



THE LEAGUE OF  
**EXTRAORDINARY MINDS**

**ACTION DOCUMENT  
for Panel 1**

# **Getting Customers to Always Choose You over the Competition**

*“Expertise is only as good as the actions you take with them. In this program, we’ve gotten you world-class experts. We’ve tried to get you world-class interpretations that we are moving mountains to share with you. What you do with it is up to you.”*

**Jay Abraham & Rich Schefren**

## Panel 1: Getting Customers to Always Choose You over the Competition

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Jack Trout	<a href="http://www.troutandpartners.com">www.troutandpartners.com</a>
Joseph Jaffe	<a href="http://www.crayonville.com">www.crayonville.com</a>
Kevin Hogan	<a href="http://www.kevinhogan.com">www.kevinhogan.com</a>
Michael Bosworth	<a href="http://www.mikebosworth.com">www.mikebosworth.com</a>
Russell Granger	<a href="http://www.7triggersmallbiz.com">www.7triggersmallbiz.com</a>
Bert Decker	<a href="http://www.decker.com">www.decker.com</a>
Stephen M.R. Covey	<a href="http://www.coveylink.com">www.coveylink.com</a>

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### How the ideas from this panel get translated into business growth

This action document is designed to help you increase your credibility and the trust of your target market. We have synthesized the key points from the panel discussion into ten specific actions you can take to use trust and credibility for business growth.

**League of Extraordinary Minds  
Action Document**

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## I. Differentiating Yourself

### Find Your Key Differentiators

1. Do you know who your top 5 competitors are? If you do, list them below. If you don't, determine who shares "brain space" with you in the minds your market, then list those companies below.

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Here are some ways to determine your top 5 competitors:

- Primary research. Ask others in your network to find out what companies are perceived as your competitors.
  - Ask clients what other companies they considered before choosing yours (and why they selected you; this information will be useful later)
  - Ask your suppliers and vendors what companies they provide products and services to that they consider your competitors.
  - Ask your peers and joint venture partners who they consider your competitors.
  
- Secondary research. Whether your primary business environment is online or offline, the Internet is a rich lode of information about competitors.

- Use key words (the ones you are using for your own online presence, or, if you don't have key words, use terms that you believe your market would use to find companies like yours) and a search engine like Google ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com)) or Yahoo! ([www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com)) to generate results.
  - If your company is local in geography, be sure to include location names in your searches. You can also search local businesses using [www.local.yahoo.com](http://www.local.yahoo.com).
  - Click through on the pages delivered by the search engine that lead to companies like yours and determine which really are competitors.
- 
- Make a list. Based on the information you have gathered make a list of the companies that are candidates as top competitors.
  - Do deeper research. With this list in hand, research each company in more detail.
    - Review their web sites fully, search the web for other mentions (e.g., conference speaking engagements, news articles) and follow the results through.
    - Check consumer review sites (e.g. [www.yelp.com](http://www.yelp.com)) to see what has been said by customers.
    - Check social media sites ([www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com), [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com), [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)) to see if the company and/or key members of the company are represented there; if so, follow conversations there as much as possible.
    - Visit their store/offices if they have a physical location.
- 
- Make another list. Based on this second round of research, note the companies that you believe are your 5 top competitors in blanks above.
  - Use the form at the end of this section to assess your strengths and weaknesses and those of your competitors.
    - First, your competitors. For each company on the list you made above, write down responses to the following questions:

- What do they do well (or claim they do well)?
- What do they offer that you don't offer?
- Where do they fall short?

Answer the same questions for your company.

2. What are your differentiators? You now know enough about your competitors and your own company to determine how you stand out (or how you could stand out) in the perceptions of your market. List up to 5 actual or potential differentiators below. Put a star next to the potentials; you will need to make a plan for how to achieve these.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

3. In the space below, write out a narrative statement of how you differentiate yourself in your market. Do not compare yourself to competitors; rather, focus on your company and make positive assertions.

## Make and Rehearse Your Elevator Speech

The “elevator speech” originated in the venture capital space, where companies seeking investors had to cover points of interests quickly and succinctly in order to make it to the next step in the process. The idea of being able to quickly convey the offerings, value, and unique positioning of a company took hold in the sales and marketing space, and the elevator speech became a “must have” for producing results.

