

Ten top tips to becoming an Awesome (Big Word of Mouth) Storyteller.



1. Follow the Big Word of Mouth rules

Rules? Yessiree, of course there's rules. There's always rules. But they're pretty straightforward. Okay, so there is a broad theme and we're happy for you to interpret it as you like but we sure don't want to be thinking, great story but what's the connection to the theme? The story needs to be true and it needs you at the centre. This is not the time to tell us about that summer when your sister nearly got taken by a shark. We want *you* to share *your* story with us. It's also not the time to give us your rant on whatever the heck has got your goat right about now. And no, it's not stand-up, so don't think we want you to test your new set on us, hilarious though it no doubt is. And you have five minutes to tell us that story. Okay, so we give you a minute's grace after the five-minute bell has rung, but really, do aim for five. That's about it, as far as rules go.



2. Rummage around in your life for the story

So how to start? Well, understand that all the stories are right there within you. Because they have to be true, right. So it's really sorting through your memory and finding that episode of that sitcom or that drama which is your life. Because you've lived it, you see. Maybe there are a few 'episodes' which match the theme, in which case you could let it all percolate in your mind for a few days while the possibilities are revealed in your brain's search engine. Then you'll spot the story in there, along with a million other memories and situations and dramas and life experiences you've accumulated. And you're ready for the next step.



3. Start making notes

Jot down what happened in chronological order. Consider the back-story. We don't need a lot but if the story happened while you were a kid, or a young parent, or overseas on holiday, we need to know enough that we can put the story in that context. What happened to get you to where the story happened? What does the audience need to understand about you, about the situation, to understand what is at stake in the story.



4. Where's the meat?

Speaking of stakes, a story without anything at stake is just a rambling nothingness, so make sure you know what you are set to win or lose in your story. Create empathy by showing your motivation and that of the other characters. So please, have some skin in the game. Help us understand how important the story is.



5. Reel them in

Now, it's time to think about the hook. Because that's what you want to do with your listeners, hook them in with a dramatic start. You're not going to start with, *um, hello, this is about a time I got lost at the beach*. No, you'll front up to the microphone and just start. Consider, *it was hot and we were going to the beach*. That's okay but then compare it to, *my four-year-old thighs stuck to the vinyl car seat*. Aim for a bit of drama and approach your story with confidence, something that says to your audience, *it's okay, I've got this, come with me*.



6. **Get some emotion going on**

Show us how you're feeling. There's a fab energy exchange that occurs between the teller and the listener, where emotional responses are mirrored and connections are made. Make us care and you will hold us in your hand and we will gladly follow you to the end.



