



## HOW TO FIND AND TELL STORIES THAT CAUSE DONORS TO GIVE AGAIN

### Full Transcript:

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Steven: Cool. Let's get started. Well, good afternoon for all of those who are listening. If you're on the East Coast, good afternoon. If you're on the West Coast, good morning. Thanks for joining us for today's Bloomerang webinar, entitled "How to Find Stories that Cause Donors to Give Again."

My name is Steven Shattuck and I'm the VP of Marketing here at Bloomerang, and I'll be moderating today's discussion. Today I'm just really excited to be joined by our guest. She's a master storyteller and a fundraising pro, Lori L. Jacobwith. Hey there,

Lori: Thanks for joining us.

Hello, Steve. I thank you so much for having me on today. Thanks for sending the sunshine. It's just starting to peak out from behind the clouds here.

Steven: Yeah. It's sunny here in Indy too. It's been a little rainy. But you brought the sunshine to us, I think. So, thanks for doing that.

Lori: I hope.

Steven: And for those of you who don't know Lori, you should know Lori because she's just an excellent fundraiser. She's coached and trained thousands of fundraisers across North America. She's helped organizations collectively raise over \$200 million, which is just a staggering amount in my mind. Today she is here to share all of that wisdom and her tidbits for success with us. So, it's really just an honor for Lori to be on this webinar. I don't know that we've had a guest quite of her caliber. So, I'm personally excited.

Steven: So, what's going to happen is Lori is going to jump right into her presentation. She's got some slides to share with us. I'm not going to take any more time away from her. Once she starts, you should be able to ask any questions through the chat box right there on the webinar screen. Feel free to ask her anything as she's going. She'll stop and make this a little bit more interactive. So, ask away and know that when we get towards the end of the presentation, there will be time for more of a formal question and answer session there at the end as we approach the 2:00 Eastern hour.

Just so everyone is aware, we will be sending out the slides and a recording of this presentation. So, if you have to jump of late or maybe if you're just arriving, we will send that stuff out that you can review later.

So, Lori, I'm not going to take up any more time. Please take it away.

Lori: All right. Thanks, Steve. Welcome everyone, wherever you are in the world. Thanks for choosing to learn something and be a part of today's session. Thanks for listening to our banter about screen sharing as we got started. If you've been around my campus for a while, and I know some of you have—you were texting me while I was talking with Steve—you know that I put as much into any session I do as possible, even when it's on the web like this. So, what I will tell you a tiny bit of my background and then we'll jump in and I'll have some resources for you.

What I'll tell you is I've been in the social sector for all of my life practically. I've had one—what I call—real job out in the marketing world when I was in my 30s. But I've been Executive Director and Development Director of small-to-startup nonprofits to institutional-sized departments and everything in between. I live in Minneapolis. I've lived both in Minnesota and Phoenix, Arizona. As a trainer, I've gotten to travel the world, as far away as Australia and Europe. But I've coached groups literally, you know name it—wherever they have nonprofits, I've probably coached a group.

As Steve said, my measurable that I like to share with people is I have helped organization that have wanted to focus in their individual donor fundraising to raise more than \$200 million from individuals. Ten million of that has been just in the last year. What I will tell you is I have a passion for the positive, to figure out where you are focused on things that are working for your organization and to hopefully today, not only get you to learn some new things but also to change the lens that you look through in doing your work.

So, just know that I know this is a disruption in fall fundraising season, but I am hoping that it is a positive disruption for you. I'll have some resources and different items to share with you as we go.

One of the things I like folks to know is I am the author of a couple a books, an eBook that you can download from my website that's free, also a blog post compilation. But this year, I launched a workbook and a system on storytelling. So, some of the worksheets that you'll see are in that system that you can purchase. Some of the worksheets that I'll share with you are in the free eBook that you can also just download for free.

So, let's jump in. Here's what we're going to cover today. So, I want to make sure you know what storytelling is. Some people have a misnomer about what it is and others are very, very clear and use them often. I'll talk a little bit about why to tell stories. What is it that donors want? Where do you find great stories? And then a framework to help you craft your story and then that framework you can use with your board, your volunteers, with your staff, with your clients, with people you serve to help them tell you their story.

So, I love to chat with you all while we're on the call. We have well over 100 people and counting. People are coming in right and left here. So, please know that as you chat with me, I will call out as many of the items as I can.

But I have a question for you right now that I'd like you to type into the chat box. That is what is it that you want supporters to do? If we're telling stories and giving our supporters some sort of engagement by storytelling, what is it you want them to do when you tell those stories to them? What are the things that you're wishing and hoping for as they do that?

So just go ahead, you want them to pass on the stories, great. You want them to engage with your mission and actually give money, we love that. Connect with your work—sure. Feel their importance in changing lives—Becca, I love that one. You want them to share what you're doing. So, that means you've got to tell compelling stories, right? I want supporters to give and tell their friends about us. Feel too proud and too understanding of what we're doing. Let's see—become a member, recruit others. Start a ripple effect—oh, Kara, I like that a lot. Donate. Spread the word. Volunteer. You want them to be touched. You want their hearts to be touched. Great. Those are awesome, perfect reasons. You want them to give their time, talent, their stuff and their money. Join us in transforming the lives of first generation students by giving and being ambassadors, okay.