In spite of its name, an elevator speech is actually a conversation. The purpose of making and delivering an elevator speech is to make it easy for you to “get to the point” about you, your company, and its offerings in any conversation you have. This is important to keep in mind. You don’t just recite your elevator speech AT someone; you want to weave it into a conversation, and allow space for questions and comments from your listener.

- Starting with the differentiation narrative you wrote above, write a short “script” that communicates:
  - What your/your company does (one sentence)
  - How that helps its customers (real benefits, not just “save them time/money”)
  - What makes you stand out from the competition (one, no more than 2 key points about your differentiation.
- Read the script out loud and edit as needed to make it flow well in oral form.
- Time yourself and edit to get the script to around a minute (absolutely NO MORE than 90 seconds).
- Rehearse your final script until you have it down. It doesn’t need to be absolutely word for word—you will never recite it; you do need to be sure you cover all the points in the script in a natural way.
- To really hone your speech, record yourself delivering it, listen, and adjust until you hear yourself talking normally, naturally, and with energy.

- When you are fully comfortable with your elevator speech, go back over it and identify natural points of response. These are places where you should pause to allow your listener to participate in the conversation. (Keep in mind that the listener's response may take you "off script." That's okay. If you have mastered your speech, you will be able to engage in conversation that conveys the right information about your company.)

Here are some key points to keep in mind about your elevator speech:

- The listener is most interested in what application you and your company have to them. Take the focus off how great you are and instead concentrate on the real benefits your customers get from working with you.
- The more effortless, conversational, and natural you are when delivering your speech, the more memorable and interesting the information will be.
- Leave out jargon and acronyms are too specific for anyone to understand.
- Don't leave out your personality! Make the speech *yours*, with language and wording that is authentic to you.
- Try to include a "hook" at the end of your speech. In other words, end with something that will prompt the listener to keep the conversation going.
- Friendliness, enthusiasm, and passion: Three necessary ingredients to any conversation. Don't leave these out of your speech!
- Remember to breathe! And take things slow...it can be easy to rush through your script breathlessly, leaving your listener stunned and without anything to say.
- If appropriate, conclude the conversation with an action request, like asking for a business card or making a meeting appointment.

Once you have gone through this process once, consider creating other versions of your elevator speech, tailored to different circumstances and different types of listeners.

## II. Taking the Pulse of Your Market

### Conduct a Conversation Audit

The Internet offers a number of ways to take your market's pulse. One of these is the conversation audit. This involves finding sites and online communities where the members and influencers of your market are "hanging out." When you find the key audiences and conversations that impact your customers, competitors, and reputation, you can monitor the state of your market and participate in conversations that will establish your credentials and build trust.

Your conversation audit has three parts: 1) The environment in general; 2) the environment as it applies to you; and 3) the environment as it applies to your competition.

#### 1. General environment

- Where is your market congregating online?

LinkedIn

Facebook

Twitter

Plaxo

Blogs (list top 3-5)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Forums (list top 3-5)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Other online location(s)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

• What are they talking about? List conversations you can effectively participate in and/or subjects you could provide content for?

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

• Who are the influencers in these conversations? List prominent thought leaders, frequent participators, individuals with large followings, any other “stand outs.”

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

2. Environment Applying to You

- Who is talking about you?

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

- What they are saying (circle one: positive, negative, neutral)?

- \_\_\_\_\_ + - N
- \_\_\_\_\_ + - N
- \_\_\_\_\_ + - N
- \_\_\_\_\_ + - N
- \_\_\_\_\_ + - N
- \_\_\_\_\_ + - N

- Where are the conversations taking place?

- LinkedIn

- Facebook

- Twitter

- Plaxo

- Blogs

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

- Forums

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

- Other online location(s)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

- How intense are the conversations? What is the overall tone?

- Where are opportunities?

- Where are threats?

### Keep Track through Alerts

Once you have completed your conversation audit, you can monitor your market and its viewpoint through automated alerts. You can set up particular words or terms in a service that scans the web in general or specific sites; the service will email you with any sites or conversations that include your words/terms.

To set up your alerts, you need to know what terms you want to monitor. Using the results of your audit, list 5 or 6 terms (include your name and/or your company name):

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

#### *Google Alerts (<http://www.google.com/alerts>)*

If you only set up one service, this is the one. Google offers six types of alert searches: News, Web, Blogs, Comprehensive, Video and Groups. The results are sent to you via email on a schedule that you choose (as-it-happens, once/day, once/week)).

