

International Journal of Applied Quality Management

Volume 1 Issue 2

A light gray world map is centered on the page, showing the outlines of continents and major islands. The text 'Storytelling "Quality Way"' is overlaid on the map, centered over the Atlantic Ocean and Europe.

Storytelling "Quality Way"

Navin Shamji Dedhia

ISSN 1742-2647

Abstract

Selling and remembering is easier when connected with an event or a story. Storytelling is an easier way to give a motivational or an inspirational message. It is becoming a major factor in management and organizations as it is more effective. Purposeful storytelling will get results when selling quality to the management. Management will buy an advice or recommendations when presented with a story.

Introduction

“Tell me, and I will forget, but tell me with a story and I will remember” is true. Storytelling is not new. It is an ancient phenomena. Human beings hear the stories from cradle to grave. A child hears the stories from the mother prior to going to a bed. Storytelling in schools, libraries, around the campfire or elsewhere enables the listeners to feel about the happenings. Storytelling to the child is for entertainment purpose or to keep busy, to the youth is for them to feel or provide encouragement, to the adult is for intuition and to the employees is for interaction, collaboration and get actions. A child is always eager to meet grandma as the story time begins with grandma’s arrival. Storytelling is for pass time as well as getting an attention of the listeners.

Hints, instructions, advice and precautions are given in a storytelling way to avoid an adverse situation. A father telling a son how to prepare for a job interview or a mother telling her child to be careful while crossing the road by narrating an event or from the personal experience is very common.

A narrative or story in its broadest sense is anything told or recounted in the form of a casually linked set of events or telling of a connected series of happenings in a free flow manner. Stories can be fictional, true experience, mythological, historical or dreams. We have heard war stories, horror stories, king and queen’s stories, adventurous stories, brave people’s stories, and other such stories. Stories are often set up as myths, history or values for understanding reality.

These days we don’t have a time to read, get information and be knowledgeable. We are under stress and always pressed for the time. We can acquire information and knowledge when presented in the form of storytelling. Many places reading book clubs have sprung up, where one person reads the book thoroughly and presents the summary of the book at the periodic book club meeting. This way everyone gets to know the book and the message gets conveyed from the follow-on discussion.

Our lives are full of stories to learn lessons and teach others. On Monday morning people always are eager to share their week end camping stories or a sports game events to their colleagues. Upon return from a vacation, every one is eager to hear the vacation experiences. We can never get tired of telling our own stories.

Storytelling can get boring if it is not delivered appropriately. A waiter can spoil the mood of a restaurant customer if the prepared food is not served properly, no matter how much delicious food is prepared by the cook.

Testimonials used to sell a product or convince a customer are live examples of storytelling. One cannot convince a prospective member to attend a class or attend an Annual Quality Congress or join ASQ without describing personally derived benefits.

Benefits of Storytelling

It is increasingly being used as a powerful tool in many organizations and businesses to meaningfully convey complex issues and act in a responsible way.

People believe in us and get inspired when told through a story. Storytelling is another way to invite people to get involved in the process of change. It can reach large numbers of people rapidly. With storytelling people can get the idea in a flash. Story telling delivers results quickly. Convincing becomes easier with a storytelling where experiences, happenings or events are narrated in an unusual way. Purposeful storytelling is a tool for getting things done in the world. Storytelling delivers quickly and the listeners can grasp the theme or an idea immediately. Storytelling does not require expensive investments in hardware or software.

Potential benefits of storytelling are communicating ideas quickly, naturally, clearly, truthfully in a convincing way that listeners will believe it. Storytelling provides facts, truth. Audience can trust the speaker as they are involved with the speaker's feelings.

Personal Experiences

The following few examples are testimony of my quality journey, narrating my basic beliefs in quality, my involvement in the quality field, accepting the quality as a profession and volunteering for ASQ.

At home and in a school, excellence and perfection were always emphasized. To be a role model for others to follow personal quality and quality culture were always in mind but, were never taken seriously until some events took place. The journey of quality started with a personal quality and workmanship.

During the 7th Grade middle school in India, one day I was called in the office of Vice Principal. Without knowing the reason, I went to the Vice Principal's office, where our language teacher was also present. The language teacher's complaint was that I haven't paid any attention at improving handwriting despite her frequent instructions. The Vice Principal explained the meaning of

good handwriting and advised for extra care when writing. From that day onwards, I made efforts to improve my handwriting. That was my first lesson in personal quality and workmanship.

In India, in the Engineering college woodworking project was required, where many kinds of wood joints have to be presented as part of the class project. Mating of two wood parts was not easy. Few samples showed to the foreman were not acceptable due to poor workmanship. Then, our foreman talked to us and explained the importance of patience, diligence and quality in workmanship. That was an important lesson in excellence in workmanship.