So, you are looking for them to take action. And I love that you know that you want folks to take action when they are hearing about your work. So, when they're doing that—taking action—my intention in talking about storytelling is that we focus on cutting through the clutter, cutting into the day-to-day deluge of information. You've probably already listened to the radio today; maybe you've read the newspaper or watched the news on TV. You've got emails coming into your inbox—don't check them now by the way—and voicemails coming in. But the truth is there is just a lot of information. And there's a lot of other charitable organizations that are reaching out and asking your supporters to do something.

So, what is it that you can do to stand out? And the truth is you have control over how well that your supporters know you and how much action they take. So, the secret—and really, there is a secret that the answer you'll know but how you execute it might not be as clear. So, the secret to cutting through the clutter of day-to-day noise is by sharing your impact in real people examples.

So, if you're an advocacy organization or you're an environmental organization or you are a human service organization or an education organization or foundation—no matter the work you do—you've got people whose lives are changing because of that work. So, no matter if you feel like you provide direct service or not—I had a couple of United Way groups come to some of my sessions recently. I've been traveling around the country doing conference speaking. We talked about what stories do you have to tell when you don't provide direct service? What stories do you have to tell if you're a board member or come into contact regularly with people whose lives are changing?

So, some of that we're going to focus on here. How do we have those stories stand out? How do we find them? How do we have people talk about it in a way that truly causes them to come back again and again and again? That's the name of the game—donor retention.

So, just to clarify for you and remind you, storytelling is a narrative account of real or imagined events. Now, of course you write stories. You might have videos of stories. My focus today, really, for this session with Bloomerang is just about the talking of stories. Much of what we'll learn here and touch on here can be adapted to your video sharing, your blog writing, your website's storytelling, your testimonials, all of that. But I want to really focus on the talking part of it.

Notice I said of “real or imagined events.” In my house, Mark, my spouse, reminds me that I seem to do a better job of talking about the imagined events than the real events sometimes. But I do consider myself a master storyteller. I’ve been telling stories and coaching stories for many, many, many years. And it is the very first job that I had in development that I started to notice when I got connected as a Development Director. It’s when I sat in our lobby and started to listen to some of our clients tell me why they had come to use our services. Then I started to craft those stories into impactful little snippets and longer testimonials and just use those to connect people regularly.

So, here’s the good news—storytelling is not a newspaper article. You aren’t a reporter sharing objective and very careful stories. You’re looking to actually not just put words to a description of what happened. You’re looking to tell a story. That takes a little bit of art and science to put it together. I’ll give you the tools so that you can do both in a way that causes people to take action.

Now, I believe the very best storytellers—until we forget how to do it—are children. I was at the airport recently—as I have been lately quite a bit—but I was at the airport and a little boy was sitting on his dad’s lap. The boy was facing me, but the dad’s head was facing me. So, the back of his head was facing me. So, he was facing his father, and he was gesturing just like the little boy on the screen here. He was talking about airships, spaceships and zooming and he was pointing outside the window. You could tell he was having a wonderful time recounting the story. His dad’s head was nodding but his arms were moving and he had a smile that lit up his face.

At the core of storytelling is both the use of language, pauses, exact choice of words, some of your physical movement—leaning in, opening your hands—being connected to your audience. Guess what? If you’re writing a story, that has to be conveyed through the telling of the story. So, I’ll give you an example of a before and after of a story in a bit here. My guess is some of you have stories like the boring version or the pre-version that I’ll share with you. My goal today by the end of the session is to start to look at what you’re writing and telling in a whole different way.

So, if you want them to be sharing with you, being an ambassador, giving their time, recruiting others, what I can tell you is the stories that you share can be clear and bold and cause the money and action to happen or they can be sort of mundane and just so-so and people won’t be moved and inspired by them and they’ll move on. They’ll move on to giving somewhere else or they’ll move on to reading something else or they’ll move on to a different event. Eventually, if they are a donor of their time or their dollars, they’ll start giving somewhere else. So, you want to have there be a real clear distinction between a story and a report about a client. We’re going to talk about stories today.

So, when people support you—this comes from Katya Andresen, a colleague of mine. She used to be the COO at Network for Good. She’s now moved on to a different position. But her blog is well read by thousands. This is from last fall. She talked about when people support you, here’s what they’re looking for—they’re looking to make a difference, to feel personally connected to something greater than themselves, to feel useful and to get that warm glow of giving.

So, number four on that list is the biggest reason that people give today. My parents’ age and my aunt who’s 79 or so years old, in her era, giving was to help people. It was more of number one. But really as you focus on both younger donors and being able to cut through the clutter of why people really give—Freakonomics did a great podcast about this recently—people want to feel good when they give to you.

So, here’s what happens often times, as Katya says, when they are supporting you. They get a text receipt. They get some statistics, some facts and figures. We send a letter by an email or maybe we sent it in the regular mail. They often get an appeal to give more money. That’s pretty regular—pretty standard—after you’ve given once, now you’re going to get asked again and again. So, they’re looking for and we want to put in more of what people are looking for in their experience with us. So, there isn’t that great gapping disconnect, right?

