. This helps the audience visualize the story and understand its environment, whether it's a specific location, a moment in time, or a unique cultural context.
-  **Plot:** The journey and conflict are essential elements of the plot. The journey is the path the protagonist takes, while the conflict represents the challenges they must face. These elements drive the story forward, engaging the audience as they follow the protagonist's quest to overcome obstacles.

-  **Purpose:** The purpose of a story often centers on the reason for sharing it — what the storyteller hopes to achieve or communicate. While the purpose may not be directly included in the bulleted elements above, it's a guiding factor behind why the story is told in the first place.
-  **Point:** The point of the story lies in the lessons learned and the change that results from the conflict. These extra elements provide meaning and closure, helping the audience understand the story's broader significance or takeaway.

While the 5 P's — People, Place, Plot, Purpose, and Point — provide a solid structure for storytelling, elements like change and lessons learned offer additional depth. Together, these components enable us to create stories that resonate, inspire, and leave a lasting impact.

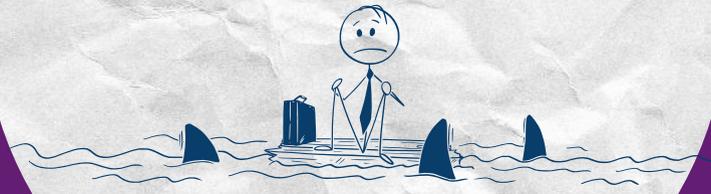
Whilst a narrative tells us what happened, storytelling takes us on an emotional journey, helping us see not only what happened but why it matters.

The Power Of “Show, Not Tell”

One of the most critical principles of storytelling is the idea of “Show, Not Tell” or “Show, Don't Tell.” This approach has been emphasized by many storytelling experts, but it was first coined as a phrase by Anton Chekhov, the famous Russian playwright and author. Chekhov suggested that instead of telling readers what a character feels or does, a storyteller should show these things through vivid detail, action, and dialogue.

“Show, Not Tell” means immersing the audience in the experience rather than simply informing them of it.

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For example, instead of telling the audience, “She was nervous,” a storyteller might show her fidgeting, avoiding eye contact, or checking her watch repeatedly.

These descriptive actions allow the audience to infer her nervousness, making the experience more relatable and engaging.

Ways To “Show, Not Tell” In Stories:

- **Use descriptive language:** Instead of general statements, include sensory details that allow the audience to visualize and feel what’s happening.
- **Focus on actions and behaviors:** Show characters’ emotions and states through their actions, gestures, thoughts, and expressions.
- **Include dialogue and internal dialogue:** Let characters express their emotions or intentions through what they say, how they say it, and their inner thoughts. Internal dialogue, in particular, reveals a character’s unspoken thoughts and feelings, bringing the audience closer to their inner world.
- **Set the scene:** Describe the environment and surroundings in a way that supports the mood and helps build immersion.

Example Of “Show, Not Tell”:

- **Tell:** “John was furious when he saw the broken window.”
- **Show:** “John’s face turned red as he clenched his fists, his gaze fixed on the shattered glass scattered across the floor. His voice shook when he finally spoke, ‘Who did this?’” And in his mind, he thought, “How many times did I warn them about keeping the windows locked?”

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In the “tell” example, we simply learn that John is furious. In the “show” example, we feel his anger through his physical reactions, words, and inner thoughts.

This difference between telling and showing makes storytelling more powerful, pulling the audience into the scene and letting them experience the emotions firsthand.

Diane Callahan’s YouTube video — which will have a link to in your [PDF companion](#) — “How to Show, Not Tell: The Complete Writing Guide” offers one of the best explanations of this classic storytelling principle. According to her, “Show” dramatizes while “Tell” summarizes. “Show” eliminates the author (or communicator) as the middleman.

In the traditional storytelling space, “show, don’t tell” is often a guideline for creating engaging, immersive narratives — but in business, this concept can be leveraged in a unique way.

