



## The Science of Storytelling

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The Centre for Strategic Communication Excellence is pleased to present a series of five articles written by [Gabrielle Dolan](#), a global thought leader on authentic leadership and business story telling. In this article, Gabrielle take us on a journey inside the human mind sharing how storytelling helps messages stick.

Storytelling is increasingly being introduced to companies as they look for better ways to engage and connect with their employees and customers. You might already be aware that telling a story makes good sense, but it is more than that. It is based on science, or more specifically how our brain operates.

Our brain has different parts, and each part has a different job. The left side of our brain, for example, helps us think logically and organise our thoughts, while the right side helps us experience emotions and recall personal memories. We also have a 'reptile brain' that

makes us act instinctively and a 'mammal brain' that helps us connect in relationships.

Our brains have a neocortex, which is connected to a complex series of nerves and networks called the 'limbic system'. This is responsible for the development of the bond and connection we feel between ourselves and another (like the mother-child bond).

When we tell stories different areas of our brain are stimulated and start to work together, combining words, logic, emotions and sensory images. Accordingly, we see the whole picture and communicate our experience. With all this activity going on, our emotions go into overdrive.

Essentially, this means that stories provoke an emotional response. Good stories make us feel something as we listen to them — excitement, anger, sadness, empathy or enthusiasm. Our emotional reaction can mean we feel something towards the person telling the story, which helps create connection — similar to the bond our neocortex helps develop.

In the 2014 Harvard Business Review article '[Why your brain loves good storytelling](#)', neuroeconomist Paul Zak revealed the powerful impact the love hormone oxytocin has on the brain when we tell stories.

Oxytocin is also often referred to as the 'trust hormone'. Our bodies release it when we are with people we love and trust, when we hug, or even when we shake hands in a business meeting. And it's released when we listen to stories. Oxytocin being released signals to the brain that everything is okay and it is safe to approach others — essentially, that we won't be attacked or eaten, as would have been the risk back in the day.

So not only does a good story make us feel different emotions and a connection to the storyteller but, at the same time, the love hormone oxytocin is also signalling that we can be trusted and therefore strengthens the connection.

This emotion is important because emotion impacts our decisions. Decisions such as:

- > Do I buy from you?
- > Do I get behind this change?
- > Do I accept the role with you?
- > Do I trust and respect you?

Our audience will be forming these types of questions whether we're trying to get them to buy-in to an organisational change or motivating them towards next year's targets ...or simply trying to connect with them.



## Gabrielle Dolan

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Gabrielle Dolan is a global thought leader on authentic leadership and business storytelling. She has worked with thousands of high-profile leaders around the world, helping them to become better leaders and communicators using the art of business storytelling.

Gabrielle co-founded One Thousand & One, one of Australia's leading storytelling companies before launching her practice in 2013. She is the best selling author of Ignite: Real Leadership, Real Talk, Real Results, and other publications. Her newest book Gabrielle Dolan in an international speaker and trainer on business storytelling. Her latest book, Stories for Work: The Essential Guide to Business Storytelling is available online or in book stores. Find her at [gabrielledolan.com](http://gabrielledolan.com).