

# Storytelling for Sustainability

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children, Youth and Families  
Family and Youth Services Bureau  
Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP)



**Mark Rovner**  
Sea Change Strategies



**Mary Martin Vance**  
RTI International

You can write a  
powerful  
story...today.

# Agenda

- What is Sustainability?
- Why Stories?
- Storytelling Science
  - Dramatic Story DNA
  - Storytelling Cheat Sheet
  - Examples from Past Workshops
- Applying Storytelling to Your Work



What Is Sustainability?

# Necessary Conditions for Sustainability

- Internal Sustainability
  - Leadership
  - Technical expertise
  - Strong operational structures
- External Sustainability
  - Stakeholder support
  - Access to technical expertise
  - Strong partnerships
  - Deep community engagement

# Defining Sustainability

“The ability to maintain programming and its benefits over time”

# The 8 Components of Sustainability

Environmental Support

Funding Stability

Partnerships

Organization Capacity

Program Evaluation

Program Adaptation

Communications

Strategic Planning

# Stories and Sustainability

Environmental  
Support

Funding Stability

Partnerships

Organization  
Capacity

Program  
Evaluation

Program  
Adaptation

Communications

Strategic  
Planning

# The Bottom Line

- The key to engaging people begins with engaging emotions. The key to emotions is story.
- Video: Andrew Stanton