- A News alert aggregates the latest news articles that contain the search terms of your choice and appear in the top ten results of your Google News search.
- A Web alert email aggregates the latest web pages that contain the search terms of your choice and appear in the top twenty results of your Google Web search.
- A Blogs alert aggregates the latest blog posts that contain the search terms of your choice and appear in the top ten results of your Google Blog search.

- A Comprehensive alert aggregates the results from the three alert types above (News, Web and Blogs) into one email.
- A Video alert aggregates the latest videos that contain the search terms of your choice and appear in the top ten results of your Google Video search.
- A Groups alert email aggregates of new posts that contain the search terms of your choice and appear in the top fifty results of your Google Groups search.

*Socialloomph* (<http://www.socialloomph.com>)

One of the features of the free version of this service delivers Twitter posts that contain your key terms in one email. This can give you more up-to-date and real time results that the Google alerts provide.

*Video-Alerts* (<http://www.video-alerts.com/>)

Video-Alerts is a free service that allows you to get an email notification when new videos are uploaded to YouTube with the terms you have specified. You can track up to 10 key terms and receive email updates once per day.

### III. Measuring How You Are Perceived

#### Survey Your Market

Surveying one's market used to be a time- and money-intensive initiative, which made this strategy only available to companies that had the resources to pursue it. No more. You can reach out to your market once or many times through online surveys.

Online surveys offer a place for your customers to share their opinions and ideas without having to engage in direct dialog. A well-crafted survey can be a source of accurate information from your market, and can be used to improve your offerings, your reputation, and your sales.

There are a number of survey services, and many offer a free option. This allows you to become adept with surveys without any dollar investment. Here is a short list of services:

- Survey Monkey (<http://surveymonkey.com>)
- Zoomerang (<http://zoomerang.com>)
- Surveygizmo (<http://www.surveygizmo.com>)
- Polldaddy (<http://polldaddy.com>)
- FreeOnlineSurveys (<http://www.freeonlinesurveys.com>)
- eSurveysPro (<http://www.esurveyspro.com>)

There are five steps to a survey initiative:

1. Define: Figure out what you want to get out of the survey.
2. Prepare: Set up the questions that will get the information you want.
3. Test: Do a “dress rehearsal” with a small number of respondents, and adjust if needed.
4. Conduct: Launch your survey and collect responses.
5. Measure: Evaluate the answers you've collected and decide how the information will be used.

### *Define*

- Make a list of what you want your market tell you about your business and your offerings. What questions do you have about your business that your market can answer? What customer complaints have you had in the past 6 months or year that you would like more information about?
- Prioritize your list. Go through and assign an “A” (top priority) or a “B” (secondary priority) to each. Then go through your “A” list and prioritize by number, so that when you are finished you have a unique priority for each (i.e., A1, A2, and so on). Do the same with your “B” list.
- Select the top priority item for your survey. You should only survey around one topic, idea, or concept at a time. If you find that you have a number of high priority items on the list, consider creating a program of periodic surveys, each one focusing on one thing.

### *Prepare*

- Draft a set of questions for your survey. Keep the number of questions short (no more than 10, preferably fewer).
- For each question, decide what type of query is best:
  - Multiple choice, offering a choice of multiple, specific responses per question.
  - Matrix, asking the respondent to rate the question topic along a continuum (e.g., 1 to 5, excellent to poor).
  - Open ended, allowing the respondent to type a narrative answer.
- Review the wording and language of your questions using these guidelines:
  - Eliminate any double negatives, abbreviations, and acronyms.
  - Ensure neutrality in phrasing.
  - Break compound questions (i.e, ones that include “and”) or long questions into shorter, more focused ones.

- For multiple choice questions, provide no more than 5 choices and make the choices short (6 or so words).
  - Use the same rating scale for all matrix questions.
  - Stay away from “if” questions. These will make the survey more complex by requiring the respondent to go one way with “if yes” and another way with “if no.” Reword such questions to avoid this kind of branching.
- Make a final edit of your questions by asking (for each question): What will I learn from this question that will be useful to my business? If your answer is not sufficient, drop that question from the survey.
- Order the questions. Lead with interesting and /or easy-to-answer questions that entice your customers to respond. Put them in a logical order by moving from general to specific. Look for redundancies or inconsistencies from one question to another and resolved these.