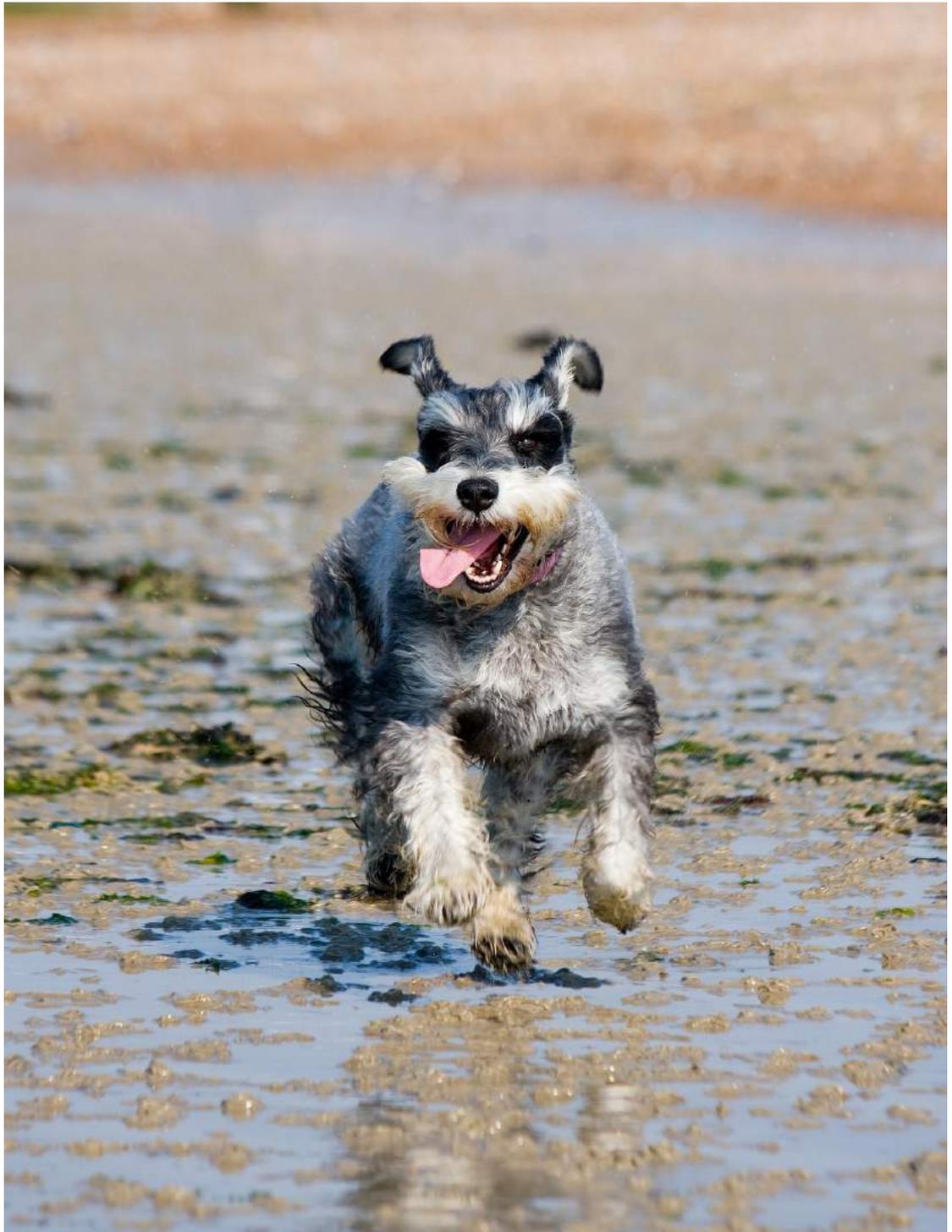
7. Write your story

Have a look at that list of chronological events you jotted down and now write the story. Maybe you will tell it in that order, maybe you'll move through time a bit, backwards and forwards. Read your story out, record it, time it. Play it back. Have a hard copy of the story with you while you listen to it. Run a pencil through the bits that don't work. Discard anything that doesn't propel the story forward. Edit and edit it until you have a little less than five minutes of story. Read it again, slower this time. Allow for pauses; don't feel compelled to fill them with *ums*. Having little moments of silence adds gravity, or allows for a chuckle, or time for the audience to process what you've told them. Speak more slowly than you think you need to.



8. **Let the barrier down between you and your audience**

Memorise the first line and the last. You might also want to memorise some key points to help you with the order, but remember this; a story told by rote is boring even if it was once a good story. A memorised story creates a barrier between the teller and the listener. You can engage more with your audience by not reciting a story, but by telling a story you've practised and thought hard about.



9. **Bring your best energy**

When you give yourself to the story, investing a good level of energy and effort in it, you show your audience the value of it. Bring low-level energy and what you're saying is, *I can't really be bothered telling this*. Don't think we'll care if you don't.



10. **Stand tall, breathe deeply; you're the boss**

You have your first line memorised. You know where you are going. You know the end line and when you deliver that you will anchor it by not rushing it. Trust in yourself and trust in your audience. Everyone wants to see you succeed, the audience is with you. Begin.

Margaret Linley, *Big Word of Mouth*, 2017.