Before we get there to that, and to your benefit, let’s first talk about traditional storytelling, “Show, Not Tell.”

According to Janice Hardy’s book, “Understanding Show, Don’t Tell,” knowing when to show is key. Moments involving emotions, opinions, and sensations are best shown rather than told.

Here’s a simple formula to help you apply “show, don’t tell” effectively:

1 - Use evidence to support your claims. Rather than just stating something as fact, demonstrate it through actions or examples.

2 - Replace the abstract with the concrete. Don't just say how a character feels; paint a picture with specific details. For instance:

- Instead of saying a character is “beautiful.” Your specific details: When you look twice and can't bring yourself to look away.
- Instead of saying something is “terrifying.” Your specific details: When your heart pounds so fast and loud you can hardly breathe, frozen by the certainty of danger or even death.

3 - Substitute vague descriptions with specific sensory details. Especially when describing emotions, sensations, and opinions, ask yourself: What does this look, feel, sound, or smell like?

4 - Avoid over-relying on body language. While gestures can enhance, they shouldn't carry the full weight of emotional expression. However, if a lengthy “show” passage needs to be replaced for brevity, using body language to show in a more summarized way is always a good alternative.

5 - Show emotion through dialogue. Let conversations reveal what's truly being felt or thought.

6 - Filter observations through the narrative voice. In other words, it is as if you are pouring the characters' observations of what's happening around them through the narrator's voice. This adds depth and personal connection to your storytelling.

These principles apply beautifully to traditional storytelling, but you'll hardly have the time to share a novel during your global leadership meetings or communication. At least, this is how you will feel to your audience if you take too long to tell your story and delay making your point.

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I want you to, however, understand these general concepts so that you can use them when needed, but also because transposing this idea to business storytelling will make a lot more sense now.

Here's where business storytelling shines: in global leadership, "show, don't tell" can be achieved by using stories to illustrate your point. They are your "showing" during your "telling."

Instead of explaining or instructing directly, stories evoke reflection and provoke critical thinking, allowing your audience to engage with the message on their own terms.

Through storytelling, you're not simply telling people what to think or do — you're inviting them to come to the conclusion you want. This approach makes your communication not only more impactful but also more memorable.

And that's what business storytelling is all about: showing through clever narrative, including stories, creating space for engagement, and leading with connection.

For example, I once led a workshop about people's core values and how our focus shifts depending on what we value most. To show this concept, I shared the following story, which was loosely based on a behavioral science research experiment:

A Wall Street banker came home one night, and over dinner, his wife started telling him about something her friend had experienced earlier that day.

Her friend had just gone through a difficult breakup after a five-year relationship. Feeling overwhelmed, he decided to take a walk in the park to clear his mind.

Lost in his thoughts, he barely noticed a child tugging at their mother's sleeve, whispering, "Why does that man look so sad?" He didn't see the woman hesitating, almost approaching him to ask if he was okay.

He found a bench, sat down, and finally noticed something unusual — a small plastic chest sitting there. Looking around, he thought perhaps a child had left it behind. Curious, he picked it up, opened it, and found a single chocolate gold coin and a tiny handwritten note inside. The note read:

"This is just for you, stranger. I hope your day gets better from here."

The banker's wife then asked him, "What do you think he really found on that bench, love?"

The banker leaned back, smirked, and said, "Someone with way too much time on their hands."

"I disagree," she replied softly. "He found kindness."

She went on, "In fact, after he left, he kept thinking about that small act of kindness all day. Later, he bought a coffee for the person behind him in line at the café. And that person? They left a big tip for the barista, who used it to buy lunch for her coworker who'd forgotten their wallet, he heard.

"One small act of kindness sparked a chain reaction that touched so many people, even though they'll never know where it started. And all because of a little plastic chest left on a park bench."