# Video

Michael Hauge

# If they don't care...

They won't give

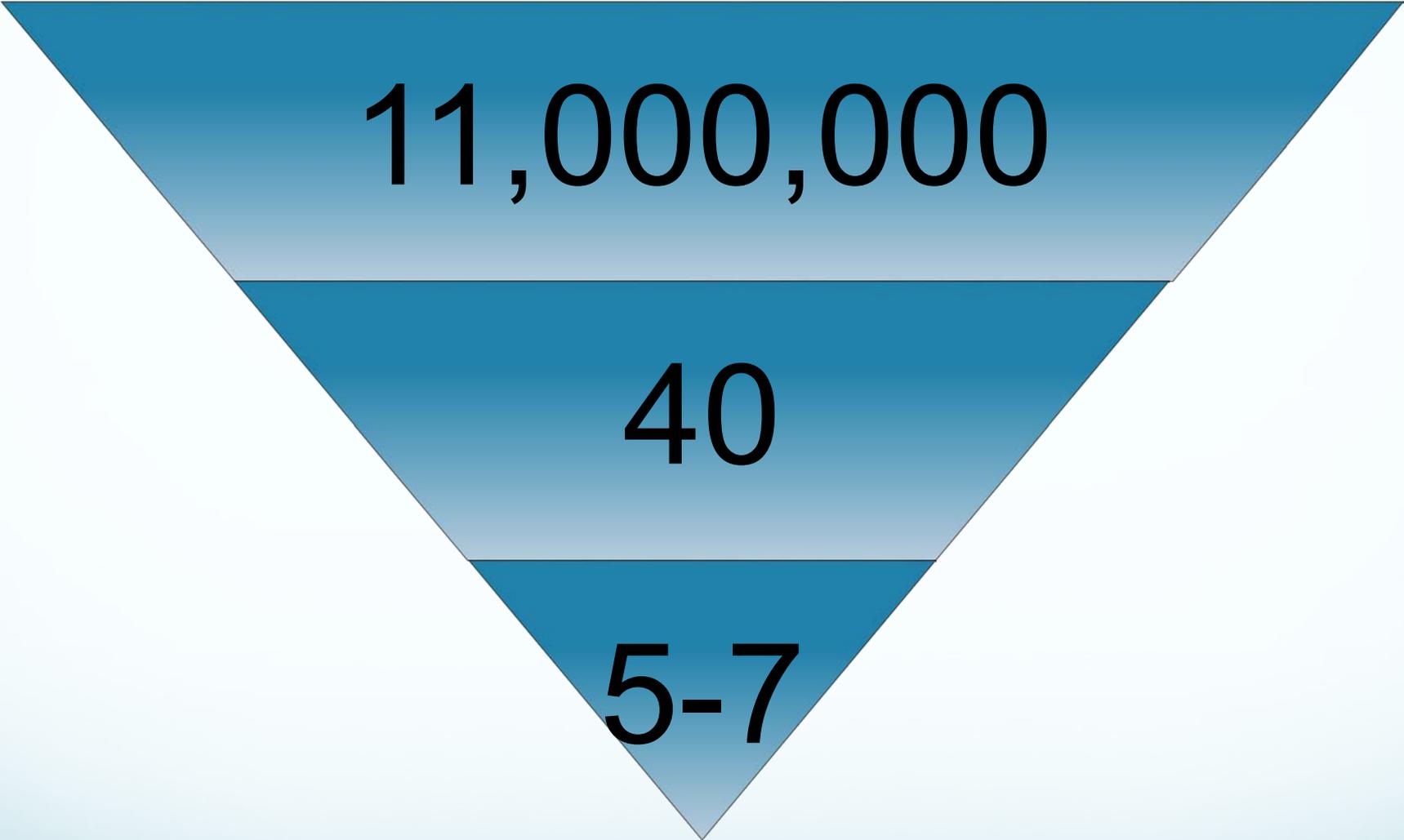
They won't join  
you

They won't help

They won't listen

# Storytelling Science

And a bit of fundraising science too!



11,000,000

40

5-7

# THE BIOLOGY OF EMPATHY





# Video:

Lisa Cron



Deborah Small, PhD  
Wharton School of Business  
University of Pennsylvania

# Version A

Any money that you donate will go to Rokia, a seven-year-old girl who lives in Mali in Africa. Rokia is desperately poor and faces a threat of severe hunger, even starvation. Her life will be changes for the better as a result of your financial gift. With your support, and the support of other caring sponsors, Save the Children will work with Rokia's family and other members of the community to help feed and educate her, and provide her with basic medical care.

# Version B

Food shortages in Malawi are affecting more than three million children. In Zambia, severe rainfall deficits have resulted in a 42% drop in maize production from 2000. As a result, an estimated three million Zambians face hunger. Four million Angolans – one-third of the population – have been forced to flee their homes. More than 11 million people in Ethiopia need immediate food assistance.

# The Identifiable Victim Effect

“Where the effect of one individual, identifiable, victim who is known in full detail can evoke much deeper feelings, emotions and sympathy than a large group of anonymous individuals”

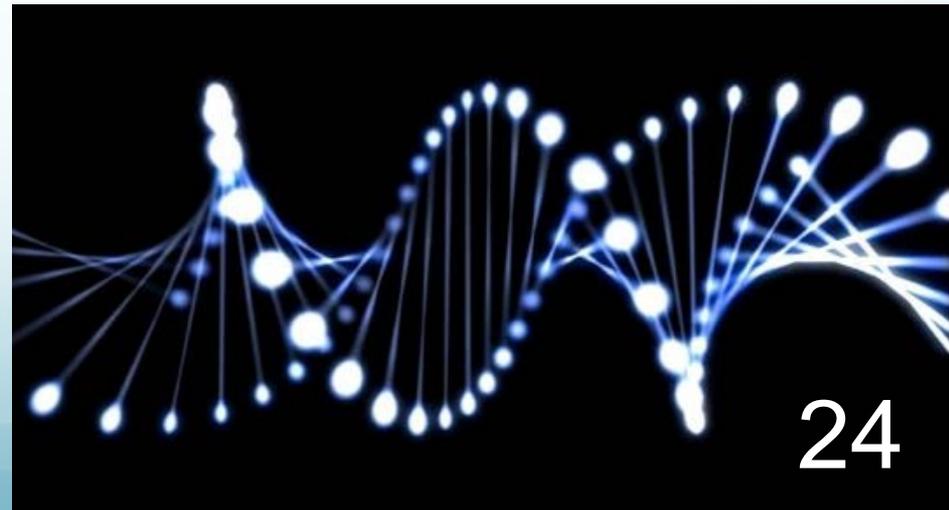
“One death is  
a tragedy.  
A million deaths is  
a statistic.”