### *Test*

Once you launch your survey, you do not want to change it. Therefore, you want to test it first. Doing a test run helps you understand how respondents are likely to answer the questions and also understand any reactions that may be triggered (you can't capture these in the survey).

- Identify a group (between five and eight members) which is a good representative of your target respondents to take the survey.
- Get on the phone or meet in person with each respondent when they do the survey, then ask them how they responded to each question, what words, phrases, and sentences confused them, what worked and what needs improvement.
- Use the feedback from this test to improve the survey and finalize its wording and structure.

*Conduct*

- Determine the number of responses you want to collect. Plan to advertise to significantly more people than you want to hear from: Consider a 4 to 1 ratio (i.e., 400 requests to get 100 responses).
- Invite people to respond. You can do this via email, in person, through a blog, on your website, via press release, or some other avenue appropriate to the group you want to survey.
- Pay attention to the calendar. Take holidays, weekends, time of year into account. For example, publishing a notice of your survey on Monday morning (when people are gearing up after a weekend) or Friday afternoon (when people are preparing for a weekend) will likely be less effective than Tuesday afternoon or Wednesday morning.
- If you keep your survey open for a period of time, send one or more reminders to your invitees.

*Measure*

- Compile responses (many services will do this for you).
- Look for trends and patterns in the responses (your survey will likely not be statistically rigorous, so keep this in mind when reviewing results).
- Note any unexpected responses or ones that raise unconsidered issues.
- Determine the message(s) in the results. Have you obtained the information you were seeking? If so, how will you apply it to your business? If not, what do you need to do differently to obtain what you are looking for?

## The 3x5 Card Habit

Get in the habit of carrying 3x5 cards with you.

- Give people cards any time you have an opportunity to get feedback; for example:
  - a) After a sales pitch
  - b) After a call or teleconference
  - c) After a speech
  
- Ask card recipients to give you feedback on:
  - a) Three positive aspects of your delivery, and
  - b) Three areas where you can improve.
  
- Collect the cards
  
- DO something with them:
  - a) Leverage positive feedback by doing more of the same or adding your strengths to other areas of your business.
  - b) Use the improvement feedback to alter your delivery, fill in missing elements, or make your products or services better for your market.

## Video Yourself

We may be saying the right things, but our nonverbal communication may need attention. Body language, facial expression, and vocal tone are examples of nonverbal elements that influence our listeners.

Video yourself giving your elevator speech, telling stories, giving presentations—or any time you want to see how you are coming across in your delivery.

### *Tools You Need*

Many digital point-and-shoot cameras have a video option. If you use one of these, get one or more “smart disks” of at least two gigabytes each that will fit into the slot in your camera. Tape onto this disk, then remove it from your camera and insert it into the appropriate slot in your computer (if your computer does not have disk slots, you will need to get a card reader with a USB plug and hook it up to your system). You can then view the recording by double clicking on the appropriate file.

Another “quick and easy” way to video yourself is by using a Flip camera (available in stores like Walmart and Best Buy and online at sites like [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)). This rectangular block is extremely user-friendly, fits in a pocket, and plugs directly into your computer with a built-in USB connector.

Another handy item to have to video yourself is a mini-tripod with bendable legs. Screw your camera into it, then either stand it upright on a table or twist the legs around a support and point it your direction. Hit the “tape” button and you’re recording!

### *Evaluating Your Video*

- Watch your video once all the way through without doing anything. Just watch.
- Run through the video a second time and note:
  - 3 things that work about your nonverbal communication.
  - 3 things that need improving.

- Work on improving the 3 items you've noted, and tape yourself repeatedly to gauge your progress.
- When you have made the necessary corrections, go through this process again with up to 3 more items needing improvement.
- Continue until you have corrected all the items you have found.
- Ask a trusted advisor to view your latest video and go through the same process using their feedback.

## IV. Establishing Credibility

### Build Credibility into Your Marketing

You have differentiated your company in your market. You have created a short elevator speech (or more than one) that captures what you do, who you serve, and how you stand out from the competition.

Look at your differentiators from the exercise above, and read through your elevator speech. From these, brainstorm up to three short sentences or phrases that capture the essence of your company and write them below:

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Which one is the most esthetically pleasing (e.g., uses alliteration well)? Which is most memorable?

