

Presenting Author Lori Silverman's "story prompt" method of obtaining success stories

This edition of the newsletter presents the first of two articles on a new way (for most of you) to start asking members questions about their rewarding experiences with the lodge and the Association. Practicing the enclosed samples, and your own story prompts, can help members share more about what has gone right with your lodge that would get nonmembers really excited to join you. (See Lori's websites: www.partnersforprogress.com, www.wakeupmycompany.com).

Think of it like this: prompts help you decipher the true to life (nonfiction) stories about what your lodge and its members have accomplished -- through sharing specific, life changing experiences. These are more than anecdotes or reports in the Herald. The enclosed story prompt method, presented by Author Lori Silverman, provides ways to ask about the best activities of your lodge. It can help you discover those activities or situations that actually made a dramatic difference in the lives of members, community groups, and nonmembers. The more powerful stories are the ones that will captivate nonmembers' attention to find out more about your lodge. Consider yourselves "journalists" interviewing members in an engaging conversation on what they think, feel, and know about the lodge.

Prompts (a form of interview questions) are actually the first step in the process of obtaining your success stories. Here's what they can do, according to Silverman:

"Prompts are used to 'evoke' stories from others -- not just the words of a story you already have in mind.

'Story prompts' (as opposed to concrete stories) can be used in one-on-one and group situations to:

- a) get to know someone - build rapport
- b) solidify relationships
- c) solicit stories that MIGHT be able to be used in publicity (you'll need WRITTEN permission to use a story - to be discussed in the October edition)
- d) build camaraderie in a group
- e) spark new ideas"

So rather than considering story prompts as a "have-to" lodge activity, please realize they can primarily help in one-on-one conversations with members to produce stories that can lead to more referrals and volunteer interest in the community. Story prompts can induce members to talk more about their initial thoughts and feelings on how they have benefitted from the lodge. They can also help produce the emotional passion members feel to help them describe what has led to their commitment to the lodge and community. Using the results of these story prompts verbally and through print and online media is what can make a difference in growing membership more quickly.

As a pilot project, I asked these questions of a few members in IA and WI, producing very enthusiastic and heartfelt discussions about what the lodge or their heritage has meant to them. In fact, one IA member said, "These stories could translate into social media such as a lodge blog." The WI discussion using story prompts (enclosed) lasted well after an evening event for nearly three more hours!

Try these on for size with your lodge, and let us know what happens!

With that said, please see the enclosed insert from Lori Silverman. She also gives workshops. See the pink insert.

About Lori Silverman ...

As a strategist and the owner of Partners for Progress®, for more than 20 years Lori Silverman has consulted on enterprise-wide change and viable long-term strategies to increase success with organizations such as American Family Insurance, National Specialty Insurance, Physicians Plus Insurance, Cigna, the American Legion Auxiliary, Chevron, LensCrafters, Wells Fargo Home Mortgage, and the U.S. Air Force Reserves. A nationally recognized keynote speaker at more than 75 events with organizations such as McDonalds USA, the American Fraternal Alliance, Thrivent, Anderson Windows, and Tinker Federal Credit Union, Lori has inspired thousands of conference participants to take action. She has appeared on more than 70 radio and TV shows, talking about using story techniques to achieve tangible business results, and has authored numerous articles and books including *Critical Shift and Stories Trainers Tell*. Her latest bestseller, *Wake Me Up When the Data Is Over: How Organizations Use Stories to Drive Results*, debuted in the top one hundred books on Amazon. She is an adjunct instructor at the Fluno Center for Executive Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Speaking endorsements are located here: <http://www.partnersforprogress.com/SClientsSaying.htm>

THE FIRST STEP IN TELLING STORIES: EVOKING THEM FROM OTHERS AND LISTENING IN A NEW WAY

Written by Lori Silverman, Partners for Progress®, www.partnersforprogress.com, www.wakeupmycompany.com
Author of *Wake Me Up When the Data is Over: How Organizations Use Stories to Drive Results* and other books

The July issue of *Fraternal Connection* provided an overview about the importance of capturing and telling best practices and successes as stories to build interest in your lodge. While this might seem easy to do on first blush, this is not always the case. Here are steps you can take to encourage others to tell their stories.

Which Approach Do You Think Will Elicit a Story?

Imagine you are at a lodge meeting and want to learn more about a new member. After the meeting finishes, you approach the individual to chit-chat. There are several different ways you might start the conversation. For example, you could say:

1. “Hi. I’m _____. I’m glad you were able to join us this evening.” (And then wait for the other person to share something about him or herself.)
2. “Hi. I’m _____. I’m glad you were able to join us this evening.” I’m curious. What did you like about tonight’s meeting?
3. “Hi. I’m _____. I’m glad you were able to join us this evening.” Tell me about yourself.”
4. “Hi. I’m _____. I’m glad you were able to join us this evening.” I’m curious. Tell me about that moment when you (and your husband or family) made the decision to become a member.”

Which of these four approaches do you think will evoke a story from the other person? If you chose #4, you are correct. Why is this?