So, in order to have a disconnect not happening, we want to focus on communication. Now, many of you are probably familiar with this statistic from Penelope Burk, “Donor-Centered Fundraising.” Penelope does a research project every year with Cygnus Applied Research. The book is a great investment. But this number—this statistic—that I’m sharing here is pretty common year after year after year. In fact, what I’ve been reading in studies this year is the number of donors that stop giving, the retention rate is even less attractive, more people going away for smaller nonprofit organizations. But guess what? If they’re going away for things that are connected to a failure to communicate, like you’re not being clear about what you need or, “Gosh, you send me three messages.” In fact, today I got an email newsletter from someone with my name spelled wrong on one and my name spelled correctly on the other. Now, that could be that I typed it in wrong, but it means they didn’t merge their records before the sent out the e-newsletter.

So, there are communication issues. You might have a new CEO and I don't what your new vision is or it doesn't look like you need anything, so I go somewhere else. But if those reasons that donors are going away have to do with a failure to communicate, then really we can do something about that. We can actually change their engagement based on our own communication.

Now, this is a new way to look at it—the giving pyramid from Agents of Good, it's an awesome blog post site, the old giving pyramid with major donors on the top and the bigger stretch of the pyramid on the bottom is the occasional donors or event participants. That doesn't work so much anymore because it focuses just on the money. What I like about this new way to look at the pyramid is you're not just looking at how much someone gives now and you're not just looking at the size of your gift, you're actually looking at the love the donor gives you, which is actually largely mirrored by the love we showed them.

So, the stories we share with them that have them know your work is making a difference, that then connects the top part of your giving pyramid and has an intention to keep those donors staying connected to your mission, why their gift matters to you. And if our job as fundraisers is to give people reasons and inspiration for people to feel the love and then realign their values with your cause, which is really their cause too, the very best way I know how to do that is through the stories that you're telling them. So, they reconnect to the fire in their belly that they have for you for why they give to you in the first place.

Now, providing regular feedback and reinforcement, I want you to know that I am not a fan of sending a lot of emails and a lot of mailings. I am a fan of connecting with people and having—this is what I call the care and feeding of your supporters—the care and feeding of them is the most critical after their first gift. So, if you connect me with a story of someone whose life is different because so many of us just gave during fall fundraising season and then you follow that up with something in your newsletter or the thank you call, whatever it is. Now you're tending the relationship before you ask me for money again. Stories are the best way, I believe, to allow me to feel something positive and something amazing because of the gift that I have given. So, regular feedback and reinforcement, especially right after I've made a first gift. But then if I'm a regular donor, an annual donor or a monthly donor, you want to think about what is the care and feeding that you provide your supporters. How do you do that so that they stay with you? By sharing stories is, of course, the way I believe. But here's what you want to know. Stories are critical. Lisa Cron wrote a great book that was published last fall called "Wired for Stories." She reminded us in that book that we actually link in story.

You all had a reason why you joined us on the webinar today. Thank you for doing that and taking time out of your busy schedule to do that. But you told yourself a story about what you might get from this. Maybe you've been on a webinar with me before. Maybe you love Bloomerang as I do and think it's an awesome software and they're just smart, savvy people and you wanted to be a part of whatever this session was. Or you thought about how there was something that this would teach you about stories.

So, the decisions we make are based on a story we tell ourselves— what shoes we wore today, what coat we put on, what job we have, why you showed up here—then the truth is your donors are having that same experience. We cannot—our brains are wired in such a way as human beings—we cannot make a decision unless we feel something.

So, you have in your arsenal thousands and thousands of stories you can share that allow people to feel something about your work. I'm not even telling you what they should feel. Should they feel happy or sad or angry or excited? It doesn't matter to me. I just want them to feel something so that their brains have been woken up a bit and they have a way to experience the facts and then take action.

So, if you do both—you share factual information, percentages or statistics—you have to tell me a story with that because the truth is, knowledge alone doesn't cause people to take action. Your head and your heart have to be engaged. You made the decision to be a part of this webinar because it feels like a good idea. You told yourself a story that you'd learn something, you want to be a better storyteller and you could fit it into your schedule. The fact is you had to be available during this timeframe today. So, there are both some facts involved and some passion involved.

The stories of your impact should create unforgettable emotional connections. I don't always remember all of the details of stories that people tell me. But I do remember how I felt often times when they told me that engaging scenario. I call those mission moments. You probably call them something different in the organization and maybe it's a mission moment. A mission moment in my mind is a short, inspirational example of how your work is making an impact. So, how your staff is doing something, how your volunteers are doing something, how your clients are

making choices that are making an impact on their lives.

The truth is, though, for a story to make a difference, it actually has to be about a real person. Even if you plant trees, even if you pass legislation—it has to be about a real person whose life is different because of what you do. So, it could be a client, a staff person, a volunteer, a board member, your founder, a neighbor, an elected official—I don't care. The truth is, though, it's got to be a little slice of something that you go, "Oh... yeah. That's right."

I'm going to share with you a quick example. Some of you may have heard it if you've heard me talk about mission moments before. But it's a favorite story of mine to share and I'll share it briefly. It's a mission moment that isn't about the social sector about a charitable organization.