"If I look at the mass I will never act. If I look at the one, I will."

–Mother Teresa

# Dramatic Story DNA

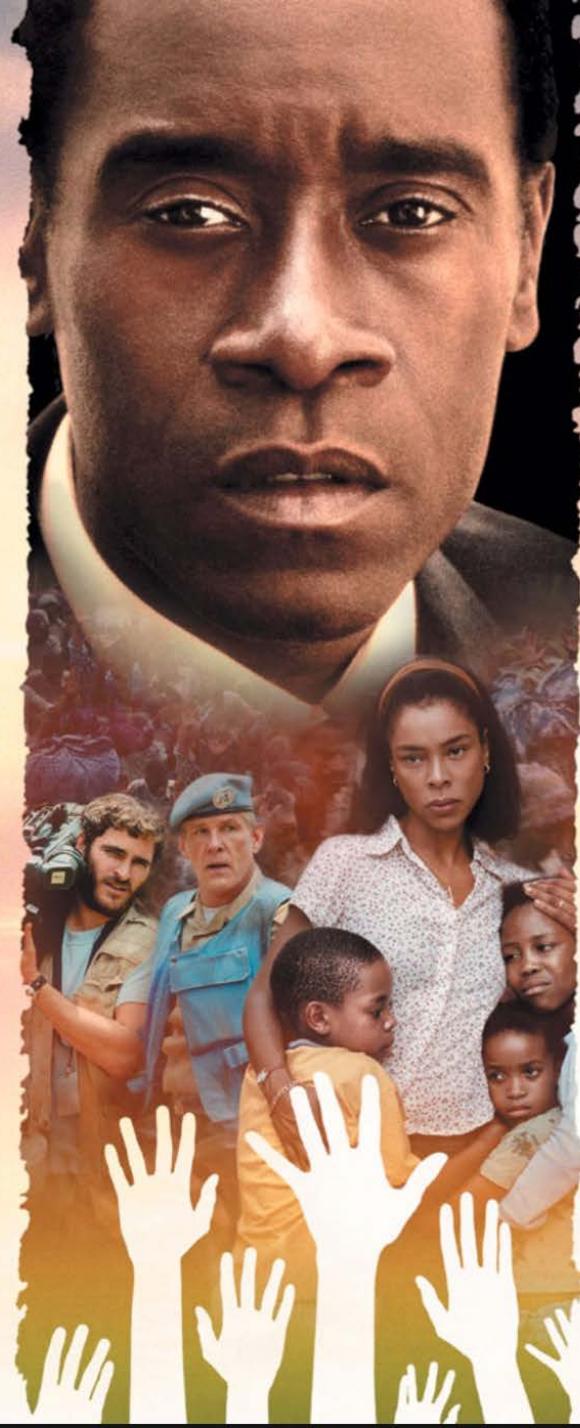
1. A small story tied to significant saga
2. A relatable character
3. A singular goal or desire
4. Conflict or obstacles



# 1. Small Story/ Significant Saga

“An asteroid plummeting toward Earth is one thing. An asteroid plummeting toward Earth and a family we have gotten to know personally in the context of a story is quite another.”

–Screenwriter Scott Myers



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**ET NICK NOLTE**

Quand le monde  
a fermé ses yeux,  
il a ouvert ses bras.