Select the sentence or phrase that captures and conveys the essence of your company and sets it apart from the competition. Call it a slogan, call it a tag line—you want this phrase to become associated strongly with you in minds of your market and your market's influencers.

Put the essence phrase of your company into every type of written marketing communication you have. Brochures and websites are the more obvious marketing communications to focus on; use the phrase as a springboard to hone the marketing messages in these media. Here are some communication vehicles that may not come as readily to mind:

- Start with your domain name, and, by extension, your email address. Do you have a domain/email address that expresses your credibility?

- a. If you have a domain name that is your company name (or some version of it), consider buying other domain names that point to your primary domain. Construct these secondary names from your essence phrase and/or from key words or terms that capture important points about your company. Forward these domains to your primary site URL so that you provide access to your company's online presence through multiple "doors."
  - b. A side note: If you haven't already done so, buy your name as a domain. This keeps others from owning your name as Internet property, and offers you a space to position yourself (apart from your company) as a thought leader or expert if you wish to do so. You can also use this domain for another email address (e.g. [john@johndoe.com](mailto:john@johndoe.com)) that will be easy for people to remember once they know your name.
- Consider your email signature. Most email programs allow you to create one or more "signatures" that get appended on to each email message. This can be used as a mini-billboard to market your company and/or your offerings in a few sentences or lines. Use your "essence phrase" in your email signature (along with contact information).
  - Use your essence phrase in other signatures, such as those you use when commenting on blog posts or conversing in online forums.
  - If you are participating on social media sites, use your essence phrase there (e.g., as all or part of the 160-character Twitter bio attached to our account).
  - What other places can you use your essence phrase? Postcards, signage, magnetic car door placards, personalized clothing (t-shirts, caps, etc), trade show booths, coffee mugs—the list goes on and on.

**Writing for Credibility**

Appearing in publications or publishing pieces yourself can create instant credibility, authority, and respect from your market, your peers, and the public at large. While writing requires time and effort, the benefits of being published definitely make the resource investment worthwhile.

When your expertise is publicized in articles, white papers, reports, and books, it does not look or feel like advertising, but it works like advertising—connecting you to the subject matter in the reader’s mind.

Here is a matrix for the various types of writing you can do to enhance your credibility and thought leadership.

	OFFLINE	ONLINE
EXTERNAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trade/Industry Journals</li> <li>• Consumer Magazines</li> <li>• Local/National/International Business Publications</li> <li>• Local/National/International Newspapers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forums</li> <li>• Blogs (as commenter)</li> <li>• Blogs (as guest blogger)</li> <li>• Social Media (as commenter)</li> <li>• Trade/Industry/Business Website Publications</li> </ul>
INTERNAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reports</li> <li>• White papers</li> <li>• Books</li> <li>• Articles (self-published)</li> <li>• Magazines (self-published)</li> <li>• Newsletters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reports</li> <li>• White papers</li> <li>• Books</li> <li>• Articles (self-published)</li> <li>• Magazines (self-published)</li> <li>• Newsletters</li> </ul>



The external-offline targets often require the longest lead time, because they require some connection to publication decision makers (editors, reporters, etc). They also often require assistance from a public relations professional who has access to those decision makers and who can get you and your writing in front of them.

If you want to pursue publication in an external communication medium, you can sign up for Writer's Market (<http://www.writersmarket.com>), which offers a comprehensive listing of trade and general publications along with their guidelines for writers.

The three other types of targets take much less time than the external-offline types, and/or are directly under your control in terms of getting them published.

Notice the gold star, which notes that both types of internal writing have the same components. This means that you can double your exposure from one piece of writing. Create a white paper or newsletter, for example, and you can distribute it as a tangible printed piece on sales calls, at presentations, and at tradeshow, and also offer it on your web site (or through other Internet sites that serve your market) and by email to your contact list.

Article banks are avenues that appeared on the Internet a few years ago. They allow individuals to upload articles they have written and make them available to anyone who wish to use the articles on websites, blogs, or other medium. The only requirement is that the user of the piece include the writer's byline as posted with the article. If you upload to a bank, you may be effective in get your name and expertise out to your market fairly quickly, and boost your credibility and sales leads at the same time.

There are a number of article banks operating on the web. Here are 10 of the top banks that cater to general topics. Search the web for "article banks" with key words that characterize your market to locate article banks that focus on your target readership.

