

White Paper

Storytelling For HR

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Storytelling For HR

Where To Start

Whether you're lucky enough to work for an organisation that has a fully-fledged HR department, or if you work solo (or in a small team), one thing is certain; HR faces the perpetual challenge of proving long-term viability, authority and value to the leadership team. However, it is also often the case that HR practitioners are not always good at selling themselves. Many people cringe at the thought of 'selling themselves,' however, if you dig a little deeper what you will realise is that no matter how you want to label it, what we're really talking about here is 'telling stories.'

In order to increase their awareness and value, (both perceived and real), HR Professionals need to learn how to sell their vision to the business. This means that when presenting the needs of your HR Department to your business, you need to become really good story tellers. Even though each business story may be different, they are all important, and in telling yours, you need to learn how to do it and do it well.

The majority of individuals get into HR because they want to be working with other people on a daily basis. And yet, it would be fair to say that once they obtain a role in HR, most individuals spend more time doing administrative tasks rather than connecting with the employees in the business. This administrative burden wears people down, and ultimately takes the fun out of a profession that could (and should) be more creative (and life enhancing) than administrative. The question is, how do you make it so?

To frame it another way, rather than asking how do you make it so, consider instead, how do you frame and deliver stories that inspire your CEO and the leadership team to give you what you need. It all comes back to telling a great story. Storytelling is powerful. It entertains us. It teaches us. It moves us. It is such an integral aspect of our lives, and yet in business, we forget that we can use it to our advantage in building culture, in sharing results and changes, and in getting what we need to succeed.

Essentially, it all boils down to this: every story you tell in your workplace should begin with the 'why' of your story, the emotional side of things. Then, let your audience know the 'how' and the what'. More on this later.

Sounds simple, right?

Well, it is if you understand context and process.





Image credit: [Lynne Cazaly](http://www.lynnecazaly.com)

What Makes Your CEO Tick?

If you're an HR Professional, how many times have you gone through the process, either with your team, or solo if you don't have a team, to understand what makes *your* CEO tick? Do you have an accurate roadmap of their most highly held [values](#) (both from a business and a personal perspective) and how these personal values align against the culture of your business? If you have more of an understanding about what these values are, they will allow you to craft your 'story' more effectively.

There are seven key areas of life which will be of different leavers of importance to each individual, and ranking these areas in the context of importance to your CEO will help you pitch your story more effectively. The seven areas of life, in no particular order are: Career, Finance, Health, Social, Relationship, Social, Spiritual. If you can find a way to link these areas to your Company Values and in some respects the Mission, Culture and Values of the organisation, including the vision of HR, then you will have a much better chance of inspiring the CEO to back your initiatives, your approval requests and your investment spend.



Transform Institution Era Thinking In Your Business

CEOs (and surveys of CEOs) indicate that people and talent management remain one of their biggest concerns. People costs are usually the largest spend in a CEO's annual budget, which is why those CEO's tend to put pressure on their HR leaders to take care of 'administrative and compliance issues' more than any other aspect of HR to ensure that the business does what is necessary to get 'people' right.

This is due in part to productivity and profit pressures that the CEO will directly face and short-term, 'need-to' thinking that often takes precedent over more inspired 'love-to,' long-term thinking. It is easy in such situations to find fault with the individual as opposed to the the behaviour that the 'system' requires of them.

However, this type of approach belongs in the 'Institutional Era,' which is both a business model and a way of thinking that have essentially become redundant. What HR professionals need to learn how to do, is to tell stories that inspire the CEO (and others on the leadership team) to enable and support HR in the transition to a '[human era](#)' business model (and mindset), in which HR is supported to focus on culture and values through creative and innovative business practices.

Why Is Story Telling Important?

We believe that this is where story telling can be a powerful tool for HR in terms of getting what you need to drive your business forward in a human centric world. When you're able to illustrate with clear examples, exactly how you can support your CEO's vision of the future and how, in practical terms you can make this happen, then half your battle is won. You may not agree with the CEO's motive, but you do need to understand their motivations and inspirations and weave this into your storytelling. This is how HR builds capacity to make a difference.

HR's job is to craft their story (and the story of the business) into something meaningful that represents how you can help your business achieve the CEO's (and the overall business) vision more quickly. Allowing the CEO to understand what resources are required to achieve their strategy and vision is one of the most important things HR can do. Your HR story needs to interweave this theme throughout the stories you tell to your CEO, to ensure that you get what you need to perform. Perform as an individual, as a business unit, and as an organisation.

