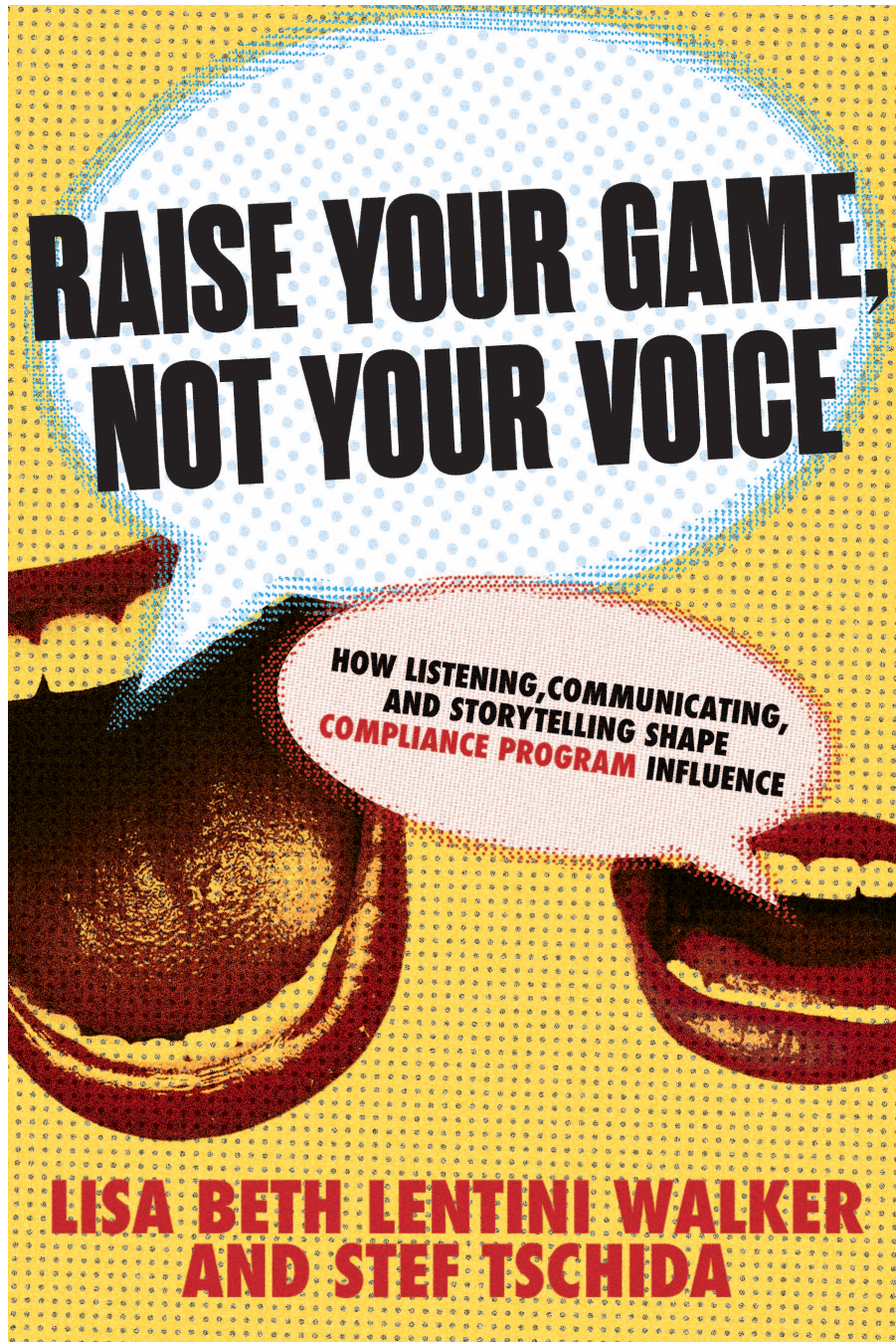


# SAMPLE CHAPTER



## CHAPTER FIVE

# THE STORYTELLER'S SECRETS

*"Stories are memory aids, instruction manuals, and  
moral compasses."*

– Aleks Krotoski, journalist and social psychologist

Since the beginning of recorded history, stories have elucidated, changed the way we think about the world, and passed information down through multiple generations. Early humans told stories through music, paintings in caves, and spoken tradition to convey meaning and unite in purpose. Later, stories were conveyed through the written word; great works such as the Ten Commandments, the Vedas, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Egyptian Book of the Dead all gave instructions on expectations of life and codes of conduct.

### Pro Tip from **Lisa Beth**



Stories are important to every aspect of our lives. One of the most impactful stories you can tell is the one that conveys who you are and why you are important to the listener. We often call these "elevator pitches" (termed such because they should last no longer than a short elevator ride), which are brief, persuasive speeches used to spark the listener's interest in you, your organization, an idea, etc.

A good elevator pitch hooks the listener in less than fifteen seconds. Have an elevator speech memorized to quickly communicate who you are and what you are trying to accomplish.

## **WHY DO STORIES HAVE SUCH AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN CONVEYING INFORMATION?**

Part of the answer lies in neuroscience: **Stories activate different parts of the brain.** While data-driven information lights up two areas largely focused on language processing, stories light up

another five areas (those associated with smell, emotion, hearing, sight, and memories). Neuropsychologist Donald Hebb coined the phrase “Neurons that fire together, wire together,” a popular mantra among neuroscientists that means pathways in the brain are formed and reinforced through repetition.

Hearing a story triggers multiple areas of the brain, causing all those neurons to fire together, which helps you remember and retell the story later.

**We are wired for story.** Storytelling has remained popular for thousands of years because it is a survival mechanism; stories allow us to learn from the experiences of others without directly having to experience the event ourselves.

**Stories make us care.** The most powerful way to make someone care isn't by telling them what to feel, think, or do, but by telling a story that resonates with them. Creating great communication is like making any meal; if you don't get the ingredients right, it doesn't matter how well you have done on plating and presentation, it's not going to satisfy.

