

Storytelling and the Art of Email Writing

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Version 1: Institutional approach
outlining accomplishments and need.

Version 2: Story of one young person
diagnosed with a debilitating disease.

Version 1 raised...

4x

...more than version 2

For a national civil rights organization,
the story version lost by 25%

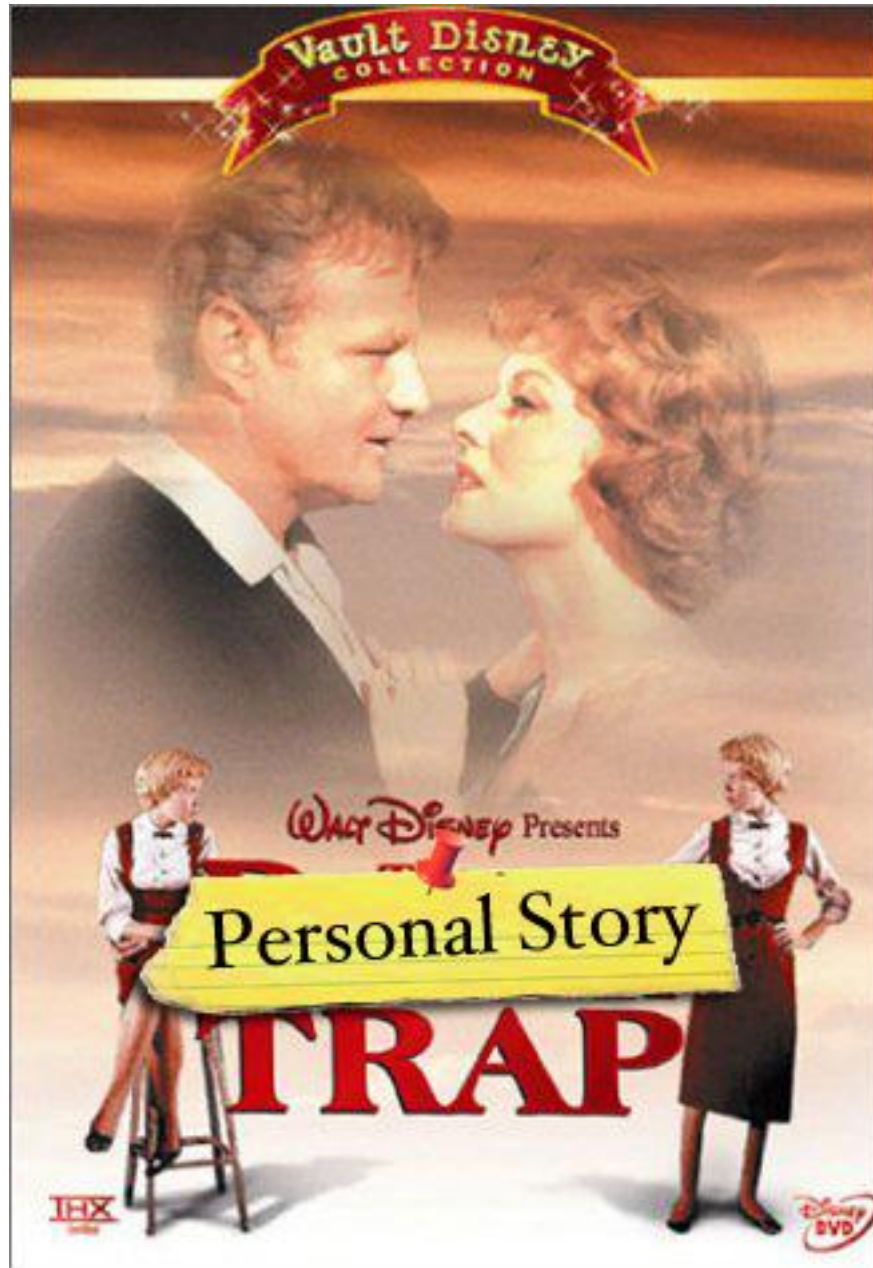
For an international aid organization,
there was no statistical difference

In countless other cases, story-based
appeals have under-performed industry
and client benchmarks

Science tells us stories are powerful...

- **They are universal**
- **Mirror human thought**
- **Shape our identities**
- **Define our social community**

...so what's going on?