This picture is my niece, Grace. She's nine years old now. This is her seventh birthday. And I love this picture because it captures the personality and the largeness of who Grace is, even in a little body. She fills the room when she shows up. She doesn't stop talking from the moment she rolls out of bed. Actually, sometimes I think she's still talking when she's in bed. But she bops around, she's got questions, she's got big brown eyes, long brown hair and just an animated person. She loves to do crafts. She loves to be doing things with her mom. In February of this year, she was home sick with the flu or cold or something.

So, she'd been home for three days. And my sister Lisa was about at her wits end—grateful that Grace was going to go back to school the next day. But it was past bedtime and they were working on an art project—you know, the project you do in February for Valentine's Day when you're in grade school in the states and that is to make your box to collect the valentines from all your students, your peers.

So, they're just finishing but Grace is dawdling as she's known to do. There's glitter glue and construction paper strewn around the floor in a mess. Grace is moving slowly because she knows she has to go back to school, and she's extending this moment as long as she can. My sister says, "Come on, Grace. Get to bed. Let's go. Pick up. We've got to get going. I know you're not finished, but we can finish it tomorrow." And Grace looks up at my sister in her pink fluffy robe with her slippers on and she tilts her head and she says, "But Mom, isn't this the best night ever?"

And my sister says, "The eyes teared up, the heart bulged a little bit and I had a mission moment of motherhood." She said, "I understood better than ever before what you talk about that little slice of something that happens in your day where you go, 'Oh, that's why I do this work.'"

So, Shirley's asking, "Why a real person rather than a real animal?" You can have it be about the animal, but I'm not an animal. And you're not an animal. So, what do I feel because I get to help that animal, Shirley? If you can make the story feel like it's about someone who thinks and talks and is a bit like me—the reality is you want the person to connect with some commonality. My hope is as you were hearing the mission moment about Grace, those of you who are parents might have had one of those. So, you might have had a mission moment of being a parent when you go, "Okay. This is why I do this even when they're cranky with me."

Lisa says, "I work for a disease—related charity. What is your feeling about touching the heart by telling sad stories versus happy ones?" The emotion that you convey doesn't matter. I worked for the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation. I was the Executive Director here in Minneapolis. The important part of what I wanted to convey was the criticalness of our work. Sometimes those were happy stories and sometimes those were really not such happy stories. So, it doesn't matter which you're telling. You want to tell it in a way that causes me to take some action.

All right. So, I'm going to keep going and I'll keep watching questions and comments here and weave them in as we go.

Where do you find these stories? Some of you are touching on some of the places that you would right now. We take for granted a couple things. If you've got staff who are providing services out in the community or in your office, you're thinking that they might know how to tell a story. And so, the reality is when you ask someone to tell you a story, you might get this look— that sort of deer in the headlights look of, "Oh, I don't know any stories."

I've got a session set tomorrow, in fact, a Skype training that I'll do with all of the program staff people, the line staff people from a Volunteers of America affiliate. We're working with them. This will be my third or fourth time of working with them to have them see that their work every day is a mission moment. There are lots of mission moments. And then how to take those mission moments and either themselves turn them into a story so the development staff can use them and the communication staff can use them or we're wanting to just have them see that they know mission

moments and then the development staff can take those and extend them out and expand them into a story with the format that I'm teaching them.

But here are the two things we take for granted—that people understand what kind of impact example they're looking for— people examples is what you're looking for—about some moment that they went, "Ah." Ramona said it just right, "The strength and courage of the person who is either suffering or who isn't suffering anymore." Conflict in a story is the oxygen of a story. The story of my little niece Grace and my sister, Lisa, there wasn't a big conflict, but you got the moment there. There was a little bit of conflict in trying to get her to bed and wanting to finish up the day and being tired and frustrated—that conflict, whatever it is, is the oxygen.

"Do men and women feel differently?" I'll answer that in just a moment. I want to tell you the other thing we take for granted and that is people know how to actually tell a story. What I would probably bet you a \$100 guaranteed is that people know how to recount the facts of a situation, but they don't necessarily know how to tell a story. So, if you know that people don't know how to do what you're asking, you want to be really clear about some things.

"Do men and women feel differently and should we approach differently?" I will tell you that men will first off say—I don't know, Steve, if you want to chime in on this—they don't need to hear a story or they don't think the story is as important to them. But the studies show—scientific evidence shows—that men are as moved by inspirational or emotionally engaging stories as women are, they just don't acknowledge—raise their hands right off the bat—that they are.

Steve, do you have any thoughts on that?

Steven: As a man speaking, I can definitely confirm that that's true. I have been moved by emotional stories. I hope that's true.

Lori: And you might say, "Oftentimes I wouldn't look for the story, but I am moved and inspired by it.

Steven: Yeah.

Lori: So, I would say women might look for the story. Steve might look for it a little less quickly. But men and women are both inspired by them. So, you want to use them for sure.

But here's where you want to look for the stories—this is how you want to be looking to find them. First, you have to figure out who you're asking for mission moment examples. You want to decide what questions you're going to ask them. And then you want to decide where do you ask those questions?