**Stories engage our emotions.** A good story has the power to make us laugh, rage with anger, fall in love, or cry—sometimes all of these things. This is the most powerful component of storytelling: stories can compel us to change our behavior by engaging our emotions. Often, we know what we should do, but don't actually do it until we feel that we should.

**Stories make the abstract concrete.** Resistance to desirable behavior often stems from being uncertain of how to act next and failing to understand the incremental impact over time. Someone might know they should eat healthy or exercise, but that advice is too abstract to be helpful. A story of how one person managed their day while eating a healthy diet would be much more helpful in producing change. Stories make the



abstract concrete by putting in context how the information will be used and why it is important. Context creates clarity, which eliminates barriers to action.

### **Making the Abstract Concrete**

I once worked with a CEO who was an expert at this skill. He wanted the company to be known for a particular quality, to be unforgettable and so unique that consumers couldn't live without us. But what does that actually look like in real life? How could we aspire to make that happen?

He continually told the story of McDonald's being known for how special their Diet Coke tastes. Who would have thought? I don't know all the details, but apparently McDonald's invests a lot of resources into ensuring their Diet Coke dispenses better than any other fast food restaurant, and they've become known for it. People who wouldn't typically be McDonald's customers seek the brand out because of their Diet Coke. It's been years since I worked with that CEO, but this story stays with me because it helped make the abstract concrete.

**–Stef**

**Stories help clarify what we should do.** They provide specific examples of what to do and what not to do in situations. Truly, a story is a way for us to perform mental simulations and analyze different options without having to go through the actual experience. In the business world, this would be helpful in crisis response simulations; the learner can understand what they should do in several situations without having to live through a variety of actual emergencies (thankfully).

**Stories teach us cause and effect.** It can be easy to lose sight of your position and the larger consequences of each action.

