

Tell Me a Story: How to Communicate and Captivate Your Audience with Hillary Rea

SPEAKERS

Hillary Rea, Lara Schmoisman

Lara Schmoisman

This is Coffee N. 5, I'm your host, Lara Schmoisman. Welcome back to another episode of Coffee N. 5. Everyone who knows me, knows how important is storytelling for me. I always believed that the story is the beginning and the end and all the rest is always additions but if there is not intention in the content, there is nothing to tell. Everything needs to be telling a story and in the middle something needs to change. Today we're going to tell stories and we have Hillary Rea with us. Hillary started her career in a very very unusual way, I will let her tell us that story because who's better at telling stories than her, and today she helps entrepreneurs and leaders to find their own voice and using the art of storytelling as a tool for effective communication. And it's all about being authentic, and honest, is something that I repeat, and I repeat, and I repeat it because I believe in storytelling, I love storytelling. So welcome, Hillary. Thank you so much for being here

Hillary Rea

Yeah, thanks so much for having me. I'm so excited for this conversation

Lara Schmoisman

We need to get over this, I know you probably told the story 100 times but I want to tell it one more time. How your career started.

Hillary Rea

Sure, so my background is in theater but a few years out of college I on a whim thought I wanted to do comedy, I knew I could make people laugh in my everyday life, and I figured okay I've never been on a stage just being funny or telling jokes, why don't I give this a try? And so I did, I signed up to perform in a comedy show and it turned out that I was telling a story with a beginning middle and end instead of really telling jokes, it was funny but it was a full story, and then I discovered that there were live open mic storytelling shows where the comedy didn't matter, you could just go and tell a story and so I had a plan, I... at the time I was freelancing a bunch of jobs to cobble together my life and I cashed in all of my change from my piggy bank to... I went to the bank to the coin counter to pay to get into the storytelling show and I'm carrying this, this you know, these dollar bills that I had cashed in from the bank and I'm walking down the street to the venue and it's pouring rain and a public bus in Philadelphia goes really fast down the street by me and splashes me head to toe

Lara Schmoisman

oh my god! And then you had to go on stage like that?

Hillary Rea

Yes so I go to the venue with my last few dollars, I fill out the form, basically you just you know what the theme is and I was ready with a story, but I filled out the form saying I wanted to tell a story but I put my name in the bag and it's up to the host to randomly select who goes out and so I didn't even know if I would have that opportunity. And not only was I selected, they pulled my name out of the bag first. So here I am, having never told a story in this like style in front of strangers before, I'm soaked, and I have no examples of what to do or what happens, so I just tried... I went with it and it was one of those things where as soon as I started the fear went away, I was fully expressing myself and telling a story that I felt very passionate about and I knew was funny and it wasn't even about the competition aspect of it being a storytelling show where there's judges in the audience, it was just feeling that energy and that connection with the audience that got me hooked with storytelling as an art form and from there I became more curious about how it's used in an everyday communication style, and in a business capacity and so I continued and follow that curiosity and you know through a number of other amazing stories and circumstances formed a whole business around using storytelling as a communication tool

Lara Schmoisman

That's amazing I love your story and I love that you use storytelling. And before the show we were talking about this aspect of using storytelling about explaining things and make them easier, and I remembered the name of the book is The Life of Fred and this is a book that I bought for my kids and explained really difficult concept, math concepts and in real stories, in real life, how you apply it in real life. I'm honored that I got that scale and I love to storytelling and to explain things and I feel like you can get to people better that way. I feel that instead of trying to put dry concepts because that's hard. And so I want to ask like working with you, how you can incorporate someone who doesn't have that skill in their life. Because I feel like I had a client of mine who always told me, you to tell too many stories. it's a waste of time. And I said, I was like, well, because of my stories, you understand better the concept you are, you're remembering a story. And you remember better, which he didn't realize at the time, he thought it was a waste of time.

Hillary Rea

That's a common objection. Like, ah, why. And the objection usually comes up like, Well, why would I try that? Why would I try to use storytelling to explain something, because no one's gonna pay attention, I'm going to talk too long and people are going to lose interest. But it's actually not true. There's science behind it too. And there's all these research studies of putting listeners in a room with a storyteller and and monitoring brainwave patterns and identifying that when someone is telling a story with a beginning, middle and end, and they're fully engaged and bringing the listeners on a journey, and there's an emotional truth in it, that the brainwave patterns of the storyteller completely sync up with the brainwave patterns of the listener. And so I am not a scientist. And I can't speak to that study beyond that little anecdote. But in taking that anecdote, I trust the inherent structure of story. And I also know, like, as a listener, it's like what you said, like, I am so much more invested and engaged and open to understanding if someone is telling me a story versus talking at me, or using jargon that is over my head, or assuming that I have context for things that I don't I'm much more likely to remember what they said, and also how they said it and who they are, if they're using story,

Lara Schmoisman

And also is about the intervention and intentions that he is. And there's a reason why, since we're little kids, people tell stories, because there is a morale, there is something always to learn as part of the story.