So, I'll take you through those just really quickly. First is who do you ask? And I know that we ask probably our line staff, our program staff. Sometimes you might ask your volunteers. But let's make a quick list. Just type into the chat box—who shares their—what I would call a mission moment, they might not yet—but who shares their mission moments with you when you ask them? Great—your faculty, your clients, your program directors, your missionaries—awesome. Volunteers, recipients, our staff, our board-perfect-people who built the building, people who benefit from our free medical care. How about your donors? Do you ever ask them? Our doctor team members, our partners—yeah.

So, you have lots of you have relationships with folks to ask some specific questions of. But what do you ask them? And here's where it gets a little more—listen carefully here, I guess, is what I would say. You want to not ask them, "Please tell me a story." You want to ask them open-ended questions—questions that have a way to allow you to get at the story but don't necessarily feel like you're putting the person on the spot. Our job, our responsibility, is to ask questions in a way that causes people to tell us the slice of something so that we can go back and we can flesh out the story. They don't have to be responsible for that, at least not in the beginning.

With your board, I want them to become great storytellers. So, we would teach them the way to tell a story. Your responsibility if you're the communication staff person or you're the development staff person is to be the one asking the questions. So, they might be questions like, "Who have you met at our organization that inspires you? What's your own mission moment?" You have to define it first. But let them know, "We want to know what your mission moment is that causes you to want to be a part of our organization."

Add other questions. I've got a whole list. This is a sample of one of the pages in the free downloadable eBook that I mentioned at the beginning. Steve, if you want to share the website, it's [www.Boring2Brilliant.com](http://www.Boring2Brilliant.com).

This is one of the worksheets in also the storytelling system that have, but this worksheet is just easy for you to follow some open ended questions to start with. “How does our team help you?” for the people you serve. Board members—“What’s the most important part of our work for you? Do you have a special mission moment you remember about someone you’ve met?” First time donors—“What brought you here? What’s special for you about our work? Why’d you fund it in the first place?”

Mark asks, “What about when—when to ask the questions?” So, that comes up with where—so, the where and when is really critical. Mark says, “I work at a summer camp where our campers come on Sunday and leave on Friday. We don’t want to take time away from kids during their time there. It seems like we don’t truly have time during the summer. It’s much harder to connect after the summer is over.”

So, Mark, I’m going to ask a question of all of you as this session ends today. One of the things that I do—I’m stealing my own thunder here, so I’m going to actually scroll ahead. I don’t think I’ve ever done this before but I’m going to do this just to make a point and answer your question because I think it’s important and I think it will help folks. So, I ask this question at the end of every training. Wherever I do training— live, in person, on the web—I ask people one thing they learned and for you all today I’ll ask you, “How will you create a storytelling culture?”

So, the reality is I make sure to find a way that I can access a mission moment from you while you’re still with me. And then if I need to, I can follow up with you in some way. But I would ask your campers, “What was the most inspiring moment for you before you leave?” They could write it on a bulletin board. They could write it on a big poster pad. They could jot it to you on a text.

But I would capture them while they’re in their element because where you ask the questions and when you ask the questions is as important. So, you want to ask them at your event. You want to ask them online. You want to ask them—I love it if you were at an event and you say, “All right. Here’s our Facebook page. Everybody go to our Facebook page and you can just comment on the picture we just took of you all in the room.”

Becca says, “What about a last night campfire asking campers what their favorite moment was? Just be sure to have a notepad available.” Love it, Becca that is perfect.

You’re looking to capture information from the, “When I was inspired.” So, where to ask the questions is all over the place, but now you want to be doing that listening clearly to make sure you’re capturing enough of the essence of that so you can put the story together. Absolutely doing 30-second videos of the impact—a lot of us has smartphones these days.

So, let’s talk quickly. I just want to take you through how you do this. We won’t take the time to do this. How do you turn a mission moment into a story? So, there’s the website again— [www.Boring2Brilliant.com](http://www.Boring2Brilliant.com)—it’s a free eBook. It’s a subset of the actual storytelling toolkit and system that I have. But when I ask you to tell me a story, I ask you to have it be about a real person with name and age and descriptors so I can visualize who you’re talking about and even maybe connect with them a little bit.

I ask you to please use words that emotionally connect me to your work. Watch the jargon. Watch where you’re doing our organizational speak. And then, you want to share specific examples of your work and how it makes a difference in the life of a real person or a real animal—it can be that, but you want to tell it from the person viewpoint—and then it has to be two minutes or less.

Meg also says, “Train your counselors to be on the lookout for mission moments and do a debrief with your counselors at the end of the day and just jot them down.” So, great ideas you guys are having.

Here’s what I’ll tell you, though. The criteria I’ve just posted, the third there, “Share specific examples of your work and how it makes a difference,” is the least-developed in your story. It doesn’t always have me know what you do. Your story sometimes just focuses on that person, the pain they’re having or the frustration or whatever it is and it forgets to say how you made a difference for them.

