

Storytelling and leadership flashcard



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Storytelling can be an effective management tool for corporate leaders. Through the use of stories to illustrate successes and /or failures, the corporate leader is able to transfer or communicate knowledge to his members, and make the organization that he leads one that is constantly learning and working with him. Louise Brooking's book *Corporate Memory*(1999) presents knowledge management expert Karl Wiig's four types of corporate knowledge: Goal-setting or idealistic knowledge; Systematic knowledge; Pragmatic knowledge; and Automatic knowledge. Peter Senge presents his concept of the learning organization in his book *The Fifth Discipline: The art and practice of learning organizations* (1990). Senge's (1990) five disciplines' key competencies are: 1) Systems Thinking; 2) Personal Mastery; 3) Mental Models; 4) Building Shared Vision; and 5) Team Learning.

Using Senge's (1990) learning disciplines, and Wiig's (cited in Brooking, 1999) four types of knowledge as bases for analysis, the stories presented in *The Leadership Moment; Nine True Stories of Triumph and Disaster and Their Lessons for Us All* (Useem, 1998) can be analyzed for the type of leadership learning discipline each embodies, and the type of leadership knowledge transfer each story exemplifies. Through this analysis, one can clearly see the power of stories to enhance the growth and learning of an organization, and that stories can impart the same concrete principles as the prescriptive list presented in the *One Minute Manager* (Blanchard, Johnson, & Johnson, 1981). In *The Leadership Moment; Nine True Stories of Triumph and Disaster and Their Lessons for Us All* (1998), Michael Ussem offers nine stories of leadership during crucial decision-making moments and the resultant

outcomes. Useem (1998) appears to have selected these stories to provide the reader with very discrete leadership lessons. He provides a short-list of the leadership principles demonstrated within the nine stories: know yourself, explain yourself, expect much, gain commitment, build now, prepare yourself, move fast, find yourself, and remain steadfast. In stating that “ Leadership requires us to make an active choice among plausible alternatives, and it depends on bringing others along, on mobilizing them to get the job done.

Leadership is at its best when the vision is strategic, the voice persuasive, the results tangible. At the end of the day, leadership is what we’ve left behind that has made a real difference for the people and visions we value. ” Useem (1998, p. 266) is restating the concepts of leadership and the power behind stories to strengthen leadership that Senge (1990) and Wiig (cited in Brooking, 1999) propose in their work. Useem (1998) summarizes his analysis of the nine leadership moments by noting that “[the single most important] lesson from these moments is the overwhelming significance of vision and action.

“ One Minute Manager (Blanchard, Johnson ; Johnson, 1983) is a stark contrast to the fable-like approach of Useem’s (1998) book The Leadership Moment. One Minute Manager is set out like a prescription to good leadership practices, not just in the business world or workplace, but also in how you manage your life. While it may not have the excitement value of Useem’s (1998) book, it still effectively delivers similar messages about leadership practices and the importance of continuous learning and communication of knowledge. Read about transactional leadership in <https://assignbuster.com/storytelling-and-leadership-flashcard/>

nursingUseem (1998) begins his leadership chronicles with the story of Merck's Roy Vagelos in the 1980's.

As CEO, Vagelos committed hundreds of millions of dollars to develop and distribute a drug to cure River Blindness, even though the people who needed the drug would never be able to pay for the research and development, testing and distribution. Vagelos' story provides a good example of Systems Thinking and Goal-setting or Idealistic Knowledge. Vagelos is an inspiration through his determination to go against the for-profit mainstream to achieve his vision/ goal for Merck &Co. His ability to inspire the employees of this organization give further credence to Vagelos as a visionary leader. Next, Useem (1998) introduces the reader to the smokejumper Wagner Dodge in 1949.

Dodge lead a crew of fifteen men into the face of a fast-moving forest fire. Despite holding the key to getting his crew to safety, his lack of history with the crew, and his own lack of self-confidence prevented him from performing as an effective leader with the tragic outcome that most of the crew died in the fires. This story is an example of when the Mental Model and Pragmatic Thinking are not used effectively in the leadership role. Dodge's story is a cautionary tale and a reminder to leaders of the value of decisiveness.

Useem (1998 p.

53) said. " If we don't talk the vision, some people will begin to wonder, is there a strategy? When he really needed it, his leadership failed him terribly. A great time to build your leadership and your team is now, before you need it later on. " In 1995, Hollywood introduced the public to Eugene Kranz,

played by Ed Harris. Useem (1998) recounts the gripping 1970 story about how Kranz effectively lead his team at NASA through getting the Apollo 13 astronauts back to earth after a disastrous explosion disabled the spacecraft.

As a strong, omnipotent leader, Kranz epitomized the cool-headed, boy scout credo “ always be prepared”. “ Winning the confidence of your people now may well be invaluable in a yet-unforeseen time when you face the ultimate test... [However,] early investments in winning support among even your most stalwart opponents may make the difference between success and defeat when it counts most. (Useem, 1998 p.