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This story wasn't just about a chest of chocolate — it was about what each of us values. Some people see cynicism, others see free time, and some see generosity. The way we interpret the same situation depends on our core values and where we place our focus.

After I finished sharing the takeaway, we opened up a discussion in the workshop about what each participant thought the man had truly found on that bench. Responses ranged from “Hope” and “Compassion” to “Danger” and more, each revealing the unique perspective of the participant.

Many participants later shared how surprised they were to discover the diversity of viewpoints among their coworkers. They realized how a simple story, paired with the right reflective question, could vividly demonstrate how people interpret the same event in entirely different ways.

This is “Show, Not Tell.” in business storytelling. You don't just tell them your takeaway; you show them.

This is especially useful when telling people something will be absolutely unconvincing. For example, imagine if you wanted to convince people that they are biased.

Do you think telling people, “You are biased,” will achieve anything? Well, it will probably put them in a defensive state.

That's exactly what Jake Brigance avoids doing in “**A Time to Kill.**” If you haven't seen this brilliant movie yet, I highly recommend it — it's a powerful and thought-provoking story that will stay with you.

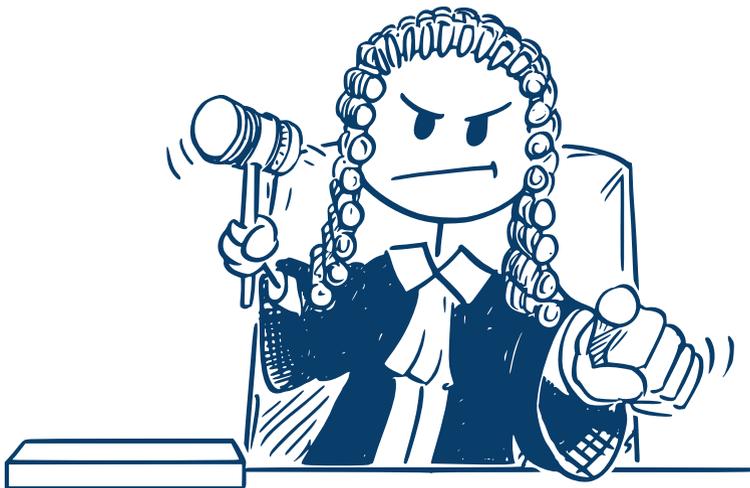
Released in 1996, “A Time to Kill” is an American legal drama based on John Grisham's 1989 novel of the same name.

The story revolves around Carl Lee Hailey (played by Samuel L. Jackson), a devastated Black father who takes justice into his own hands by killing the men who brutally raped his young daughter. Hailey seeks the help of Jake Brigance (Matthew McConaughey), an inexperienced lawyer, to defend him in a small, deeply segregated Southern town in the US. With racial tensions running high, Brigance faces an uphill battle to convince the jury to acquit Hailey, who is undeniably guilty of the crime but acted out of grief and desperation.

In one of the film's most pivotal scenes, Jake Brigance delivers his closing statement, knowing full well that a conventional legal argument wouldn't suffice.

Instead, he chooses to tell a story. He asks the jury to close their eyes and vividly walks them through the horrifying experience of a young girl being brutally attacked. His storytelling is detailed enough to evoke the raw emotions of the moment without becoming overly graphic.

At the end of his account, Brigance delivers a simple yet powerful line: "Now imagine she's white."



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This statement lands like a thunderclap. The jurors — and the audience — are visibly shaken as they confront their own biases.

Many likely pictured a white girl as the victim, a subconscious bias that speaks volumes about deeply ingrained prejudices.

Through his story, Brigrance forces them to reflect on these biases and recognize the humanity of the victim, regardless of race.

The movie is worth watching not only for its masterful execution but also as a lesson in how storytelling can make a case — pun intended.

It's a prime example of how “showing” through stories can be used to challenge assumptions, evoke empathy, and drive home a point in ways that logic or data alone cannot achieve.