Hillary Rea

Yeah. And I think the other reason why people give pushback, or why I've heard similar objections, like what you've said, is that it's that not trusting that it's a learnable skill, that it's either you're a good storyteller, or you're not. And that's not true, either. There are some people and I'm sure they are people in your life. I know there's people in mind that are really good off the cuff storytellers. Like they can just start and like they don't know what's coming out of their mouth. And whatever it is, it's amazing. And I'm enraptured. But for most people, it's work. And the good news is that it's a skill that can be built and honed, and then, like, practiced and used, and then it the amount of work and extra prep that goes into it gets less and less as you use it more. It's like building a muscle.

Lara Schmoisman

I mean it with me, for example, I don't know, I would like to ask this question to you, do you prepare for an for a talk? I don't. I feel, the more I prepare, the more I screw up.

Hillary Rea

Interesting. So I have a very, like I have a process that I take people through, but it came from my original way that I crafted stories. And so I do prep work, but I do it...I do probably the opposite of what people do. I speak before I write. So that's like how I start, like, if I have an idea, I speak it out loud, either to myself or to another person. And then I write, but I don't then take that written version and memorize it. I bring that I like trust that I did a writing process that I can then bring the spoken version to life again. And yeah, I might like outline it before I'm about to go live and speak. But it's that marriage of preparation and in the moment speaking, that, I think is where people need to find like, oh, what percentage of prep do I really need and what percentage Can I trust myself to just be myself in the moment and communicate in the moment? And so I think it's all about individuals finding that balance for themselves. And so I love that you already know that about yourself.

Lara Schmoisman

Well, for example, I speak a lot internationally and I have my slides. But the audience sometimes it's so different in every situation. You have those audience that they're going to be asking questions and you have those audience or they're like, not speaking so I I'm always prepare for the unpredictable. So my slides are basic, and then I just go with the flow I'm, I know my shit so I can I can say it in English, I can say this Spanish, but also I can change the story depends who I'm talking to. And that's really important to know your target audience.

Hillary Rea

And I think that what you just described is possible for everybody to accomplish and I think that there's a lot of people probably listening that feel like that is just like your skill set and your strength and maybe my skill set or my strength, but it is also something that people can work towards as their like as the

style that they communicate. And I love it. And I it is about audience awareness too. And that exchange of energy in the moment and being able to change in the moment if you need to.

Lara Schmoisman

Absolutely the same, like here being in the... I'm gonna tell you a secret. My production team gives me all these questions. I never read them. For every little podcast, and I don't I don't I just love to talk to people or hear their stories. So now team, you know that you don't need to write them anymore. But anyway, I want to ask you something else. Because, for example, my first degree is in screenwriting, I had the honor of having one of the most amazing woman's, her name was Maria Andres Andres, she was basically the one who invented soap operas. And I had an honor of having her as my teacher, I think I was the last class she'd ever thought or one of the last. But I learned from her something that I think changed my life, and that every story has the beginning, the middle, the end. But there is something else that is super important. That is when the penny drops, is the moment of that everything changed the moment that the character or the story changes just because of the understanding of the situation. So it's not the change itself is the understanding that something's changing, or something needs to change.

Hillary Rea

I agree with that wholeheartedly. And I think the first step is acknowledging that there's a beginning, middle and end because I think often people launch into a story or think they're telling a story and one of those components is missing or in some way. But yes, that added layer, and this is the layer that transforms the person listening also can transform the storyteller is that is like the internal reason for telling it. And that that moment of perspective, as the storyteller, looking back on the experience that you lived and bringing that to life for people, so you have a, like a two fold job, you're in the story that you're talking about. And then you're also telling the story.

Lara Schmoisman

Absolutely. But also the stories in the details. And I found that that a lot of people who want to tell the story, they want something they did, and people go too long, they don't know where to stop. So where do you stop giving details, because you can give so too much information. And then it's where the storytelling started disappearing and you lose lost the audience.