Through storytelling, the learner can come to understand the full effect of their actions on others. For instance, stories of people making what seemed like logical decisions that led to negative consequences can be very powerful in providing guidance in decision making.

A good example of stories teaching us cause and effect are contained in the context of perverse incentives. An incentive is intended to motivate and reward a person for engaging in certain behaviors or driving certain outcomes, but it becomes perverse when there are unintended (and often undesirable) results.

The “cobra effect,” named by economist Horst Siebert, occurs when an incentive designed to solve a problem actually makes the problem worse. During the British rule of India, officials in Delhi became increasingly concerned about the number of wild cobras in the city. To reduce the population, the government established a bounty on cobra skins. Soon, dead cobras were flooding the local government. However, at the same time, some budding entrepreneurs decided to raise cobras to be sold for the bounty. The government soon caught on to the entrepreneurial endeavors and terminated the bounty program. However, the story didn’t end there. The cobra-raising entrepreneurs, left with worthless live cobras in their care, decided simply to release the cobras, further increasing the population of wild cobras within the city.

Perverse incentives have dire consequences in compliance as well. There are plenty of examples of sales incentives leading to undesirable behavior, and many bribery and corruption stories begin with incentives for sales growth that were taken too far. Perhaps the most well-known recent example of a perverse incentive is Wells Fargo: when salespeople’s jobs and bonuses were on the line and tied to account growth, fake and unauthorized accounts proliferated.

## THE NEUROSCIENCE BEHIND EFFECTIVE STORYTELLING

Stories give us a common point of reference and help us to relate to each other. They allow us to share a moment of common history while also increasing our empathy and reinforcing pro-social behaviors like kindness, compassion, and philanthropy. But there's also a scientific reason stories make an impression the way they do.

From a biological perspective, stories compel us in three ways:

- They help us bond through emotional experiences.
- They force the left and right side of the brain to connect more deeply.
- They afford us "practice" and mental muscle memory in a safe environment.

### The Love Hormone Facilitates Strong Bonds

*What's love got to do with it?* Oxytocin (also known as the "love hormone") is the chemical released by the brain when we connect with people we care for, like children and other loved ones. Through storytelling, we can experience simulated bonding, as if we were meeting a friend, even though we don't have any real relationship with them.

### Wiring Your Left and Right Brain Together

Language, communication, facts, and data activate two parts of the left side of our brain. The left side of the brain is rational, focused on data and analytics, and tends to work well with concrete concepts and patterns. The right side is often considered the more creative and colorful part of the brain, where abstract concepts and big-picture themes go

to live. The right side of the brain is also where intuition and gut instincts reside.<sup>2</sup>

Stories bring together both sides of the brain in beautiful harmony. The language and information target the data and analytics side of the brain, while the big picture and themes of the story arc stimulate the right side of the brain. When we hear a story, both sides of the brain operate simultaneously, combining memory functions and experience functions with data.

The power of emotion and story—often over facts!—was best summed up for me recently by a colleague when he asked which statement is more impactful:

- You can reduce disease transmission 95% by wearing a mask.
- Don't kill grandma.

Because of the way our brains are wired to feel the story, a few words are more meaningful and more likely to drive a change in behavior than all the numbers you can find.

**– Lisa Beth**

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[2] Cohut, Maria, Ph.D. "How language shapes our brains ... and our lives." *Medical News Today*, February 22, 2019. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/324529>

## Mirror Neurons Help to Form Strong Emotional Memories, Safely

A mirror neuron is a neuron that is activated both when a person is in action or experiencing an emotion and also when a person sees the same action or emotion performed by someone else. Essentially, mirror neurons allow a person to have a simulated experience by observing someone else.<sup>3</sup>

These neurons often cause us to subconsciously mirror the actions or emotions of others, which explains why we cry in sad movies and why our hearts race during a thriller. When we watch someone drowning on film, we feel the need to hold our own breath, and we may experience the fear and anxiety as if we were the ones stuck in the sinking ship. Our mirror neurons help us connect with these experiences so that we literally express the physical manifestations of a movie character's actions and emotions.

