

Storytelling

Holding a meeting is easy. Getting real return is difficult.



The key to successful meetings is to maximise delegate engagement so that they learn, remember and, wherever possible, change behaviour. Messages have to sink in and then stick when attendees return to the “real world”. Keeping audiences engaged is easy to do during networking and social events, but during business sessions, which often end up being a morasse of PowerPoint, it’s not so easy.

The problem is that the rise of new media and an increasingly cluttered multi-channel world has resulted in our attention spans getting shorter. This is making engaging with delegates increasingly difficult, while their demands become greater. So how can organisations make their meetings more compelling to prevent delegates spending time emailing and tweeting in their seats instead of paying attention to what’s going on in front of them? The answer lies in one of the oldest forms of communication known to man – storytelling.

The age old art of storytelling has never been more important. Stories drive people’s spirit, imagination, intellect, heart and hands. A great story will explain a big idea in a creative way, it will be underpinned with clear logic, it will fire emotions and it will motivate people into action.

Meetings, like stories, need a beginning, middle and end.

Beginning: What happens in the first moments of a meeting determines the framework for the rest of the conference. It sets the tone, mood and scene for and produces a state of mind for what is to follow. The beginning establishes order and sequence to our meeting. Note: The opening finishes when attendees understand the kind of meeting they are in and how topics are going to be handled. After this we progress to the middle with some form of transition, usually either a comment, a break, an announcement, a physical change etc

Middle: the middle is the part where it has to happen. Participants should actively dive into and explore the content. Compared to the opening they should receive the information much more slowly and thoughtfully – in bite size chunks so they can chew it and it can be properly digested. The middle is the part of the content that should be “owned” by the participants. It is the point where attendees are furthest from the outside world where new thoughts, ideas, reactions, theories and emotional connections can be made through discussions, workshops, assignments, brainstorm, breakouts etc. Notes: Collaboration and interaction inevitably leads to greater disorder, chaos, and emotion. This should be designed in but requires greater attention to detail and strict time planning.

End: The end is the most vulnerable part of the meeting. Here the meeting comes to a close and messages become irreversible. The end is the last experience and will be prominent in the short term memory. The content conclusion needs to re-establish connection and impact to the reality of the outside world. The end of a story needs a final scene that connects the storylines – and this needs to be combined, summarised and transformed in a final meaning and change transformation by the main character. The end is also the time when the voice of day to day nitty gritty starts whispering louder and louder. Worries about travel schedules, traffic jams, un-read email messages and things to do start to burn. The expectation of the attendee is for the end to tie the storylines of the plot together into a neat knot. When this is achieved the end has a strength and can withstand the inevitable invasions from the outside world.