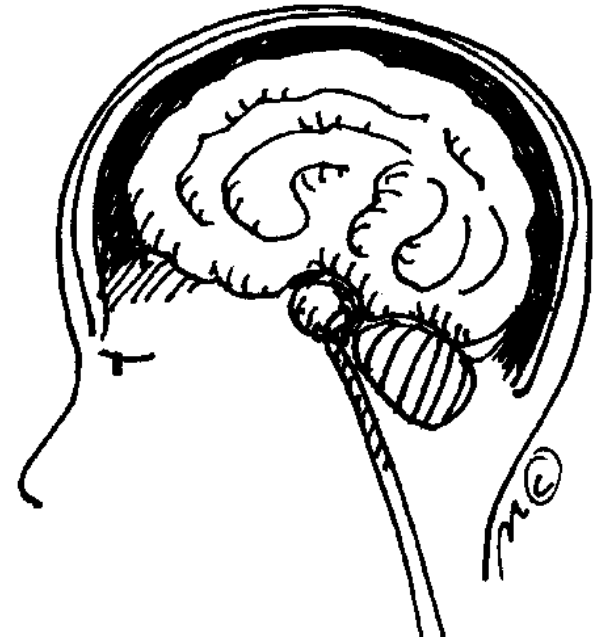


Two Types of Stories:

1) Stories that explain

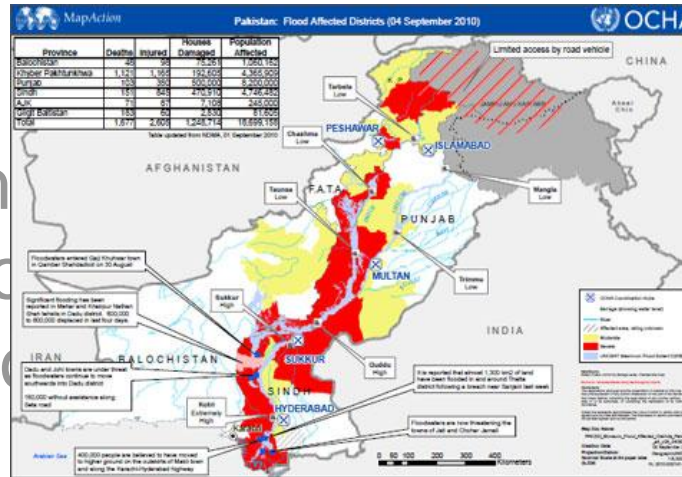
2) Stories that compel

Stories that Explain



1) Replace statistics

In the wake of hundreds of thousands of people are without food, unable to buy supplies without help from



Pakistan, are without supplies

When you're a child it's impossible to Right now in F get food – so *going hungry*



early of adults. Only ways to *en are*

2) Put a human face on work

UNICEF provides
decrease the
provide clean
children.



n tablets to
e illness and
ousands of

When children
river is cloudy
it. UNICEF's
tablets make
clean water a



t matter if a
ll drink from
clean water
access

3) Build your org's credibility

We are the nation's longest-standing faith advocacy organization and have a Charity Navigator 4-Star Rating.

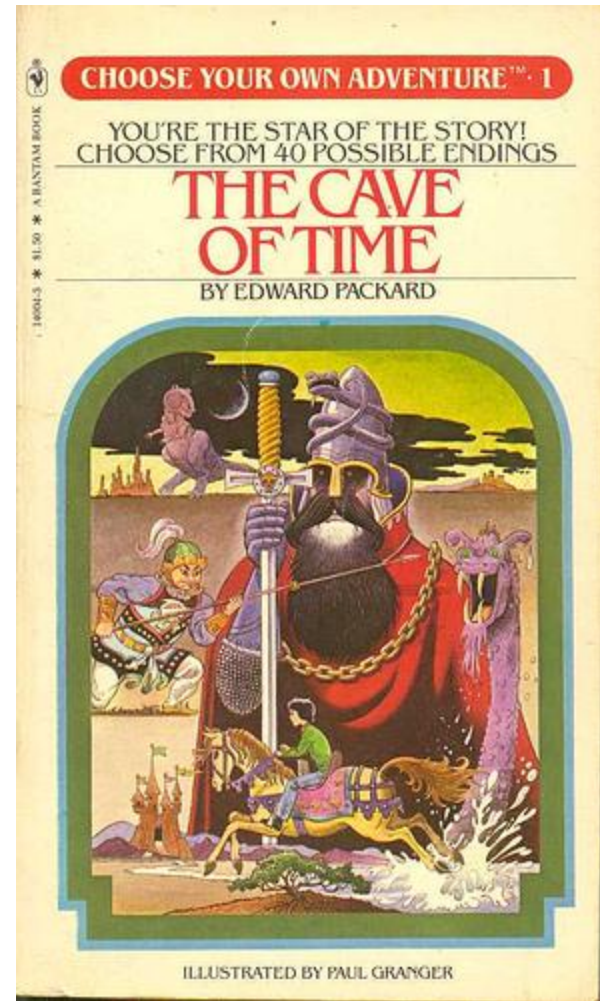
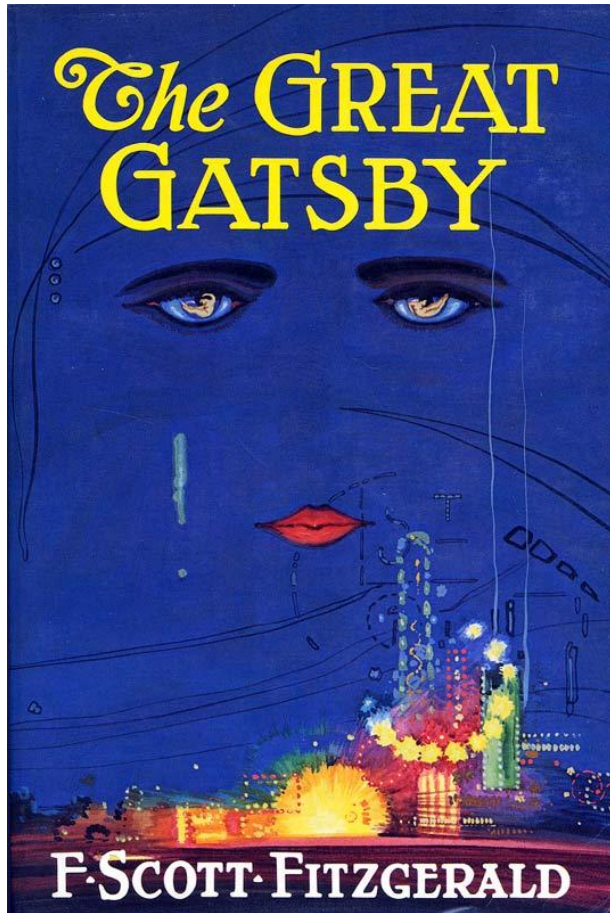
When Glenn Beck puts you “on notice,” you know you must be doing something right...