Our emotions are a signal to remember an experience. When we feel emotions, the attention and memory-making areas of the brain are triggered, letting our brains know that the information is important. The more deeply we feel the emotions, the more deeply these memories are stored in our brains. When we connect on an emotional level with a narrative, we are much more likely to be able to remember key parts of and retell (or "relive") the story.

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[3] Bastiaansen, J.A.C.J.; Thioux, M.; and Keysers, C., "Evidence for mirror systems in emotions." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological Sciences*. The Royal Society, August 27, 2009. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2865077/>

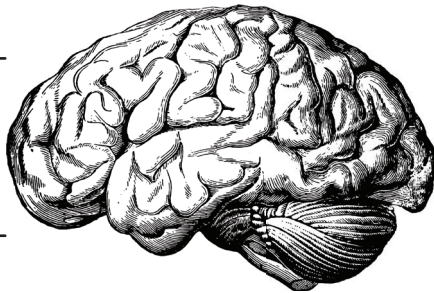


### NEURAL COUPLING

A story activates parts in the brain that allows the listener to turn the story in to their own ideas and experience thanks to a process called neural coupling.

### DOPAMINE

The brain releases dopamine into the system when it experiences an emotionally-charged event, making it easier to remember and with greater accuracy.



### MIRRORING

Listeners will not only experience the similar brain activity to each other, but also to the speaker.

### CORTEX ACTIVITY

When processing facts, two areas of the brain are activated (Broca's and Wernicke's area). A well-told story can engage many additional areas, including the motor cortex, sensory cortex and frontal cortex.

# 3 TIPS FOR CRAFTING AN EFFECTIVE STORY

If you want your story—personal or professional—to have a greater impact on others, keep these things in mind:

## 1. Capture Attention Through Conflict or Tension

Attention is the brain's most precious resource. For the brain to expend its energy on taking in new data, there must be something at stake. A story that creates tension is likely to capture our attention, as our brains see the possibility of learning something that could help us avoid a threat or take advantage of an opportunity.

In marketing, there is often a fine line between causing unnecessary stress and bringing attention to a problem that a product or service could help resolve. In storytelling, it is the relatability of the character's problem to our own that makes our ears perk up and draws us in.

Tension and conflict have been used throughout time to generate listeners' interest. Both promote the anticipation of release or resolution. Common methods of incorporating tension and conflict include time pressure, drama, plot twists, withheld information, and cliffhangers.

## 2. Put Yourself in Their Shoes

To build empathy and a sense of connection, think about how your audience will be able to relate to your story. What are their greatest desires and fears?

Cater your story to the people you want to help or entertain the most. Think about the stories you are drawn to. They are likely ones you can most easily see yourself in.

Present your story so your target audience gets to be the hero—you just happen to be the “guide” who helps them navigate through a problem, sort of like a personal Yoda.

If you are successful with these first two strategies, you will help your audience experience a phenomenon called “transportation.” Through transportation, we enter the “land” of the story, thanks to a cocktail of cortisol (from our heightened attention) and oxytocin (from our sense of shared connection).

We can all agree that the issue of human trafficking is sobering and overwhelming in its magnitude, but it can be easy to tune the problem out because we think in numbers, not in terms of individual people.

If you were to communicate about human trafficking with your employees, you might share details about your organization’s policy pertaining to modern slavery, as well as what the organization expects of them. That’s what most compliance professionals would do. Alternatively, you could tell them a story that helps them put themselves in the shoes of a victim of human trafficking. Suddenly those numbers aren’t just numbers anymore—they’re about a real person.