# HOTEL RWANDA

**D'APRES UNE HISTOIRE VRAIE**

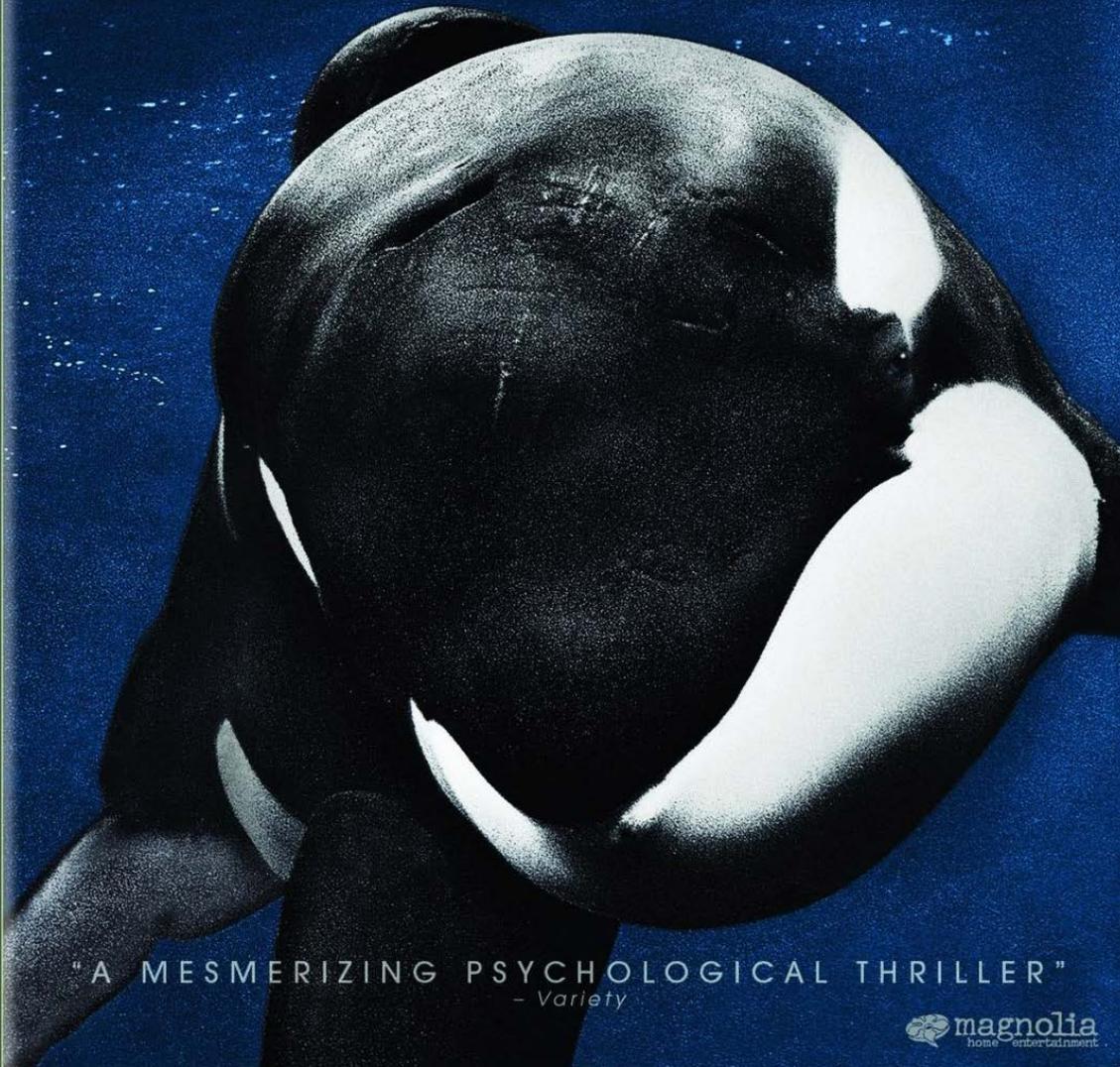
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# BLACKFISH

NEVER CAPTURE WHAT YOU CAN'T CONTROL.



"A MESMERIZING PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLER"  
- Variety

 magnolia  
home entertainment

- The small story engages emotions.
- The significant saga lends it meaning. It is a story made up of stories

# Video:

Michael Hauge

# 2. Relatable Character

Your organization is not  
a character.

# Video:

Lisa Cron

# What Makes a Character Relatable?

- Experiencing relatable pain or suffering
- Being unfairly treated
- Having to make tough moral choice
- Having a sense of mystery
- Being funny
- Being proactive
- Being good at what they do

# 3. Desire or Goal

# “Inciting Incident”

“We succeed only as we identify in life, or in war, or in anything else a single overriding objective, and make all other considerations bend to that one objective.”