***Explaining stories don't,
by themselves,
compel readers to act.***

Why do people give?

- 1. To be happy**
“You don't just find our work – you'll know you changed a life”
- 2. To feel important**
“Give today, to become a member and get insider info and updates.”
- 3. To be part of a success story**
“We've saved a van and a leopard. We can save the Asian elephant too.”
- 4. Because everyone's doing it**
“From Massachusetts, a giant broomhead to Jim T., a construction worker in Florida, Americans everywhere have already committed to our fight.”



***People give because doing so
offers them a chance
to write their own story
– and join in a shared story.***

If you remember one thing:

*“Your
organization is
not the hero. The
donor is the
hero.”*

7 rules on how to use storytelling



1. Details matter
2. The right “we”
3. Brag about them
4. They made the difference
5. Describe their heart and soul
6. First act, center stage
7. Explain the choice

Details matter

Use rich details to make your story credible.

Try using sensory details about how it looks, smells, feels, sounds, or tastes.

“It's such a simple package – a cardboard box with the familiar blue UNICEF logo on the outside. But inside is *hope* for a starving child.”

The right “we”

*Use “we” or “us” to refer to **both** your organization & supporters – not just your organization working alone.*

“It’s a team effort. It has to be, if we’re going to put people back on their feet — build clean water systems, teach farmers better ways to grow food, make women safer, make sure girls go to school, or build solid shelters.”

Brag about them – not yourself

If you have to brag, always say who made it possible: your supporters.

“That's precisely what the Clinton Foundation is accomplishing in places like Rwanda, where one program improved harvests 240% – providing 30,000 people with food and thousands of farmers with additional income.

Results like this are why I'm in awe of President Clinton's efforts around the world. **But he can't accomplish this alone – we need your help. ”**

They made the difference

– not their money.

“When you make a donation today, your gift will help protect turtles”

VS.

“When you give today, you will help protect turtles”

Describe their heart and soul
– list what makes your donor special

Frame “giving” as a chance to be that kind of person.

“A gift to WCS is something much bigger than one donation – it's a signal that you believe in a future where tigers, elephants, and gorillas still roam free – and that such a future is worth fighting for.”

First Act, Center Stage

– talk about your donor early on

The donor should have the spotlight within the first 5 paragraphs.

The hero rarely enters the story in the last chapter.

Explain the choice

- giving has consequences

Explain the consequences of the donor's choice to give or not.

“Millions of other children with special needs are hoping for a story like Shannon's – but right now, their fates hang in the balance. Will you let them continue down the path to an uncertain future...or will you step in and help?”

4 Gut-Check Questions to Ask Yourself



1.

*Would I share this story
whether or not it's in an
email?*

2.

Is your story about how awesome you are, or how awesome your donor is?

3.

Is there unresolved tension in the story? Is there a role for the reader?

4.

*What would happen if
your supporters
disappeared at this
moment?*

Q & A