Consider the example of Kaitlyn, a young girl who was angry with her parents for being too strict at home. Sick of all the boundaries and expectations at home, Kaitlyn decided to run away with her best friend, Amanda. The two best friends left and went to a truck stop, looking for a ride to Florida, where they planned to live at the beach. It was a bit colder than the girls expected, and they ended up seeking food and shelter from the wrong person. So began their descent into the world of human sex trafficking. After their first encounter,

the girls were too ashamed to go home, convinced their families would never accept them again. And so the cycle of abuse and slavery continued not far from their hometown.

Everyone can imagine a Kaitlyn or Amanda. In reading the story above, you may even have pictured a Kaitlyn or Amanda who you've known personally. Details like these help your reader step into the shoes of the impacted parties. Which would you be most likely to remember down the road when you actually needed to apply this information—details about the company's human trafficking policy, or the story of Kaitlyn and Amanda?

### **3. Use Time-Tested Techniques to Propose a Solution in a Novel Way**

Building your stories using time-tested techniques that are common throughout recorded history can allow your audience—regardless of their differences, including geographic location, life experience, cultural background, etc.—to internalize the controlling idea and test it using newly found ethical and compliance muscles, or retest what they already know.

The underlying elements of all stories are nearly identical (character types, setting, plot, conflict, theme). What differentiates a story is the novelty of the content or the way the content is structured. The element of novelty means that you are able to create a new experience by making a slight change. In retelling a familiar story—even with the same basic characters—you can achieve dramatically different results and even send a different message. Consider the numerous adaptations of Cinderella or *The Secret Garden*; Disney is a master of this art.

Novelty increases information recall. To help your audience remember or act on your message, present it in a new and unique fashion. Because the brain has to pay more attention to retain new information, it is more likely to remember data presented in a novel manner rather than in clichés.

Some of our favorite movies, television shows, and books can help us to connect with storytelling truths we have experienced. As you consider the stories that captivate your attention, you will begin to see themes you relate to.

Starting conversations around scenarios from popular movies or TV shows can spark powerful engagement about ethical dilemmas. For example, the Harry Potter series gives many memorable examples that can be explored to discuss topics such as theft, class bias, an “ends justify the means” mentality, and so on.

## **TYPES OF STORIES**

To understand stories and how to shape them, it’s important to know some of the mechanics of good storytelling. The narrative arc, or the “story arc,” is a reference to the structure and shape of a story. The arc incorporates all the events in the story (although the sequence of those events is called the plot), and it determines the pace, peaks, and plateaus. No matter the form your story takes—written, visual, or auditory—the arc moves the audience from beginning to end and delivers a satisfying conclusion.

According to research done by the University of Vermont and the University of Adelaide, there are six primary classical arcs based on what happens to the protagonist, or hero. In their research, they used artificial intelligence to collect computer-generated



story arcs for nearly 2,000 works of fiction, and the results were subsequently featured in an article in *The Atlantic*.<sup>4</sup>

Because of the universal nature of these story arcs, they are called archetypes and follow a common pattern, even though there is mild variation. The six core types of story arcs (and examples) are:

1. **Rags to Riches** [a complete rise] (*Annie, Aladdin*)
2. **Riches to Rags** [a fall] (*The Picture of Dorian Gray, early seasons of Schitt's Creek*)
3. **Man in a Hole** [fall, then rise] (*A Christmas Carol, The Hobbit*)
4. **Icarus** [rise, then fall] (*The Hunger Games, The Great Gatsby*)
5. **Cinderella** [rise, then fall, then rise] (*The Little Princess, Jane Eyre*)
6. **Oedipus** [fall, then rise, then fall] (*Gone with the Wind, Flowers for Algernon*)

### Compliance and the Moral of Morality Stories

Most of the compliance and ethics stories we tell are short and aimed at instilling the value of the targeted action. We try to give our audience the opportunity to simulate a real situation, with the very low stakes of it being a story. Because the stories typically involve ethical or rules-based dilemmas, the subplot of a morality story often comes into play.

