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## ***Dave Lieber's Storytelling Tips***

***Learn. Practice. Shine.***

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**EVERY COMPANY HAS A STORY TO TELL** Every day, stories of overcoming problems, helping customers, making improvements happen all around you. The best ones — that show 'universal truths' about your company — should be shared.

**YOUR BRAND SHOULD BE YOUR STORY** Only a few years ago, a company needed a website. Now websites are becoming somewhat obsolete. The new medium is story. Through social media, in conversation, through advertising and marketing. Actually, it's not new. It's back to our earliest roots in humanity.

**YOUR MARKETING — TO BE EFFECTIVE — SHOULD TELL A STORY** We start with the facts we want to share, and our goals and motivation for telling the information. Then we construct a story around it.

**STORIES MUST HAVE SIGNIFICANCE** Stories you tell or write should be more than about something interesting that happened to you. Your stories ought to reveal a universal truth about the human condition — something that brings deeper meaning and triggers heartfelt emotions for members of your audience. If it doesn't, toss it.

**STORIES MUST BE STORIES!** They MUST have a beginning, a middle and end. They must have a hero and a villain, although the villain can be a person, place, thing, trend, etc. They must have a plot and a climax with some type of resolution (tying up loose ends) at the conclusion. Stories ought to follow [Dave's V-Shaped Storytelling Formula](#).

**STORIES MUST HAVE A DRAMATIC ARC** that keeps the readers/listeners entwined as they progress through the story. Each piece of the tale must lead to the next.

**YOUR SALES PITCHES MUST TELL A STORY** Don't sell with the facts. Sell with the emotion. Storytelling taps emotions, heart and 'brain happiness.'

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**STORYTELLING WORKS INTERNALLY AS WELL AS EXTERNALLY** Messages need not have bullet points and be fact laden. Short stories will be read by more. Charts and numbers on a screen for company communication events make the work dull. Liven with stories, told in different ways. The facts will be remembered.

**Combine “The Magic V-Shaped Storytelling Formula” with these four main storytelling techniques in both writing and in telling.**

1. **Scene by scene construction.** Told as if in a movie. Show, not tell.
2. **Dialogue in full.** Characters talk instead of being described.
3. **Told with strong point of view.** Through the eyes of a character.
4. **Use “status symbols”** to bring stories to life.

### **MORE STORYTELLING TIPS**

**Consider splitting your story for effect.** When you are training, instructing, educating, one technique that works is to take them through your big story, and at the most dramatic moment, break off, promise you will get back to it later. Then quickly go through the instructional portion of the program to satisfy the meeting requirements. When you can, re-launch the story and do your best to customize it to that industry (based on your research) as you steer your story towards its climax and resolution. (You’ll see me do that with YOU!)

**Stories must be sparse.** Not a single wasted word or phrase. As you tell your stories, think what words, sentences, phrases or sections can be eliminated.

**Structure of the story.** Following up on previous, look at each part of a story as a floor in a building. And each floor builds upon the one underneath it. Anything that is not absolutely crucial to the building’s integrity can be deleted. That’s how you cut a 30-minute story to 15 minutes. Or a 5-minute story down to 2 minutes. Hint: Audiences eyes glaze during weaker sections of a story. And ALWAYS keep the parts that draw laughter! Nothing works better than humor. Nothing.

**Your story constantly changes.** A story evolves. It changes as you become more sophisticated in its telling. You watch audience reactions. You keep what works; you throw out what doesn’t. During the storytelling, you will actually hear yourself come up with new lines, new funny parts and descriptions. They pop out of your head in the retelling. If these new pieces work, (you can tell by audience laughter, deeper eye contact or vigorous head nodding) you keep them. These add-ons emerge from your subconscious, your writer’s muse.

Listen to your muse! The muse is buried inside each of us. It fosters our hidden storytelling talent, and we ignore it at our own peril. Tap your muse and let it flow.

