



Springboard Stories:

“Through a story, life invites us to come inside as a participant.”
-- Stephen Denning

In 1997, Stephen Denning was frustrated in his efforts to create a knowledge management system to help the World Bank share information around the world. He had made numerous presentations with impeccably logical charts and graphs. His audiences routinely shook their heads “yes” and then did nothing. Then he heard the following story from a co-worker:

“In June, 1995, a health worker in Kamana, Zambia, logged onto the Center for Disease Control website and got the answer to a question on how to treat malaria.”

Steve began to tell this story and the response of his listeners changed. Suddenly they saw the future and the possibilities for what he was proposing. In his book *The Springboard*, he describes these stories as “less a vehicle for communication of large amounts of information and more a tiny fuse that ignites a new story in the listeners’ minds, which establishes new connections and patterns in the listeners’ existing information, attitudes and perceptions.”

Springboard stories are carefully crafted to ignite new action. They free the imagination and invite the listener to see herself in a better future. They build a sense of confidence and a mindset of action. Here are the basic principles for these gem-like stories:

1. Must be a “story” with a beginning, middle and end that is relevant to the listeners.
2. Must be highly compressed – the original springboard story contained 29 words.
3. Must have a hero – the story must be about a person who accomplished something notable or noteworthy.
4. Must include a surprising element – the story should shock the listener out of their complacency. It should shake up their model of reality.
5. Must stimulate an “of course!” reaction – once the surprise is delivered, the listener should see the obvious path to the future.
6. Must embody the change process desired, be relatively recent and “pretty much” true.
7. Must have a happy ending.

Pat Kelly, CEO at PSS/World Medical has a unique view on the power of stories. His quote which follows also winds up being a mini-springboard story:

We've never had a policy manual.
The way we pass along our values is to sit around the campfire and tell stories.

For more information about springboard stories: www.stevedenning.com