When I joined IBM in June 1968, during the employee orientation on the very first day the three basic beliefs of IBM got ingrained in me. These basic beliefs are:

1. Respect for the individual – Treat everyone equally.
2. Excellence is a way of life - Do your best.
3. Service to the customer with excellence in mind – Always delight the customer.

These three basic beliefs became my base to get involved in the quality field.

When I worked at IBM's East Fishkill, New York, facility, I was in the Engineering group. I was not directly connected with quality field as such, even though my work involved improving processes through experiments and performing data analysis, sampling, inspection and testing and training production persons. I had always a desire to move to a warm location, as Fishkill, being 65 miles North of New York City, had cold and snowy winters. During 1976, I got an opportunity to move to IBM's San Jose, California, facility. I could not let go that opportunity, even though the position involved in the Quality Organization. That was my first introduction to the Quality Field.

At IBM in San Jose, California, I was in the quality field, but did not know ASQ as an organization. I went to Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina, in 1978 to attend a failure analysis workshop by Ralph Evans. Workshop attendees were invited to join ASQ as a free member for the first year and membership fee was covered by the class. That was my first exposure as the member of ASQ.

When convincing a potential member to join ASQ or get involved as a volunteer, a personal experience can help to promote ASQ. I joined ASQ in 1978, but was not involved actively. I was just an ordinary member satisfied in receiving ASQ's publications. When I passed my Certified Quality Engineer (CQE) Examination in 1982, I was invited by the Santa Clara Valley Section (# 0613) to receive my CQE Certificate as a guest of the Section at the Monthly Dinner Meeting Program. At the meeting I was approached by Connie Pavidis, a Chair-Elect for the Section if I was willing to help the Section. Without thinking further, I said yes and that was my first introduction

to ASQ as an active volunteer. Since then I got involved actively in the local Section, holding various positions as Certification Chair, Chair-elect, Chair, Nominating and Auditing Committee Chair, Advancement Chair and Division Liaison Chair.

At IBM in San Jose, California, facility I reported directly to Jim Harrington. One day Jim asked me if I can initiate a newsletter for the International Chapter members. Prior to that there was no communication to the International Chapter members other than a personal mail from the Chair/Trustee of the International Chapter. Jim being my boss, I could not refuse. Jim also described me many advantages and benefits of creating a newsletter and getting involved with the International Chapter. I visited ASQ Headquarters, Milwaukee, in 1982 to build the contacts for the newsletter. The first Newsletter, named "Quality World" was published in October 1982. That was my second active involvement ASQ.

Since then, I have been actively involved in ASQ's various committees, Division and Board. I have grown with my active involvement in ASQ. I learnt a lot of new skills with an expanded view. I was able to appreciate more quality initiatives taken by the third world countries. This involvement provided me with many more opportunities to build a network with like-minded professionals and life time lasting friendship.

I can go and on describing my quality related experiences. Customer care was experienced at London's Heathrow Airport in 1985, when British Airways employee was asked me questions related to my flight experience as I was getting off the flight. The survey conducted by the airline was to improve its operations. Another customer care example coming to my mind is during staying in a small motel in Hutchison, Minnesota, when my rental car won't start in the morning due to cold weather. Talking to the motel manager to call AAA Service company, the motel manager immediately came out with a big battery charger and helped me to jump the car. That's the way to delight the customers.

Excellent teamwork example could be cited, when the Humphrey the hump-back whale trapped in the Sacramento River Delta, California, was freed and moved back to the Pacific Ocean during October 1986. The efforts to rescue the whale was a good teamwork example of people and various organizations working together.

Conclusion

Storytelling does convey a message in a convincing way. People can believe in you and trust you. It is an excellent way to teach, instruct or provide guidance. I have learnt from my own personal experiences the importance of quality. I do not have any regrets for being in a quality field.

Quality professionals have to report to management on the status of project. With storytelling management could be convinced of the potential benefits of an improvement project and the resulting cost savings. When selling an idea to management, storytelling comes handy to present facts on the analyzed data.

Quality professionals should take advantage of story telling when presenting to a management team. Remember to tell in a nutshell within the time limit constraints. Quality professionals must be able to the story if they expect management to accept their recommendation or advice.

References

1. "Storytelling Passport to the 21st Century – Power of Storytelling"
2. <http://www.creatingthe21stcentury.org/intro5-why-storytelling.html>
3. <http://www.creatingthe21stcentury.org/intro6-benefits-story.html>
4. <http://www.creatingthe21stcentury.org/intro7-why-story-now.html>
5. <http://www.storytellingcenter.com/resources/articles/simmons.htm>