HR's performance is about operational efficiency; not working harder, but working smarter and more efficiently. To create a business environment in which everyone can work smarter, the HR Department needs to become a marketing department that creates a stories, and sells those stories on multiple levels, to multiple stakeholders across the business. These stories are promoted externally to attract talent and internally to enable HR to achieve success.



Automation Is Your Friend

As a side note, digital automation need not be feared by HR departments. HR Teams are generally under-resourced and becoming more so, hence the increasing need for HR to implement tools that can provide efficiency gains and relieve the team of administrative and compliance burdens. Part of your story will always need to be about how you can maintain current headcount and increase productivity with what already exists. Once this has been demonstrated by making your story a reality, HR teams will be right-sized.

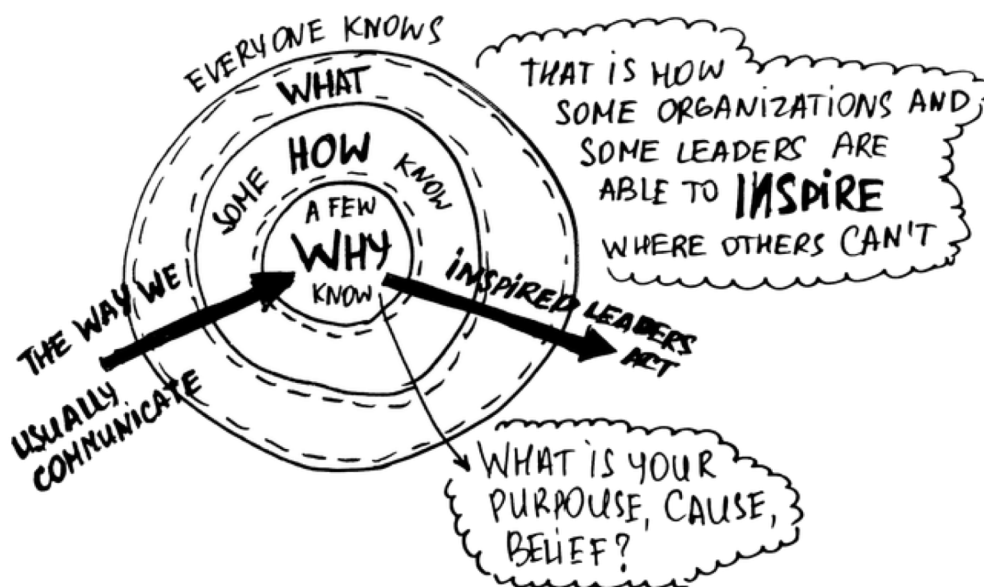
How to Tell Your Story

Here at Subscribe-HR, we believe that HR Professionals are entrepreneurial at heart, after all, necessity is the mother of invention. There is no reason why HR can't be the innovative heart of your business. Being creative and innovative not only serves to keep your job interesting and fun, it can also lead to significant operational improvements as well as more recognition from the CEO and leadership teams).

It is easy to forget that we have all been sales people. We've all searched for a job or spent time persuading partners, kids or family to do something they otherwise may not have done. Therefore, you know from experience that if you didn't put some 'sales' spin on it, you may not have succeeded at the task.

It is critical that you learn how to pitch your story to maximum effect. Research indicates that 'negative stories' have a negative impact on the person who is listening. Not only do they shut the story teller out more quickly, but the impact of the story on the wellbeing of the listener is also negative. The listener will only be able to listen to you from that 'negative' perspective. So when telling a story don't forget that you need to frame it in a way that will create a more receptive audience instead of shutting them down.

In order to tell a good story that your audience will be primed to listen to and receptive to the content of, here's where you need to start:



