

# LEADERSHIP TRAINING WITH MIKE DONNELLY

## The Magic of Storytelling

**W**e get eye rolls sometimes when we talk to clients about the power of storytelling. We hear comments like “Is this a once-upon-a-time type of thing?”, “Do we all live happily ever after at the end?”, or “Can I have cookies and milk when you tell me the story?” We hear those comments because the context of storytelling that most people remember is the bedtime story or the stories we hear when we are growing up. But all kid stuff aside, storytelling is a powerful adult leadership tool.

The power of story isn't about the story at all. It's about connecting the listener's emotions to a moral, lesson, or historical occurrence. The story helps us do that.

We listen to leaders refer to financial results, cold hard facts, pie charts, labor percentages, numbers of spectators in seats, etc. to drive decisions, actions, and behaviors. These numbers connect with the listener analytically. However, until we connect with our listener's emotions, we have little chance of affecting long-term behavior and actions.

Most organizations have yet to jump onto storytelling narrative as it relates to leadership and organizational development. Leaders cannot help but default to pie charts and graphs of growth percentages and profit margins. We're not saying that those business metrics aren't important, because they are, but as leaders, your success lies in your ability to bake those business metrics into the compelling story that created them. Emotional connections lead to economic outcomes, not the other way around.

How does your organization fare as it re-

### HOW TO USE STORYTELLING

The next time you receive a complaint about one of your valet or suite attendants, recall a true story about how one of your people saved the day or made someone's experience incredible during an event. Tell that story in your next team meeting. Your team will listen to the story and think, “Wow, I could've done that,” which is exactly what you want. Next time, because of the image you have created in their minds through story, they will!



**Utilize organizational stories as a component of new hire orientations. They turbocharge the emotional connection new employees make with your organization and boost their engagement.**

lates to telling its story? Here's a quick test. Dust off last year's annual report. As you flip through it, identify the number of pages that look like an accounting spreadsheet versus the pictures and stories of the people that made the numbers happen. If it's disproportional, you have a powerful opportunity.

Most of our venues have amazing stories attached to them – rich histories and iconic moments that go back decades. Yet once the last 18-wheeler leaves the lot, we focus on the next event, game, or concert. As dynamic leaders, that's a natural habit. The challenge as a leader is to leverage the rich stories of your venue to let your people know that they are a part of something much larger than themselves. You can do this in three easy steps.

### 1. UNCOVER YOUR ORGANIZATION'S PAST

How was it born? When did it start? Why did it start? Where did it start? Who started it?

What conditions did the founders overcome? Were they always successful? Did they have to overcome adversity? I'll bet there's a compelling story in your past that will connect your people's emotions to the organization that they're a part of.

### 2. CELEBRATE YOUR ORGANIZATION'S PRESENT

What's on deck for this year? What's new? Why did you make the changes you did? What are you most excited about right now? Sharing the excitement and energy that you have for your organization's present will help to do the same for your team.

### 3. LOOK TOWARD THE FUTURE

What's in store for the near future? How about the distant future? Where do you want to go? How will you get there? What does the future look like – for you, for your team, for your organization? This type of visioning helps people imagine what is possible. It glues people to your organization when they see what could be, and they experience incremental steps toward achieving it.

Now add as much context and texture as you possibly can. Craft your stories in your unique, compelling way. Tell the stories of the past, present, future in that order. So here's where we came from. This is our rich heritage and tradition. Here is where we are now, and you are part of it. Isn't that cool? Here's where we're going in the future, so come on along!

What's your organization's story?

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