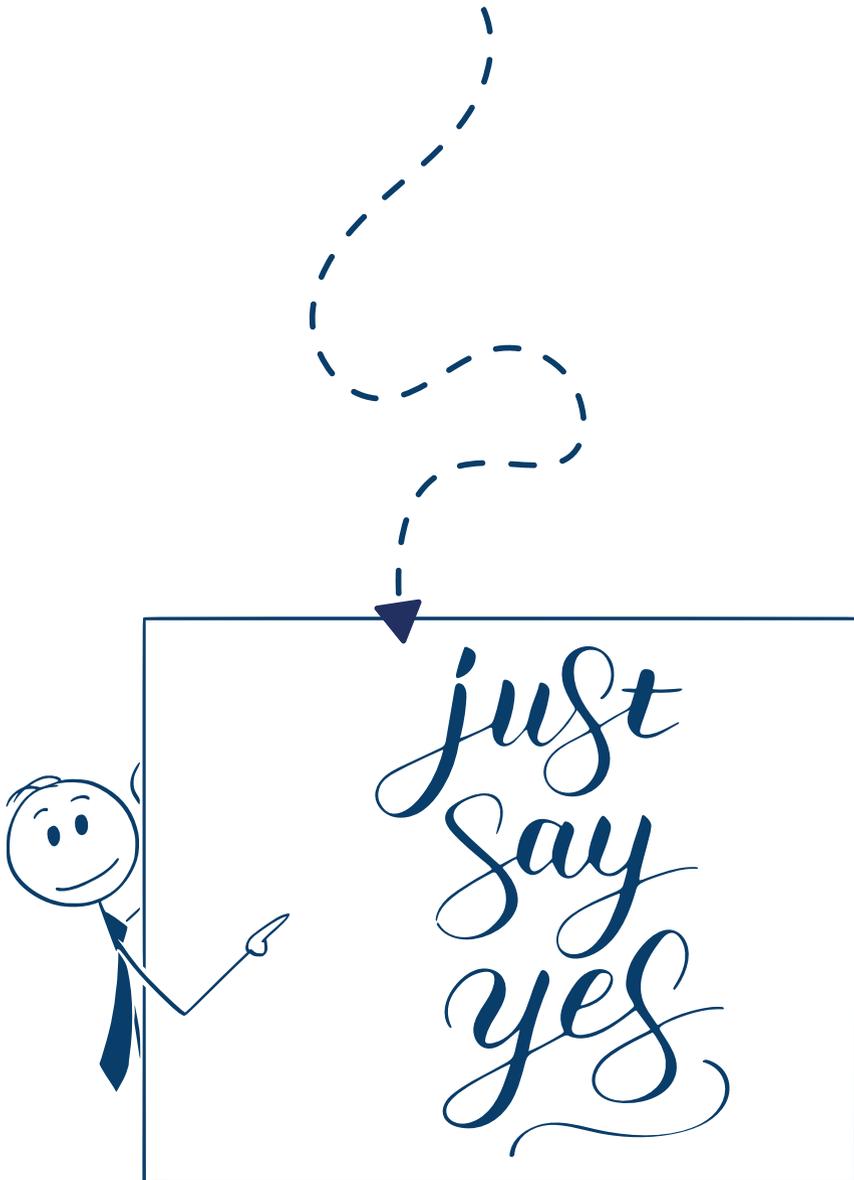
For anyone interested in business storytelling, this scene serves as a powerful illustration of how narratives with stories can break down barriers and open minds.

If you are interested in learning even more, there is an incredible webinar by Javier Bernard that blends many of the concepts of this chapter with an interesting flare.

I included its link on this book's free [PDF companion](#) download for you as extra support. Make sure to check it out.

By understanding the distinction between show and tell and utilizing all the story DNA elements we discussed, we can approach storytelling more purposefully, creating stories that engage and inspire rather than simply recounting events. Even in business settings, this is possible!

If you're starting to get connected with this idea, then...



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