

Face-to-Face Storytelling¹

Brandon Telg, Jaron Jones, and Ricky Telg²

This publication covers how to share your story in a face-to-face setting. It is the third of a four-part series on crafting your story, including *Story Development* (AEC553), *Letting Them In: Sharing Your Story with People outside of Your Industry* (AEC554), and *Storytelling through Social Media* (AEC556). This series focuses on both personal and organizational stories.



Credits: Fuse/Thinkstock.com

Introduction

A story is only as good as its delivery. By following the best practices described in this EDIS publication, you will be equipped to share your story in person, face to face. As mentioned in previous EDIS documents in this series, sharing the story of your organization can improve customer relations, community engagement, and market share.

Effective Storytelling

When you share your story with someone face-to-face, whether it is a one-on-one conversation or a presentation, you are creating an impact. You represent your story. How you present your story dictates how people view your organization, so presenting your story well is important. Sharing your story for the first time can seem a daunting task. Many people fear public speaking but you can overcome this fear with practice and preparation. The following steps will explain how to share your story effectively in a face-to-face setting.

1. **Write it out.** If you have read the previous two EDIS publications in this series, *Story Development* (AEC553) and *Letting Them In: Sharing Your Story with People outside of Your Industry* (AEC554), you have an understanding of what your organization's story is and the components that it should entail. Writing out your story can allow you to become more comfortable with your story, ensure that it incorporates the components of a good story, and is the appropriate length. Although you can write it in bullet points, it is recommended that you write it out fully. (Refer to the "And, And, But Therefore method" outlined in *Story Development* if you have not crafted your story.) In addition, having your story on paper provides you with a script to refer to as you prepare to share your story. While writing your story, keep in mind that the ideal length of a story should be about five minutes. If your story is much longer than five minutes, you risk losing the audience's attention.

1. This document is AEC555, one of a series of the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date July 2015. Reviewed September 2018. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
2. Brandon Telg, telecommunication applications analyst, Video and Collaboration Services; Jaron Jones, PhD student; and Ricky Telg, professor; Department of Agricultural Education and Communication; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county's UF/IFAS Extension office.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A & M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Nick T. Place, dean for UF/IFAS Extension.

2. **Practice alone first.** You want to memorize your story by becoming so familiar with it that it becomes second nature and you can tell it with ease. The best way to achieve that level of familiarity is by practicing. Tell your story to yourself in the mirror, or video record yourself so you can see your body language. Here are a few tips for developing effective body language:

- **Eye contact is essential.** Look into people's eyes when you are sharing your story with them. It is common for inexperienced storytellers to look down or away from the person they are talking to, but that is not engaging. If you look into the eyes of the person with whom you are sharing your story, you will keep their attention. If you are presenting for a large group, look at different people while you are speaking, but look at their eyes, not just in their general direction. While practicing, look at your own eyes in the mirror or directly into the camera lens. This will help you notice when you find yourself looking away. If you find yourself looking away, challenge yourself to not look away the next time you practice your story. This will help you get comfortable with looking your audience in the eyes.
- **Avoid distracting movements.** When you are sharing your story, moving around too much can be distracting. Stand firm, with both feet planted on the ground, and try to avoid things like too much head movement, rocking back and forth, or fidgeting. These motions distract from the message you are trying to portray. Try video recording yourself telling your story, and watch for these distracting movements, then try not to make the movements the next time you practice.
- **Use your hands to emphasize important moments.** Although distracting body movements are to be avoided, that does not mean that body language cannot be used to your advantage. To emphasize specific, important moments, hand gestures—for example, pointing to a specific object that you are referring to or making a sweeping gesture with your hand to represent a large issue—can help engage your listener. Keep in mind that gestures should be used sparingly. While practicing, whether you are looking in a mirror or watching a taped recording, it can help to actually see how you are using your hands for emphasis. If it feels like you use the technique too much or too little, adjust accordingly.
- **Speak with passion and conviction.** When you have internalized your story, you are able to better focus on each moment without trying so hard to remember them. This allows you to focus on the way that you are delivering the story. Speaking with passion and conviction draws

in your audience. It conveys that you believe in what you are saying. For more tips on how to evaluate your public speaking skills, please see this Public Speaking EDIS series at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_public_speaking.

3. **Practice with others.** Once you have your story memorized by practicing by yourself, tell it to family and friends or any other people who you trust to give you constructive feedback. By practicing, you will internalize your story, and by receiving feedback from others, you come to an understanding of how your technique is received by an audience. Try practicing with an audience of one as well as with a larger audience because there are some differences in how you engage when talking with one person versus with a group. An added benefit of practicing with an observer is that you can ask the person for evaluative opinions of how you told your story, such as “Did I have good eye contact?” or “Were my movements distracting?”

Summary

A well-delivered story is an excellent tool to market your farm operation, and with the proper preparation, you can deliver your story like an expert storyteller.