So, in the storytelling system that I offered, I wanted to just tell you—here’s an example of a before story. You’ve probably seen this somewhere before or maybe even written a version of it yourself. This is for an arts organization. “We’re grateful to Mrs. Lee for being a subscriber to our theater. She loves performing arts and rarely misses a show. She brings guest with her and makes sure we know that she’s spreading the word about quality performances we deliver. We wish all of our patrons were as passionate as Mrs. Lee.”

Well, guess what? That's not a story. That's actually a report about Mrs. Lee. So, I want to tell you a story and I won't tell you the whole thing, but on the right—if I were just standing in front of you talking to you, I might say, “You know, I want to tell you about a woman. At the tender age of nine, the first show that Amanda Lee saw was a three-hour long production of Camelot. Now she's 79 and she has told me that she can still recall that first thrilling moment when the orchestra music began and she was swept away to a time long ago. She could dream about being a queen and living in Camelot.

She's become one of our most passionate and regular supporters. Even when money was tight, she brought her kids to our people's theater so they got to experience and delight in the theater. Now she brings her grandchildren. But the years have taken a toll on Mrs. Lee and she doesn't have the spring in her step that she used to have. She still has the twinkle in her eye, but the reality is she is a bit lonely since the death of her husband. She's kind of frail and she suffers from lots of side effects of aging. We can relate to some of those, some of us. But she tells us the joy she gets from attending our performances—better than any rehab or medication. She reminds us that we're more than a theater company. We're a place where memories are made and dreams are woven and passion is felt.”

So, I just told you a little bit different story. I want to just have you type into the chat box—what was different about the first version and the second version? What did you like or what was more in place for you in the second version? Some personal details. What was emotional for you, Lindsey? What was the emotional connection? That's what's helpful for me to know. How did you know Mrs. Lee in the second version?

That's my job, to paint a picture for you. You said it perfectly, Sara. You're telling about that person, the twinkle in her eye, how she felt. You relate to her. You get to know her a little a bit. How do you balance brevity versus fleshing out the story? I'll show you some examples at the end, Alice, that are really quick examples. “The first one was sterile,” Ramona is saying, and, “It was a report.” So, I want you use that example with others so you can have them know, “Wait, we're not looking for a report. We're looking for a real story.”

So, how do we do this? You want to find one person—maybe it's one person that adopted that animal or is helping clean the rivers—whatever it is, one person. You want to learn and jot down as much about them as you can—what do they look like? Why are they with you? How did they come to be with you? You want to write down the exact results. When you talk about results, what I mean is specific things—did they get a job? Did they stop drinking? Did they get a diploma? Mrs. Lee felt some joy. She had a place to go where she felt less lonely.

You want to write down the specific results because the fourth thing is you want to write the transformations now. Once you've written down some specific results, you want to talk about what the transformations are because of your organization. This is where you flesh out even more the work that your organization has done. Transformations are the things we can't measure. Maybe I feel safe for the first time. Maybe I don't feel as lonely. That's part of a transformation that happens. So, exact results are different and specific. The transformations are where people start to feel connected to you emotionally.

And then you want to start to circle words that stand out that are emotionally connecting. I've got a short list for you here: abandoned, blessed, emotionally bruised, spiritually, physically broken, weary. It could be excited. It could be, “my eyes lit up,” “twinkle in her eye.” Whatever it is, the placement of those words is critically in creating a story that I want to hear or talk about again and again.

Then you take the story—and I'll show you a framework that you can fit it into in a moment—but you have to practice telling it often. The truth is, when you share a story, you have to tell it. You have to ditch the notes and tell the story, not read it from a piece of paper.

So, here are a couple of the pages from the eBook, the Boring 2 Brilliant eBook. You tell them about the person. You can fill in the language and the words you wrote down. I just used this at a number of conferences that I was at. I also used it with a board of directors and their staff last Friday. We had a foundation board. They created their own personal story about why they're involved with the organization.

So, Andrew says, “I run a think tank on public policy. How can I make it emotional about one person?” So, the person might be you. It might be one of your board members. What is it about the policies that you provide whitepapers on? What is the outcome of what you want to have happen, Andrew, and someone whose life is affected by when that policy changes?

So, let me just give you a quick example. I did this exercise using this two-page worksheet. Here is the second page. Here is how our organization helped with a realtors association—a statewide realtors association. And the

truth was they do a lot of work at the state capital to make sure that laws are passed to allow all kinds owner rights, tenant rights—things that felt really not connected. When they were doing this exercise, they started to realize they have lots of stories of people whose lives are affected by the laws they're advocating for and the policies that they're affecting. So, they started to realize they have to talk more to people whose lives have changed in order to tell a powerful story.

All right. I'm going to keep going. Ramona and Bernie, I'm going to keep your questions in mind here, but I'm going to move on to the next slide.

Here's a shorter version of a story. It's a quote, really, but it is a story. You could call this person—give them a real name— but he says, "I'm going to write down this day and this hour and the moment when my life changed. Now I can have hope." And this is a student when he got accepted to a school in Tanzania, Peace House Secondary School, an organization right here in my city, actually, Eden Prairie, Minnesota. They fund schools in Africa, specifically Peace House schools. They often tell little snippets of stories about the students. Sometimes they'll have them on video and they'll share them on YouTube or wherever else they can.