A typical morality story involves a single protagonist whose inner moral compass actively changes (or actively refuses

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[4] LaFrance, Adrienne. "The Six Main Arcs in Storytelling, as Identified by an A.I." *The Atlantic*, July 12, 2006. <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/07/the-six-main-arcs-in-storytelling-identified-by-a-computer/490733/>

to change) along a spectrum that runs from selfishness to altruism. Morality stories teach us how to make critical decisions and evaluate consequences. They teach us about proper behavior within the expectations of our environment, how to show greater leadership, and how to make good choices in alignment with commonly held values. Morality stories may act as the catalyst to change and help to enforce the values or ethos of the community to which we belong. These stories remind us of the expectations of behavior, give an opportunity to practice in a safe environment, and educate us about the consequences.

Morality stories typically have a controlling idea or theme: the lesson each listener or reader will understand at the end of the story. Controlling ideas help to connect the theme with the sought-after emotions. Emotions typically seen in morality stories include pride, happiness, sadness, surprise, fear, pity, contempt, and other similar emotions. At the end of many morality stories, audiences experience the satisfaction of seeing the protagonist receive a proper outcome.

## **WHAT IF I DON'T HAVE MY OWN STORIES?**

Not everyone has an arsenal of compliance stories they can tell from a first-person perspective or that they have previously identified. If you don't have your own stories or stories that would make sense within your company, look to stories within your industry or country that might make sense.

In the compliance context, here are some examples of the six types of stories:

## **Rags to Riches**

[a complete rise] (Ben & Jerry's)

The classic rags-to-riches story is embodied in the story of two ice cream makers extraordinaire, Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield. Starting from humble beginnings, their first venture, a bagel business, failed. But out of that failure, the friends launched Ben & Jerry's. Due to the anosmia (inability to smell) of one of the founders, the ice cream makers decided to use larger chunks in their recipes, and a worldwide craze was born.<sup>5</sup>

At the center of Ben & Jerry's success was a commitment to doing right while doing well. They have remained true to their values and commitments despite acquisition by a large corporation, and the company's avid following makes this a wonderful rags-to-riches story rooted in values.

## **Riches to Rags**

[a fall] (Kenneth Lay at Enron)

In the late '90s and first few years of the 2000s, Enron was all the rage. Everyone was talking about the smartest men in the room and how they had revolutionized the energy and utility industry. While some questioned how they were making all of this money legally, many others focused on the results rather than the "how."

Kenneth Lay was the CEO of Enron. At one point in time, he was one of the highest-paid CEOs in America. He was paid millions upon millions in cash and sold off more than 1 million shares of stock.

As the problems with Enron multiplied, the former leader of the most "innovative" energy company found himself without a job,

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[5] Fabry, Merrill. "Ben & Jerry's Is Turning 40. Here's How They Captured a Trend That Changed American Ice Cream." *Time*, May 4, 2018. <https://time.com/5252406/ben-jerry-ice-cream-40/>

and at the time of conviction, he apparently had a net worth of -\$250,000. He died of a massive heart attack before sentencing.<sup>6</sup> This is a fairly classic riches-to-rags story that cautions against cutting corners and failing to listen to warnings, as well as of surrounding yourself with “yes” men.

**Man in a Hole**  
[fall, then rise] (Sex trafficking)

Modern slavery and any form of human trafficking is a blight upon society. While we talk about the problems associated with human trafficking, we cannot do so in the abstract. The most impactful stories about real compliance issues put faces on real-world consequences.

While I worked at Carlson Wagonlit, a travel management company, the philanthropic work the company did with rescued trafficked people seemed most impactful when communicated through the stories of people who had been sold into trafficking, who had run away, who had been manipulated, and who were plucked from vulnerable populations. Their stories are important to tell, and the work being done to create paths to better lives is profoundly important.

