~ Storytelling ~

Engaging in the Venerable Art and the Science of the Inspiring Narrative to Prompt Action

An Overview and Some Recommended Processes and Exercises

What is a Story? Remember fairy tales like Jack and the Beanstalk that you read as a kid? How about the myths of Zeus and Odysseus that were assigned for homework? These are memorable stories because they taught us a lesson. They opened our eyes and helped us explore a part of ourselves that we might have been unaware of prior to reading that story. In today's fast-paced society that inundates us with competing messages, these same lesson-driven storytelling themes have been used for centuries and continue to be used by the best brands, the ones that successfully find a home in the audience's mind. Stories are designed to persuade an audience of a storyteller's worldview. The storyteller positions characters throughout a narrative and shows what happens to these characters over a period of time. Each character's actions reflect the values they live by and their fate shows us how values and actions are rewarded or punished — teaching a core truth about how the world works. Stories with these themes can move an audience to take action. By calling upon different techniques, stories can help us to navigate through the clutter and inspire action.

What is a Story-Based Brand? While all brands have a story, those brands that have successfully rediscovered the age-old principles of storytelling can connect more effectively with the world and with each other. So, it is important to remember that stories are more than content and a narrative. The story goes beyond what's written on a website, the text in a brochure or a presentation pitch. Your story isn't just what you tell people it's also what they believe about you based on the signals your brand sends. The story is a complete picture made up of facts, feelings and interpretations, which means that part of your story isn't even told by you, particularly as our culture shifts into the digital age.

What can Creating a Story-Based Brand Do for NFHP? Up until now, NFHP has been driven by strategic scientific investments in aquatic habitat conservation. While the national platform, the regional partnerships and the people involved have made considerable strides in voluntary, collaborative conservation, there is a significant opportunity to expand upon this success through the targeted engagement of citizens, businesses and communities. Developing a story-based brand and using it as a primary engagement vehicle can change the game and catalyze diverse involvement in conservation. Also, when combined with the proper framing, creating a story-based brand can leverage the government conservation community's scientific capacity and help to elevate conservation into the social fabric of communities all across the country.

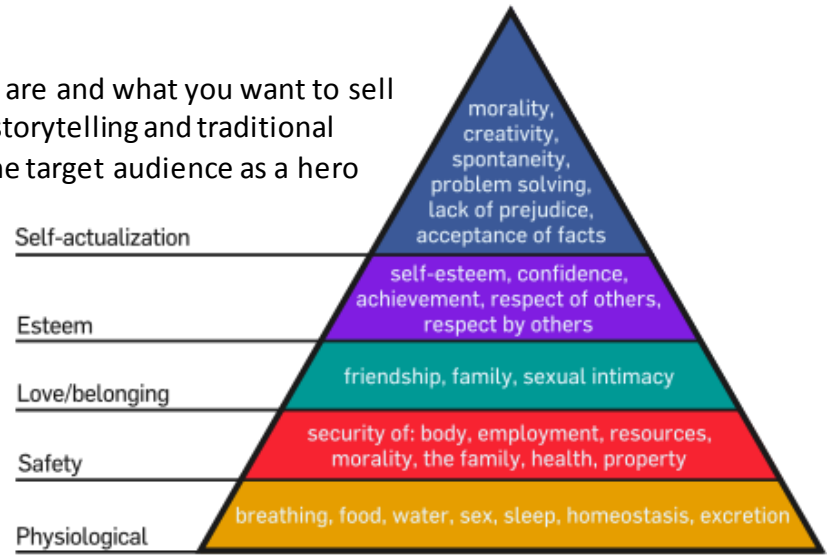
Why Should NFHP Create a Story-Based Brand?

- NFHP already has a logo with considerable ownership throughout the government conservation community. Even though it's not technically a brand, it serves the purpose of creating associations in the minds of conservation professionals around the country. So, creating a story-based brand can maintain the NFHP logo while initiating a campaign to activate the passions of anglers and help to elevate conservation into the social fabric of their communities.
- Budget limitations prevent NFHP from creating a traditional brand that is focused on generating impressions. And doing this will allow NFHP to fully leverage the interconnected power of the web and social media

- Because of technologies, how we communicate on a large scale has evolved over time.
  - Oral storytelling traditions represent one of the earliest forms of communication and have long been a part of human culture. Prior to the advent of broadcast technologies like radio and television, storytelling was the prominent form of communication.
    - Ideas are passed peer-to-peer, through social networks;
    - Ideas are owned, curated and interpreted by everyone;
    - Ideas mutate as they are passed along and if they stop being passed, they die,
    - It's a survival of the fittest landscape.
  - Radio and television ushered in a new era – the Broadcast Era
    - Ideas are distributed one to many, through broadcast media that not everyone has access to
    - Ideas are owned by their creator and broadcast to a captive audience;
    - Ideas are fixed and often illegal to change;
    - And it's a survival of the richest landscape.
  - We are now living in the Digit-oral era in which our society has moved into a space where Facebook updates, text messages, emails and tweets dominate our lives. This new digital culture has, maybe without meaning to, opened the door to a re-birth of the oral tradition.
    - Ideas are passed peer to peer, in social networks, and faster than before;
    - Ideas are owned, curated and interpreted by everyone;
    - Ideas mutate when passed along and if they stop being passed, they die;
    - We're back in a survival of the fittest landscape.
- Storytelling needs to be the basis for an overarching strategy for all communications
  - While NFHP has a viable social media approach, an outreach component and the Waters to Watch campaign, the lack of an overarching communications strategy that drives all communications, connects and leverages all of NFHP's assets and helps to engage more people in conservation is an obstacle and relegates NFHP to being just another government conservation program competing for a shrinking pot of funding

Why is Story Telling Different?

- <u>Is not</u> focused on promoting who you are and what you want to sell
- One of the key differences between storytelling and traditional branding is that storytelling frames the target audience as a hero and the brand as the mentor; whereas, traditional branding positions the brand as the hero and the audience as a passive victim that can be fixed by the brand. Also, storytelling builds upon Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to persuade the people you want to take action.



Storytelling Exercises

If you're wondering what 'telling stories' has to do with creating change, then the simple answer is – everything! For those who are intent on being effective change agents, they need to become adept at the art and science and science of storytelling:

- *Maybe it's because we're all so overloaded with information.*
- *Maybe it's because we're all so starved for meaning.*
- *Or maybe it's because, thanks to social media, everyone's become a broadcaster these days.*
- *Whatever the reason, we're all getting the same memo at the same time: if you want to be heard, you'd better learn to tell better stories.*

We are living in a world that has lost connection to its traditional myths, and that we are looking for new ones to give us new meaning. Although such stories are powerful – they touch all of us, frame our worldview, shape our assumptions, subconsciously influence our behavior – not all of us get to write those stories. What appears on the surface to be arguments over ideas or money is in fact fighting for control over cultural stories.

The bottom line -- put down your facts, your threats, your pleadings and your special offers and become engaged in these simple storytelling exercises to create your narrative that taps into passions and inspires action.

- Craft an Elevator Pitch
- Know Our Audience - Develop Character Sketches
- Apply Empathetic Engagement Techniques
- Develop Our Story's Moral
- Align Our Core Values with Maslow's Hierarchy and Use Building Blocks to Solidify Our Brand and Highlight Our Moral
- Using the Hero's Journey and 3-Act Story Structure to Develop Characters and Design Story Elements
- Apply Storytelling's Five Pillars – the MERIT Principles
- Tell the Truth, Be Interesting and Live the Truth
- Making Our Story a Myth