All right. Ramona says, "I like writing stories, but I'm often told or at a minimum I feel I'm too wordy. It depends on the setting." Writing stories, you can get too long as well. So, you want to use the framework—the two pages before. Notice I didn't give you a lot of lines on the framework. You want to keep it pretty brief, especially if you know it's got to be in two minutes or less.

So, Bernie asks, "In a fundraising appeal, is a completed success story better than an unfinished story?" It depends on what you want me to do, Bernie. Do you want me to know the end of the story by going to your donate page? Do you want to have me know the end of the story by going to your Facebook page and commenting on it? Do you want to tell a part of the story to compel me to give and have me know the story isn't complete because we don't have the resources yet to have all the follow up being done to help this person? This is someone that we had to turn away. Just having a story in an appeal is critical. You don't have to have it complete. But you do want it to cause me to take action.

Here's an example of an organization that had a gala last fall. Tiffany in the picture here on the screen told her story. I coached her. She had about four minutes to share why when she was homeless and she only had her daughter Natalie, she was so moved and inspired that the Jeremiah Program in Minneapolis took her in, gave her a roof over her head, helped her get her GED, helped her go on to college. She's now a Vice President at Target Corporation. She got to talk about how her life was different and how she had felt pretty hopeless and like she didn't matter. Her children were there when she told the story. It was very succinct.

Then, when the thank you letters were sent, they put this insert in so we could relive her storytelling with a short quote from here. And if we didn't go to the event, they used the same story— a little longer version than you see on the screen here—in the fundraising appeal that went out that fall. So, making sure that the story oozes out over time—you don't have to have it be just a one—time feeling connection.

Lisa says, "What if you're a brand new startup and need seed funding but there are no stories to tell yet?" Oh, Lisa, there are. What is the vision? What do you believe in? So, we'll go back to the example. Let me tell you about who's your founder, who's the passionate person on the board. Here's why they believe our work will matter and here's why we banded together to create this organization. Here's what he or she or I think our organization can do to help children, to make a difference in the lives of veterans—whatever it is. Be very specific about the exact results and the transformations that you're thinking your work will do. Let me know, this is one of thousands of stories that you will be able to tell when you receive the funding that you need. So, nice question.

I did a nonprofit Movie Monday video for Chris Davenport. He's someone you want to follow. He has a free service called Movie Mondays for Nonprofits. My topic was on storytelling. You can share this video at a board meeting or a communications staff meeting. But I talk about the importance of board members in storytelling. One of the things that I make sure to share is a quick story about three board members at the Volunteers of America affiliate in New Orleans—they had a really deep ingrained storytelling culture. Board members actually used the template that I have here to create a story about a client that they got to meet. So, they got really good about talking about that person. They took their picture with them. They made sure to tell those stories in two minutes or less.

When Jim, the CEO, was going to visit a foundation, he asked for a volunteer, just one, to go with him to visit the foundation on a big donor ask. These three board members were adamant they all had to go. So, Jim brought them all. Jim talked a little bit about what was to happen when they got funded by this foundation at this very large level

and then the board members talked. At the end of the meeting, the program staff person said, “You know, Jim, you did a nice job with the numbers and the programs. I would like to tell that we’ll fund your program. I’ll make a recommendation to the full board, but here’s why. I’ve never experienced three board members so passionate and articulate about the clients and the work that you do. That’s why I want to make sure we fund your program.”

[Nore] says, “Can you talk more about program staff talking about clients’ success stories?” I would go back to the question at the beginning and the comment at the beginning. Program staff do not know how to tell the stories. So, our job, really, is to make sure that we know that. I’m going to click back through the slides here and go back to the assumptions. The assumptions are, “We take for granted that our program staff know how to tell a story and that they know the kind of stories that you’re asking for.” They don’t. I would not want your program staff to talk about your clients in front of donors if they don’t know how to tell the story. So, the very best people to tell stories about your clients are your clients. If they can’t be there that day, you can record them and tell, in a two-minute recap, why their life is different because of your work. But I’ll tell you what, you have to work with that person. And then, Nore, depending on what your title is, you may be the person who tells that story.

I share a story about a woman named Sandra. She is 27 years old. She lives in Sonora, Mexico. She is the first recipient of something that was able to be provided from the Department of Ophthalmology because of our International Fellows Program. When Sandra was born, she had eye problems and all her life she’s needed what is called cornea transplant surgery. Now, I’m not sure what that surgery really is, but when she looks at the mirror in the morning it’s like there’s soap on it. She can’t see to drive. She can’t work outside the home. We have this International Fellows Program that trains doctors in how to do cornea transplant surgery. We provide them training for free.

So, Dr. Rodriguez, her ophthalmologist, was provided that training with contributions from the community just like all of you. When he learned how to do that surgery, he decided to give back one surgery every year and Sandra was his first choice—no cost, free surgery in cornea transplant replacement. Sandra was so grateful to him and to us because that day she had the surgery was the day she got to see her seven and nine-year old boys for the very first time. Now she volunteers at the clinic, she is able to drive, she has a spring in her step, she is no longer hungry to be able to be released from her home and not have to rely on other people. She can go out and be in the world herself.