81). Not unlike Vagelos, Kranz wasn't afraid to push the envelope to achieve his goals. Kranz leadership style could be described as falling within the discipline of Team Learning and Systematic Knowledge, both high levels of functioning within the corporate world. In 1978, Arlene Blum lead the first women's ascent of the dangerous Annapurna peak in the Himalayas.

As Useem (1998) presents the story, Blum demonstrated good leadership in her decision to allow the group to determine which two climbers would do the final ascent. This decision strengthened her credibility with the group and helped them refocus on their collective goal thereby making her a more effective leader. Blum demonstrated Personal Mastery Learning and Systematic knowledge. Useem (1998) presents yet another compelling story about the power of engaging all members of the team in a collective vision. Civil War commander Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain faced the visceral horrors of Gettysburg, 1863, and lead his company of mutinous troops into battle at Little Round Top.

Chamberlain had a company of misfits who had proven difficult to lead. “ Chamberlain had been able to recruit 120 mutinous Union soldiers, and many small steps that Chamberlain took determined their willingness to take up muskets and fight for him, and their willingness proved crucial his ability to hold Little Round Top on the second day of the battle. ” (Useem, 1998 p. 131) He was able to engage his soldiers at a personal level to gain their loyalty. The resultant loyalty lead to a team with a common goal allowing them to succeed under Chamberlain’s leadership.

His story demonstrates the need to know your team at all levels, and the need to get them to invest in a shared vision. Chamberlain demonstrates Team Learning and Goal Setting or Idealistic thinking. In another cautionary tale, Useem (1998) presents John Gutfreund who came very close to losing Salomon Brothers in 1990 after he ignored the presence of an unethical Treasury Bond trader on his own team. Gutfreund’s story falls into the same category as that of Wagner – how not to lead, although it ends on a more positive leadership note. Where decisive, timely leadership decisions were required, Gutfreund did not respond. His story demonstrates a lack of Mental Model Learning and Pragmatic Knowledge.

By contrast, Warren Buffet saved the day by calling the Secretary of the Treasurer to reduce the penalties to be imposed on Salomon Brothers, thereby allowing it to survive, and eventually flourish under his leadership. Useem presents the reader with the charismatic power of Clifton Wharton and his restructuring of the TIAA-CREFin, a \$50 billion pension system that had been steadily failing its customers. Wharton took the reins of the faltering TIAA-CREF in the 1990’s and was able to turn it around and create a <https://assignbuster.com/storytelling-and-leadership-flashcard/>

responsive financial organization that recognized and met the needs of its customers. Similar to Joshua Chamberlain and his troops, Wharton made it his business to get to know the people who contributed to and used the retirement fund at a personal level, and insisted that all levels of employees employ these same principles in their handling of customers.

Wharton was once heard to say that the biggest mistake a leader can make is to assume all wisdom is concentrated at the top (New York Times, 1992, p. A14). Wharton demonstrates the concept of Shared Vision and Goal-setting or Idealistic knowledge. Nancy Barry left a powerful position at the World Bank so she could lead the Women's World Banking in its fight against Third World poverty.

Barry saw first-hand the potential good of microfinance for impoverished countries. She honored her personal philosophy that everyone put on this earth has a purpose, and followed her belief that her purpose was to fight poverty through her leadership skills and financial knowledge. I felt that my whole life had been preparing me to do this job. " (Useem, 1998 p.

209). Her passion for her work contributed to her success as a leader. Barry demonstrated Automatic knowledge and Systems Thinking. In his final story, Useem (1998) introduces the reader to Alfredo Cristiani.

Cristiani is credited with negotiating an end to the long civil war in El Salvador in the 1980's. Cristiani's leadership success seems to be based on his ability to know and understand the issues facing the people of El Salvador. He was responsible for bringing the warring factions to the bargaining table to develop the terms of a peaceful agreement that would meet the needs of all

parties. Cristiani demonstrated Mental Model knowledge and Systematic Thinking.

Useem (1998 p. 266) states “ Leadership requires us to make an active choice among plausible alternatives, and it depends on bringing others along, on mobilizing them to get the job done. Leadership is at its best when the vision is strategic, the voice persuasive, the results tangible. At the end of the day, leadership is what we’ve left behind that has made a real difference for the people and visions we value.

” Through powerful narrative, Useem delivers stories of leadership that will be remembered long after the snappy prescriptive leadership guidelines presented by Blanchard, Johnson & Johnson (1982) have faded. These stories bring to life the principles of leadership that Wiig (cited in Brooking, 1999) and Senge (1994) identify as necessary for the success of a growing corporation. Useem single-handedly supports the power of stories to teach responsible, responsive leadership