Hillary Rea

Yeah, I think part of a story crafting process is once you know, okay, I have this thing that happened to me in my life that I want to talk about. And then you identify that moment, or that life experiences like what that beginning, middle and end is for how you want to talk about it. And then once you have that scaffolding that structure, as you're starting to practice telling it either out loud, or writing is then finding those moments that you can zoom into, to really bring the specificity and the detail to life and that you don't there's parts of the story that will just move forward move you forward and move the listener forward, but then you can really pause and explore a detail and it's not that every part along the way you have to have a detail a detail a detail a detail, but that you really make a choice about and even if it's a choice in the moment of like, how you want like when I was telling you about the bus and the splashing like I brought out more details like a different detail than I would if I told it to you again just

now because I just felt about like I pictured the bus going down the street and the the wave of rainwater going on me

Lara Schmoisman

No, and on also in your story was more important about explained the detail of you getting in that emotional state of getting with that you explain I was getting called into the hallway and the hallway was vague. And they have two doors on the side. So that you need to judge what details are important to the story.

Hillary Rea

Yeah, and so I zoomed in on like my emotional state. Like the the being wet. But yeah, I didn't need to describe the room that I was in or how many people were there or things like that. But yeah, it's like, it's having a choice. It's cool. You have a choice. You can talk about what you want to talk about, but I really like zooming in on what's important.

Lara Schmoisman

Yeah, the elements that they're gonna call this controversial story or takes away the focus to the story. And also, I want to because you brought that before that the humor in the stories, and I feel like I mean, I put a lot of humor in my stories, but sometimes you need to be careful because you don't want to be that joker. That is joke after joke after joke because you take it away from the story itself.

Hillary Rea

Yeah, I know for myself, and it's good that you also have this awareness for yourself that I'm funny, I can own that I love making people laugh. I know that my certain point of view and the humor I give on my own life experience, like, it brings joy to me and brings joy to other people. But I think that it's important as each person is thinking about what stories they want to tell and how they want to tell them to not to choose what types of ingredients you want in your story. So if someone's like, I don't know how to be funny, I feel like that's not a part of who I am. And then they don't have to be

Lara Schmoisman

Exactly, but a lot of people also believe that making fun of yourself, or having fun with yourself. Humor is part of who you are. And in my case is more ironic and sarcastic many times. But that's part of my personality, I need to come across when I write what I because that's who I am, believe me, I don't even say that 90% of the things that come to my head.

Hillary Rea

Yes, humor is has so many different layers and lenses. And so I think that it's just being aware of what your communication strengths are already, and how you like to speak, and how you like to connect with people and building on there. And then if there's things you want to try, like, Oh, I like maybe instead of making a joke about myself here, I'll just be more honest or be like, remember how I felt in that moment. And I felt sad and share that with people and like taking those risks too. And like finding a balance.

Lara Schmoisman

I'm huge about work culture. And we have an... I have always say, the most incredible team in the world, which is totally true. And I'm being honest here, and humble. But the thing is, I tried to bring humor and many times, even I'm judged, I being charged for that, not necessarily by my team, but you're breaking the line between you and your team. And to me, being human is a huge part of being a leader. So um, you know that you work with a lot of entrepreneurs and business owners like I do. So how do you help them to communicate because the communication with your team is huge. You're not only in to talk to them in the professional lingo, you also human beings.

Hillary Rea

Yeah, I have this, this term that I coined, that's part of what I call the Five Key Elements of Personal Narrative and it's, it's called Going Beyond the Blazer. And the reason I came up with that term is because when I first built my storytelling business, after I was performing a lot, and really developed the business, I was doing a lot of trainings where I was going into big companies and working with teams. And I would come in and I didn't know the culture of the team, or how people What relationship people had with each other, or how people treated each other. And so I thought I just had to be buttoned up and professional. And I would put a blazer on and be this version of myself that I now call watered down. Like I just don't think I was fully being myself. And so when I realized that I was doing that, and that it wasn't serving myself and serving how I teach storytelling, I came up with this idea of, you know, storytelling is about finding that bridge between our work life and our professional life and our personal life. And the more we can just show up as human beings to each other, the more effective leaders we can be the the deeper the trust is that we built amongst our team and how and the trust we have with people that are in our audience are our clients and the deeper connection. And so I think as the leader, offering the stories first as a gift to your team, because it's inviting them to then offer stories in return. And also,

Lara Schmoisman

It also is opening the opportunity to see your brain, you're who you are. I feel like my team many times need to have the crystal ball and be ahead of me. And they only can do that by knowing how I will say I would think in such situation.