- 1. Set the context:** [Simon Sinek](#) has done quite a lot of work on this. His material is readily available on the internet. It's based on the why, how, what concept. From a story telling perspective, it is also recommended by experts like Simon that you introduce these details into your story like a good reporter would.
 - Why – opportunity & expansion (for example). (If you're not sure about how to craft your 'why,' Sinek has [a great resource to get you started](#)).
 - Who – CEO.
 - What – growth.
 - How – this is where you can refer to operational HR information and 'love to,' inspirational business / vision information.
 - Where – make this tangible to the audience / your business.
- 2. Avoid Tangents:** Stick to the core theme of the story. If its ultimately about growth, your entire story needs to revolve around this. If it is about right-sizing your organisation, then this is the only theme you should have in your story.
- 3. Audience, Audience, Audience:** Keep your audience front and centre in your story. Don't be concerned about the outcome. Just pitch the story and keep telling it. In the interest of your long-term vision for the HR Department, link that story to operational wins to begin with. Tell the story about how much better your organisation will perform (grow), if you had more time to focus on resource planning (for example) and be sure to align this to the to the positive impact your proposed changes will have on your CEO's vision and values (both personal and organisational).
- 4. Practice Your Story:** Have multiple versions of your story that speaks to the different members of your audience. E.g. One for Marketing, one for Finance, one for your CEO and one for your organisation as a whole. Practice these so they become second nature.
- 5. Be mindful of people in your story:** Don't reveal secrets about anyone or try and make anyone look bad in your story. Remember, the reason you are telling the story is to win people over. Pay attention the impact of your story will have on others and be sure that you're creating a 'feel good' experience for all parties.
- 6. Keep the story short and concise:** Create an elevator pitch version of your story for each of the different audience types mentioned above in 30 – 40 second sound bites. You can also create longer versions so that when the context requires it, you can offer an expanded version of your story and provide a broader inspiration for your audience to take action. Have assets available for each audience type to back your story up. E.g. Factual information which relate to tangible outcomes.



Audience Profile - CEO

As an HR Professional, your CEO will be the the individual you need to share your stories with the most often. What follows is an example of how you can use the power of storytelling to inspire and influence your CEO.

In small companies, especially start-ups, the CEO does everything. As organisations get bigger, CEOs delegate duties to subordinates.

Good CEOs have skills in a variety of areas, but the CEO's job is not to be an expert in every area of a business. The CEO must focus on the broader picture and lead an entire organisation towards a strategic goal. There are a variety of ways to measure CEO performance, but most boards look at changes in share price, profits, ROI and company strategy.

CEOs have four general responsibilities:

- 1. Optimise Financial Performance.** The CEO determines the company's financial direction, goals and results. The CEO works especially closely with the [chief financial officer \(CFO\)](#) to make strategic [capital](#) allocation decisions and set up financial measurement systems. The CEO also leads a capital-raising team that finds [money](#) for expansion or other necessary activities.
- 2. Optimise Overall Strategy.** The CEO sets and maintains a mission and vision for the company. This ultimately dictates the products, markets and strategies the company adopts. The CEO also has a variety of direct reports (the senior management team) that he or she must hire, develop, listen to and even fire if necessary.
- 3. Develop Corporate Culture.** The CEO sets the cultural tone of the company. Explicit and subtle messages expressed by the CEO have a large effect on whether a company is a good or bad place to work, which in turn drives the company's ability to attract and retain good employees.
- 4. Be the Face of the Company.** As such, the CEO is a key figure in the company's marketing, PR and community efforts.

Why it Matters

The CEO is largely responsible for the success or failure of an organisation. Because of the inherent pressure involved with the position, it takes a very strong person to do the job well. In many cases, however, the bulk of a CEO's daily interaction occurs with only a handful of people. This sometimes makes it difficult for the CEO to obtain a completely objective evaluation of a company, especially when direct reports are usually reluctant to give honest and [open](#) feedback.

Overall, it is the managerial skills and experience of a CEO that can make or break a company. An effective CEO can bring a floundering company back from near [bankruptcy](#), or vice versa, can fail to lead a promising company into prosperity.



Key Story Elements Relevant For The CEO - Introduce Your HR Scorecard

You are no doubt well aware that an HR Scorecard is a method by which HR presents itself as a strategic part of the overall business. An HR Scorecard can be put in place so that HR can demonstrate the profitability impact it has on the business.

HR scorecards generally include:

- An outline of the critical deliverables of the HR Department.
- Identification of the business 'customers' that receive these deliverables.
- Key HR activities including hiring, training, retention, as they relate to the strategic plan.
- Cost Benefit of the activities HR provides.

An HR scorecard can be implemented by the following seven-step model:

- Clarifying the business strategy.
- Developing Human Resource architecture.
- Creating a strategy map of the firm i.e. business indicators and the results.
- Identifying Human Resource deliverables in the map.
- Aligning Human Resource architecture with the HR deliverables.
- Designing the Human Resource scorecard.
- Execution and implementation of the HR scorecard and the analytics.

Your CEO wants to understand and feel confident that you are able to help run the business with a balanced scorecard. Illustrating your plan to do so, whilst at the same time alluding to your CEO's personal values and those of the business begins to build an association.