The first selection assumes the other person is not shy. For most people, it is very hard to engage in a conversation with someone they have not met before.

The second choice is a question. People always filter their responses to questions such that they give you the socially correct response. Rarely do they provide a story. They merely answer the question.

The third option is too broad in focus. “When you say, Tell me about yourself,” it is very likely that the other person is thinking to him or herself, “What does this person really want to know about me? There’s so much I can share.” And, in fact, they may even say something like this and laugh at the same time.

The fourth alternative is a story prompt. It starts out with the words, “Tell me about ...” and finishes with a phrase that asks for a specific memory: ...”when you knew you had to become a member.”

Crafting Story Prompts

Very rarely will asking a question of someone get a true story out of that person. Sometimes you may only get a few words in response. Other times, you might get a brief example or a description of a situation. Only, a story is a lot richer than an anecdote or an example. When telling stories, people often recall specific things that were said, they use words that allow you to visualize what occurred, as well as recounting many specifics about that moment in time. Plus, they tend to tell them with emotion and/or passion. There are several ways to craft a story prompt.

One way is to use the phrase, “Tell me about ...” and follow it with a phrase that gets the person to recall one, or at the most, maybe two or three situations that would fit your request. Here is an example that you can use on any given workday. Instead of saying to your spouse or friend, “How was your day?,” you could try one of the following prompts:

1. “Tell me about the highlight of your day.”
2. “Tell me about the meeting with your son that you were hoping to have this morning.”
3. “Tell me about a funny situation that happened today.”
4. “Tell me about something memorable that occurred during one of your meetings.”

Instead of using the “Tell me about ...” expression, you can also try using, “Tell me a story about ...” or “Paint a picture for me about the time when ...” Another good phrase to use is, “Recount for me all the details about ...”

Another way to craft a prompt is to switch the order of the “tell me about” and the “specific phrase” statements. The second option could be reworded to say, “You said you were going to have a talk with your son this morning. Tell me about what happened.”

Using Story Prompts In Your Lodge Activities

Here are a few examples of situations where you could use story prompts and the sorts of prompts you might use.

- **Debriefing and collecting lessons learned and best practices from a lodge activity** such as a fundraiser, a festival, a youth activity, or a diversity booth. Consider building in a few minutes after these activities or a special meeting where the following story prompts could be used to share stories:
 1. Tell us about the most memorable thing that stood out for you.
 2. Tell us about a situation that made you say, “We need to do this differently in the future.”
 3. Tell us about a person you met that made you say, “What we do really has significant impact in the community.”
- **Set up a special social meeting with coffee, tea, and sweets on a weekend** and invite members to share special stories with each other, as a way of forging closer bonds and/or capturing stories that your lodge can use in its communications. Try these types of prompts. Keep in mind that you may only be able to have a single prompt for the meeting given all the stories that will emerge. You can have people share in small groups or with the group as a whole.
 1. Our Czech heritage is an important part of who we are. Tell us about a childhood memory that holds significant value for you as an adult.
 2. We have contributed to the community in a variety of ways over the years. Tell us about a specific situation that holds a special place in your heart. (Or, Tell us about an unforgettable experience you had at one of our events.)
- **At a District or State Meeting, consider holding a special session to capture successes and best practices.**
 1. Each of our lodges has participated in a number of community activities. Tell us about the one activity that your lodge can't stop talking about.
 2. We've all been a part of many efforts over the last year. Tell us about a situation that exemplifies a best practice in your eyes.

How to Respond When Someone Else Tells You a Story

This is actually the harder part of the equation—how to listen to a story so that you honor it and give it value. People tell me that the following approach has saved many a relationship and marriage! It is a very powerful approach that I learned from Doug Lipman, the founder of Story Dynamics®.

First, give your full attention to the person, no matter if you are with the individual face-to-face or chatting by phone. Look sincerely interested. Make eye contact. Lean a little forward if you are seated. Put down your mobile phone! Give your full, undivided attention to the person.

Second, never, ever interrupt someone while they are recounting their story to you to ask a question or share your own story. One of two things will happen if you do so. You will either cause the person who was telling the story to forget what he was saying or you will take over control of the conversation. Neither is optimal here. It is fine to express emotions, such as laughter or dismay, while you listen and to say “uh-huh” or “go on.”

When the person has finished speaking, thank them in some manner for sharing the story with you. Then, tell them what you liked about the story and what meaning it held for you. These are appreciative responses—they demonstrate that you were truly listening and that you found value in what the other person had to say.

After this, you might want to paraphrase a portion of what you heard—perhaps a section where you would like more details—and then, finally ask a question or two to clarify a point or gain additional information.

Now What?

Each and every day we all have the opportunity to use story prompts in our conversations. Take the first step. Try one with a friend. A spouse. At a meeting. At work with a colleague. Be prepared to listen as described here. The listening part of the equation is as critical as thinking through the prompt you ask. Once you experience the results, chances are you will want to try this approach again and again!

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