# Excerpt from *The New Journalism*, edited by Tom Wolfe

Published in 1975 by Picador

**[The following is included in Dave Lieber's storytelling manual,  
"The High Impact Writer"]**

I discovered this book in a London bookstore on a trip while in college. As soon as I read the opening chapters penned by Wolfe, I immediately realized that this was how I wanted to write.— and speak — for the rest of my life. Let me share the two most important pages:

## **Tom Wolfe writes:**

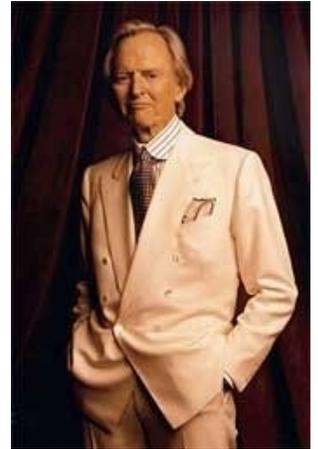
By trial and error, by 'instinct' rather than theory, journalists began to discover the devices that gave the realistic novel its unique power, variously known as its 'immediacy,' its 'concrete reality,' its 'emotional involvement,' its 'gripping' or 'absorbing' quality.

This extraordinary power was derived mainly from just four devices, they discovered. The basic one was **scene-by-scene construction**, telling the story by moving from scene to scene and resorting as little as possible to sheer historical narrative. Hence the sometimes extraordinary feats of reporting that the new journalists undertook so that they could actually witness the scenes in other people's lives as they took place — and record the **dialogue in full**, which was device No. 2. Magazine writers, like the early novelists, learned by trial and error something that has been demonstrated in academic studies: namely, that realistic dialogue involves the reader more quickly and effectively than any other single device. (Dickens has a way of fixing a character in our mind so that you have the feeling he has described every inch of his appearance — only to go back and discover that he actually took care of the physical description in two or three sentences, the rest he has accomplished with dialogue.)...

The third device was the so-called '**third-person point of view**,' the technique of presenting every scene through the eyes of a particular character, giving the reader the feeling of being inside the character's mind and experiencing the emotional reality of the scene as he experiences it. Journalists have often used the first-person point of view — 'I was there' — just as autobiographers, memoirists and novelists had. This is very limiting for the journalist, however, since he can bring the reader inside the mind of only one character — himself — a point of view that often proves irrelevant to the story and irritating to the reader. Yet how could a journalist, writing nonfiction, accurately penetrate thoughts of another person?

The answer proved to be marvelously simple: interview him about his thoughts and emotions, along with everything else. This was what I had done in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, what John Sack did in *M* and what Gay Talese did in *Honor Thy Father*.

The fourth device has always been the least understood. This is the **recording of everyday gestures, habits, manners, customs**, styles of furniture, clothing, decoration, styles of traveling, eating, keeping house, modes of behaving toward children, servants, superiors, inferiors, peers, plus the various looks, glances, poses, styles of walking and other symbolic details that might exist within a scene. Symbolic of what? Symbolic, generally of people's *status life*, using that term in the broad sense of the entire pattern of behavior and possessions through which people express their position in the world or what they think it is or what they hope it to be.



**Tom Wolfe**

The recording of such details is not mere embroidery in prose. It lies as close to the center of the power of realism as any other device in literature. It is the very essence of the 'absorbing' power of Balzac, for example, Balzac barely used point of view at all in the refined sense that Henry James used it later on. And yet the reader comes away feeling that he has been even more completely 'inside' Balzac's characters than James's. Why? Here is the sort of thing Balzac does over and over. Before introducing you to Monsieur and Madame Marneffe personally (in *Cousin Bette*) he brings you into their drawing room and conducts a social autopsy: 'The furniture covered in faded cotton velvet, the plaster statuettes masquerading as Florentine bronzes, the clumsily carved painted chandelier with its candle rings of molded glass, the carpet, a bargain whose low price was explained too late by the quality of the cotton on it, which was now visible to the naked eye – everything in the room, to the very curtains (which would have taught you that the handsome appearance of wool damask lasts for only three years) – everything in the room begins to absorb one into the lives of a pair of down-at-the-heel social climbers, a Monsieur and Madame Marneffe. Balzac piles up these details so meticulously – there is scarcely a detail in the later Balzac that does not illuminate some points of status – that he triggers the reader's memories of his own status life, his own ambitions, insecurities, delights, disasters, plus the thousand and one small humiliations and the status coups of everyday life, and triggers them over and over until he creates an atmosphere as rich and involving as the Joycean use of point of view....'

#### Dave's Favorite New Journalism books that show great storytelling

- *The Right Stuff* by Tom Wolfe
- *Fame and Obscurity* by Gay Talese
- *I Want to Thank My Brain for Remembering Me* by Jimmy Breslin
- *Bad Dad* by Dave Lieber (yeah, that's me!)

# Dave Lieber's V-Shaped Storytelling Formula