Key Story Elements Relevant to the CEO: Relevant Questions

A good place to start when building your story narrative and illustrating your HR scorecard is with a set of questions that you want to show you have answers for, so that you can get the resources to do the work to meet your scorecard. Here are some examples that provide a pathway for you to be able to strategically link the 'what and how,' of your story to your why, your CEO's why and the why of your entire business.



- How many exceptional candidates can we recruit or did we recruit for each strategic position within the business?
- How much results oriented training can new employees receive or did new employees receive this year?
- How much can be saved, or did we save through identifying top and poor performers?
- How can we, or we have identified the key attributes of top performers who stay with us the longest?

NOTE: Remember to link the story to the values of the CEO and their Job Description.

Key Story Elements Relevant to the CEO: Critical HR Metrics

You can expand your narrative by using key HR metrics that your CEO often focuses on. We've all heard it said that the numbers don't lie. Your CEO needs to know the impact that any change you want to make will have on the bottom line, so it is essential to weave metrics into your story. As an example, let's look at turnover costs. Research indicates that approximately [22 percent of employee turnover takes place during the first 45 days](#) of employment at an average cost of replacement between 16 and 20% of that employee's salary. That is a significant productivity and dollar cost in and of itself, not to mention the disruption it causes to the rest of your employees and the drain it places on your HR team.

Objective: Reduce Turnover Costs

Description: Develop effective recruiting and new-hire orientation methods to improve efficiency and optimise the retention of new hires.

Actions:

- Identify key attributes of successful employees who stay with your business for two or more years.
- Utilise technology more effectively for screening applications and completing the recruitment process.
- Identify selection methods that correlate with successful hires.
- Integrate branding efforts into the recruitment process.
- Revise the orientation program to ensure new-hire retention.



Measures:

- Cost-per-hire (financial).
- Turnover rates and costs (financial).
- Time-to-fill (business process).
- Customer satisfaction with new-hire performance (customer).
- New-hire satisfaction with orientation (learning and growth).
- Supervisor satisfaction with orientation (learning and growth).

Storytelling Examples

We've created a series of sample stories that are relevant to the context outlined above. If you want to convince your CEO to approve an investment in e-Recruitment and Onboarding software so that you can reduce turnover, improve efficiency and create a balanced HR scorecard, here are several different ways you might approach telling your story.

- **Example A:** We spend 10 hours per week on Headcount Reporting. Spending this time together is a great team building experience and an opportunity for us to clarify our changing needs. However, if we could automate how we collect, store and report on headcount information, we can reduce this to 1 hour and spend the remaining 9 hours on Workforce Planning to assist with our new product growth into an expanding market. We can provide these reports to you more quickly and in a manner that is clearer and easier to read, which will enable you to make more accurate decisions.
- **Example B:** We are spending 100 hours per month on inducting and onboarding new employees. I am able to report that our internal investigations have highlighted this as an opportunity to improve. With the right systems and processes in place, our organisation can easily reduce this by 90%, allowing Managers to be more productive through automation. Through the implementation of HR technology, we could focus on presenting key information to new starters and managers in an automated manner, so we can upskill all staff quickly. This productivity lift will mean our overall profitability will line up with the 20% increase you have outlined for the business as a result of a more skilful and efficient workforce.



- **Example C:** Because we be introducing a fantastic new product range (that testing indicates will be popular with our target market when it launches) within the next 12 months. We also need the right employees to manage and sell those business lines. We've done the work to assess our internal capabilities and it is clear that we need up to 10 new hires onboarded as quickly as possible. The last time we introduced this many new product lines, our records indicate that it took us 3 to 6 months to get the right team on board. To avoid a repeat of this issue, I would I would like to present 10 new staff hires for the business in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible. With the right automation tools in place, we are confident that we can make the launch of these new products a success. We feel this is key to your innovative plans to diversify our solution offering and become leaders in this space.

Which Stories Do You Need To Tell?

We hope you're feeling inspired to approach storytelling and 'sales' differently within your organisation. What vision, and which goals have you been trying to obtain that have thus far seemed out of reach? Now is the time to dust those goals off, craft an inspiring story that clearly illustrates your why, aligns it to your CEO's vision and values, back it up with accurate HR metrics and show leadership that you do have what it takes to create positive change and a balanced HR scorecard.

Not sure where to start?

Why not start with [learning how to craft and share your why?](#)

Need more help to tell the story about digit HR in your workplace? Try these:

- [Business Case White Paper](#)
- [HR Tech Implementation White Paper](#)



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