**– Lisa Beth**

**Icarus**  
[rise, then fall] (Elizabeth Holmes at Theranos)

Stories about the perils of a rise without appropriate governance and the inevitable fall can be very impactful.

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[6] Teather, David. "Kenneth Lay." *The Guardian*, July 5, 2006.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2006/jul/05/corporatefraud.enron>

The story of Elizabeth Holmes and Theranos is just such a story, with its shockingly unblinking CEO who styled herself after Steve Jobs and surrounded herself with a vanity board of directors all while the technology was nonexistent. The writings of John Carreyrou in the media and his book *Bad Blood* set the stage for the unicorn-level rise and then the terrible fall of Theranos.<sup>7</sup>

## Cinderella

### [rise, then fall, then rise] (Martha Stewart)

Stories about a fall and then a rise can be used to motivate people into action both to prevent and to improve conditions.

Martha Stewart began life as the second of six children in New Jersey. She was a teen model turned homemaking maven. Her empire and image of domestic perfection was reaching millions of American households regularly. From deals with Sears and a widely circulated magazine to television appearances, everything seemed to be coming up Martha.

That is, until December 2001, when she allegedly received a tip to sell ImClone stock to avoid losses. While the government never was able to convict her of insider trading, she was convicted of felony conspiracy, obstruction of justice, and lying to federal agents, a conviction that landed her in prison and under house arrest with probation.

After her return to work, Martha worked to rehabilitate her brand and her primary occupation. Her estimated net worth in 2020 was \$400 million—not the \$1 billion estimate in 2000 prior to the insider-trading prosecution, but also a respectable rise after a devastating fall.<sup>8</sup>

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[7] Carreyrou, John. *Bad Blood: Secrets and Lies in a Silicon Valley Startup* (Knopf, 2018).

[8] Hays, Constance L. "Prosecuting Martha Stewart: The Overview; Martha Stewart Indicted by U.S. On Obstruction." *The New York Times*, June 5, 2003. <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/05/business/prosecuting-martha-stewart-overview-martha-stewart-indicted-us-obstruction.html>



## **Oedipus**

### **[fall, then rise, then fall] (Lance Armstrong)**

Lance Armstrong represents a great example of a fall, then rise, then fall, much like Oedipus.

For many years, Lance was a professional bicycle racer, most famous for his work in bringing American interests and viewers to the Tour de France. However, in 1996, he was diagnosed with a potentially lethal metastatic testicular cancer. He was treated and went into remission.

Lance began cycling again and managed to win seven consecutive Tour de France titles as well as a bronze medal in the 2000 Summer Olympics.

Allegations of doping began in 1999 but were originally fended off quite easily. It was not until 2012 that the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency concluded that Armstrong was the ringleader of "the most sophisticated, professionalised and successful doping program that sport has ever seen."<sup>9</sup>

\* \* \*

The universal appeal of a good story is a great way to connect with any audience. It's your job to find the right story for your audience and to capitalize on the brain's wiring to make a connection and help your message stick. In this way, you'll illustrate the audience's role in the success of the compliance program and how they'll benefit, gaining not only their compliance, but also their interest.

It's critical to make it clear to your audience how to take action and apply the lessons from the story to change their behavior.

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[9] Cohen, Kelly. "The rise and fall of Lance Armstrong: What you need to know before watching 'LANCE.'" *ESPN*, May 21, 2020. [https://www.espn.com/olympics/story/\\_/id/29177242/the-rise-fall-lance-armstrong-need-know-watching-lance](https://www.espn.com/olympics/story/_/id/29177242/the-rise-fall-lance-armstrong-need-know-watching-lance)

Because stories are often associated with entertainment or our childhoods, we don't want people to mistake them as simply interesting; we're using them for a reason: to make our information more memorable and to inspire people to take action.

So, tell great stories, but don't forget to be explicit about the action you want people to take as well.

Complete the worksheet on page [#] to begin developing your storytelling narrative.