I’ve never met Sandra. I simply found her story and found bits of her story, and I got comfortable putting the pieces together with the framework that I’ve shared with you so that people could actually connect with her. Now, you may never give to the Department of Ophthalmology. But my hope is you feel something about the work that we were able to do and that compelling moment when I said she was able to see the faces of her seven- and nine-year-old boys for the first time makes you think, “Gosh, if I could never see my children’s faces, how would that be?” People might forget what you said, as I said earlier. They might forget what you do exactly. But they won’t forget how you made them feel.

Type in other questions as we’re going here. There are ways to stay in touch with me and follow me on my blog or my Facebook page. I do a weekly blog post. I am on Twitter. I know, Steve, you’re tweeting out right now as well that I’m a Twitter fan.

But I want to make sure that I give you some steps to create a storytelling culture and then I do want you to be thinking about your answer to, “What have you learned? And what will you do to create a storytelling culture?” So, think about typing that in.

I want you to infuse your mission. What I mean by that is have me be connected to the faces and the lives of the people whose lives are different. At your meetings, have stories shared regularly. Ask your board members and your staff and your donors for examples of how they feel inspired by your work. Make it fun and safe and easy to learn. I usually take that worksheet and at a board retreat or a committee meeting, we go through and create stories together. Include lots and lots and written untold stories on social media, websites—wherever you can.

Let’s see, Winston says, “I run an academic organization. The material is much more dry than operating a homeless center.” You know, ophthalmology is probably the least sexy mission I’ve ever worked with, Winston. I’m not sure a lot of people know how to spell it, let alone what we do. But I made sure to find a story about one person. When you teach someone to learn, to look outside the box, you are changing the trajectory of their life forever. So, you want to look for one person that you can encapsulate the essence of your work. Really, truly, it means, Winston, looking for the answers to the question, “Where can I find a mission moment and expand on it?” versus saying, “Where do I have a good story to tell?”

Just as you're thinking here, tell me, what have you learned? What will you do to create a storytelling culture? Go ahead and type into the box.

Sheryl's got some great comments for you there. "You may have saved someone's sight by an early intervention." Ah, she's talking about my work. But, at the academic organization, "You change my life trajectory, you give me a way to feel, hope for the future. There are a lot of things that happen because you've opened up my ideas of what is possible through learning."

Some of you are saying, "I'll be sharing the webinar with their executive director who's good at telling a story and you want to develop more." You want to learn how to listen to folks. I used to go sit in the lobby at the Department of Ophthalmology and just say, "Thank you for being here. I'm the Development Director. I am curious why you chose our doctors to be your eye doctors versus some of the other optometrists in town." I would get some amazing stories. I would ask for permission. I would tell them I'd like to print some of those stories or have them tell those stories at meetings that we have. You would be amazed. I had a longer list of people who wanted to share their stories than I ever had the time to use the stories.

All right. So, we've got some feedback here. "Practice my own storytelling skills on peers." Yes, good. "How to be better sharing the impact," go back and look at the stories we're sharing and our ten days of impact. "Driving folks to donate on Giving Tuesday." Love it. So, make sure you're actually telling a story versus giving a report and have them have emotionally connecting details. Love that, Debbie. "Two minutes or less," yep. We have attention deficit disorder, all of us, we have to be quick. "Focus on mission moments and changing assumptions about people's abilities to tell stories, create storytelling culture." Yes.

You're going to share some examples and have people tell you theirs. You're going to tell the story of an elder who's celebrating their hundredth birthday because of singing, dancing and getting together with other elders at your health center— love that. Love it. You want to paint a picture for me of what you do and why your work is so, so, so important. It's through the eyes of one person—the lens of just one person.

All right. Any other examples we may read off here, but is there any wrap-up and other thoughts you want to share, Steve?

Steven: Boy, that was just great. I don't know how we can top that. I love the interactivity. So, thanks to everyone who was sending questions. Lori, thanks to you for answering all of those. Really great discussion. I hope everyone enjoyed it as much as I did. This will definitely be a replay for me. For everyone listening, we will be sending out the slides and the recording later this afternoon. So, look for that in your email.

In just the few seconds we have remaining, I just want to thank Lori again for joining us. It was really a treat. This was really valuable information that Lori usually charges for. So, we really appreciate her sharing all her knowledge. So, thanks, Lori.

Lori: I'm honored. Thank you so much. I just love talking about storytelling.

Steven: Yeah. Me too. Do follow Lori on Twitter if you use Twitter. Sign up for her newsletter. Check her blog. That's one blog that, you know, one of maybe five blog sites that every morning, it's that good. So, definitely do those things. If you like this webinar, we do weekly webinars here at Bloomerang. We're taking a break next week, though, because Jay and I will be traveling. But the week after that, we're going to have Jay Wilkinson from Firespring and he's going to talk about SEO. He is a legit internet marketing SEO expert. He's going to share some of his tips for hopefully all of the nonprofit listeners on the webinar. So, do register for that. You can go to our website and register for that. It's totally free and totally educational.

So, it's about 2:00. I think we'll end it there. So, Lori, thanks for joining us. Have a great rest of your day and we'll talk to you all again soon.

Lori: Good luck everyone. Thanks again, Steve.