-Lisa Cron

“Every character should want something, even if it is only a glass of water.”

–Kurt Vonnegut

## Focus on simple goals!

To get to the doctor on time on a specific day

To pass the big test

To go to the prom and not have sex

To get a job at the Starbucks on the corner

## Avoid nebulous goals

To get healthier

To practice safe sex

To make a living

To make your mom proud

# 4. Conflict or Obstacles

# Second Deadly Sin: Editing out conflict

Not Enough Conflict



STAR.WARS.com







# Storytelling Cheat Sheet

1. My main character is \_\_\_\_\_. What is interesting about this character is \_\_\_\_\_.
2. My character's goal is \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Standing in the way of my character's achieving their goal are \_\_\_\_\_. (Try to have 2-3.)
4. My character attempts to overcome these obstacles by \_\_\_\_\_.
5. What happens in the end?
6. What do we learn (the "significant saga")?

# Wizard Of Oz

<b>1. Main character:</b>	Dorothy.
<b>2. Main character's goal:</b>	To get back to Kansas.
<b>3. Standing in the way:</b>	The witch, the wizards demand.
<b>4. Character attempts to overcome obstacles by:</b>	Going to Oz, killing the witch.
<b>5. What happens in the end:</b>	Dorothy is told she's had the power all along.
<b>6. What do we learn:</b>	There's no place like home.

# Teen Pregnancy Prevention Example

<b>1. Main character:</b>	Miriam.
<b>2. Main character's goal:</b>	To remain abstinent.
<b>3. Standing in the way:</b>	Miriam has a boyfriend who is pressuring her to have sex. She is afraid to tell him no and is unsure how to have the conversation.
<b>4. Character attempts to overcome obstacles by:</b>	Miriam learns about the Teens Making Healthy Choices Club in her community, but there not a spot open for her to join.
<b>5. What happens in the end:</b>	Miriam joins the club later when a spot opens up, but she is ultimately pressured to have sex with her boyfriend before that date and regrets the decision.
<b>6. What do we learn:</b>	The Teens Making Healthy Choices Club needs additional funding to host additional clubs to serve young people.

# Putting It All Together

<b>1. Main character:</b>	Annalise is 19 years old and has 5 children. She and one of her children are HIV positive.
<b>2. Main character's goal:</b>	She wants to enroll her HIV-positive daughter in school.
<b>3. Standing in the way:</b>	She cannot read and does not know about community services in the area.
<b>4. Character attempts to overcome obstacles by:</b>	She attempts to overcome obstacles by asking for help.
<b>5. What happens in the end:</b>	Annalise and her daughter died from complications of HIV.
<b>6. What do we learn:</b>	This community needs to work harder to educate and serve young people, especially through the implementation of the Making Proud Choices curriculum.

# Evaluating a Story

1. Does it elicit emotion?
2. Does it speak to your target audience?
3. Is the character relatable?
4. Is the goal clear?
5. Is there enough conflict?

# Storytelling and Sustainability

## Program sustainability

- Cultivation of stakeholders and partners
- Cultivation of internal organizational support
- Motivating staff and partners
- Communications
  - Opening an event or giving a talk
  - General communications/marketing materials

# What Kind of Story?

- A founding story
- A story that exemplifies what you do or why you do it
- A story that underscores a need

Note: The protagonist can be you, someone you serve, another donor, etc.

# Story Spotting

- Elicits emotion
- Interesting/compelling people
- Conflict hotspots
- Compact timeframes
- Unusual or surprising situations
- Gives a fresh view of a topic or issue
- Goes straight to the heart of a difficult matter

# Next Steps

- Write your story.
- Meet with staff to solicit stories.
- Work with staff to identify appropriate uses of storytelling.
- Think about how to include youth in your storytelling efforts.

# For Additional Reading

- Supplemental Reading:
  - *Wired for Story*, Lisa Cron
  - *Storytelling as Best Practice*, Andy Goodman
- Read good novels
- Watch good TV

Questions?

# Citations and Other Resources

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- Washington University Warren Brown School of Social Work. *Program sustainability assessment tool*.