Hillary Rea

Yeah. And so it's finding that balance and finding like and again, it's baby steps to have like, Well, why do I want to share that maybe isn't directly work related, but it makes sense for what I'm trying to communicate to my team. Like, let me share that that thing for my life to get this point across and like really? Yeah, like integrating the personal and the professional and I think some people have it completely separate and some people are really good at blending. Some people give a little too much.

Lara Schmoisman

Let me ask you a question. Do you feel find any pushback from your entrepreneurs? Because I felt like being an entrepreneur many times is a very lonely place, and probably for you too, because we find the set of skills actually I was talking today in another in a radio show about this with Forbes Riley. It's a lonely place in the world. you lose friends and you left friends behind because being an entrepreneur is not only a lonely space that you try to do everything for yourself only someone who's going up who

went through something very similar can understand the struggles the winstep roller coasters that it feels

Hillary Rea

Yeah, I try as much as possible to share my life experiences as an entrepreneur and sometimes it takes me a moment to process what's going on, and so whatever is happening isn't ready to be a story but I'm constantly looking for the stories that I can tell that will help me understand my path, and help other people understand. But I think, again this is a common thing that I hear from entrepreneurs specifically, is oh well I'm not at my ending yet like I haven't gotten that six figure contract and I'm not working 20 hours a week and traveling around the world so why would I talk about what's happening to me, because it feels messy or it feels like I'm still have so many hurdles. And my pushback to that... well it's real, and then my pushback to that is like well that's not actually a real ending, and then the only ending we're ever waiting for is death, and so there's like honestly you can find ends to every life experience and you can tell a story with a beginning, middle and end without like waiting for this like Disney ending for your life to happen

Lara Schmoisman

And that's why you could have always the next chapter or you can have a spin off or you can write another series of the other part of your life

Hillary Rea

Right and so really like once people accept that, and they're like oh but I do have so many stories to tell even if I'm... if that's not... like if I don't have to wait for that because there's all of this other stuff that I can talk about, that's relevant to my work, relevant to who I am now, relevant to my values. And so I think like once people see that they don't have to wait... then it... they have the freedom to, an even if it feels like an isolating experience, I think sharing an entrepreneurial story with with an audience of other entrepreneurs as a way to then connect and not feel isolated

Lara Schmoisman

Absolutely. I got to ask you, usually ask to give me three tips, but this time I'm gonna ask you to give me six tips...why... I want to know first why you should use storytelling

Hillary Rea

Okay so so are you asking me six different questions or you want six answers?

Lara Schmoisman

no, no, no, I want three tips about how to, why you should use storytelling and then i want to three tips in how to us storytelling

Hillary Rea

Okay. For the why is that they leave a lasting impression and so if you want to be remembered use storytelling. That's reason number one. Why... it makes people understand what you're saying in a clearer way and allows people to actually listen to what you're saying in a deeper way, that's number two. And then my third one why it's a really fun communication tool to use that actually makes a lot of

professional communication easier to handle to conquer and that fear of public speaking or what will happen what will these people think of me worrying about judgment that all goes away because you can trust the tool and trust the stories you're telling that they'll do all the work for you

Lara Schmoisman

Perfect. About how to use storytelling

Hillary Rea

So I think one great how is to start with a story. So whether that's when you're introducing yourself to new people, if you're giving a big presentation and you want to grab people's attention, if you're going on a podcast or you have a podcast opening your host intro with a story. Starting with a story grabs attention and keeps people invested

Lara Schmoisman

Oh my god we should totally do that! From now on I'm changing how we do the podcast. That's a brilliant idea

Hillary Rea

I'm more likely to continue listening to a podcast if the host begins with a story even if it's the intro to a guest, like if they bring me in with a story from their life I do not hit pause, I keep listening

Lara Schmoisman

You got me on that one. And I gonna use it well. Thank you so, so much for being here and for the tip and I hope that you start listening to the podcast because I gotta be telling a lot of stories from now on

Hillary Rea

Yeah! I'm so excited

Lara Schmoisman

Well, thank you, thank you, thank you for being here. This was great

Hillary Rea

Yeah, of course. Thanks so much for having me

Lara Schmoisman

Thank you for joining us. If you like the show, remember to leave a review. I will really appreciate it. If you want to know more about marketing and and myself, follow me on Instagram. My handle is Lara Schmoisman. Was so good to have you here today. See you next time. catch you on the flip side. Ciao ciao.