- <http://www.amazines.com>
- <http://www.articlealley.com>
- <http://www.articlecity.com>
- <http://www.articledashboard.com>
- <http://www.articledepot.co.uk>
- <http://www.articlefinders.com>
- <http://www.certificate.net>
- <http://www.ezinearticles.com>
- <http://www.freesticky.com>

## V. Mastering the Art of Conversation

### Telling Stories

As our panelists said more than once and in more than one way, the path to trust and credibility includes emotions. In fact, emotions trump data and information in virtually every instance.

You want to connect with people, you want to have conversations. To do so you need to be able to tell stories—stories that give insight into who you are as a person, that demonstrate the difference you can make in your listeners' lives, stories that make promises and commitments about obstacles that can be overcome, goals that can be achieved.

Story is your path to trust. A meaningful story touches emotions and inspires your listeners—whatever they are—and influences them to believe what you say and do what you want them to do. Making a connection through story can establish a relationship quickly and create buzz about you as people tell your stories to others.

Bring the value of storytelling into your own experience. Think of two people who wanted to influence you (salesperson, consultant, spouse, child, minister, etc.)—one who succeeded and one who failed. How connected did you feel to each? How did they succeed or fail to influence you? What made you trust one and not the other? How much did your judgment about their believability influence your trust in what they said?

Now think about how story figured into each experience. How important was story (or its lack) in influencing you?

### *Storytelling 101*

If you are starting out in the storytelling space, start with what your listeners want to know first and foremost: 1) who you are, and 2) why you are here. Stories of these two types can be used in formal and informal settings, with any type of audience.

- **Who I Am Stories:** The goal of this type of story is to show your “humanness” by sharing a flaw, mistake, or other “secret” about yourself, which makes you more approachable, and more trustworthy, in the minds of your listeners.

Psychologists call this “self-disclosure,” and some think that the reason this works is that by sharing a flaw, you are telling your listeners that you trust them—and that they will then trust you enough to allow you to influence them.

- **Why I Am Here Stories:** The goal here is to gain trust through openness as to your goals and objectives. Tell the truth about your intentions, be authentic, share your passion with your listeners, and you will encourage trust.

### *Key Story Elements*

Every story ever told has four primary ingredients:

- A protagonist - the hero, the person we root for.
- An antagonist - the villain, the person or force that we want to fail.
- Conflict - between the protagonist and the antagonist.
- Resolution - where things end happily and (perhaps) a lesson is learned.

One important thing to keep in mind: Audiences bore easily. To keep your listeners' interest:

- Include one or more “hooks” in your story. That is, include things with which your listeners can identify. A hook can be a characteristic (shyness, a limp, red hair), a situation (being bullied by other kids, being interviewed by a scary manager), or simply an emotion (fear of falling, frustration, elation). Basically, you want your listener to be able to put on the persona of your protagonist—to see the story unfold through that person's eyes—in their minds.
- Invoke all five senses. Don't just say, “It was a hot summer day.” Describe what the heat felt like, the feeling of sweat rolling down the back, the smell of hot asphalt, the sight of the wavy air over the road, the sound of dry leaves rustling in the trees.
- Use everyday language, and include slang if it makes sense to do so and if your listeners will understand it.

Use the following templates to lay the foundation of and add emotion to any story you want to tell. Then either write out or record yourself telling the story. Have other's read or listen and give you feedback, then edit the story and hone your narrative style to make a better connection with your audience. Create several stories like this and use them whenever you want to establish trust and influence your listeners.

Story Foundation

Write down your goal for the story (e.g., “to share an experience from my childhood where I learned a lesson about honesty”).

In a few sentences, sketch what the story is about (e.g., “the time I hit a softball through Mrs. Andrew’s kitchen window”).

Who is the protagonist (this might be you or it might be someone else—whoever is the “hero” of the story)?

Who is the antagonist (the person or thing that your protagonist struggled against)?

What is the main conflict (how did the protagonist and antagonist collide)?

How was the conflict resolved?

What was learned (what is the moral of the story)?

Story Color

List the hooks in your story (e.g., I had never made contact with a pitch and the other kids made fun of me, I was scared when I came to bat, etc).

Describe the setting through the five senses:

What can be seen?

What can be heard?

What can be felt?

What can be smelled?

What can be tasted?

List the emotions that carry through the story in order from beginning to end (e.g., frustration, fear, anger, fear, worry, fear, relief)