

# Stories – Think Piece

Memory is one of the prime enablers of change. For instance, if we can remember what we need to do differently and why it is important, then it is far more likely that we'll actually behave differently. Memory is the driver of action and yet at the same time our memory is fallible. Why do we mis-remember things? Why do people derive different meanings and memories even when exposed to the same situations? There are numerous ways to make things more memorable to more people. In this piece we discuss an important way to make messages more memorable – using stories.

Whilst simple rules of thumb such as repeating key change messages 5-7 times are useful in improving memorability, this takes a lot of effort and it can, unfortunately, start to turn off people that were otherwise engaged.

We recommend that change messages are captured, even in part, into stories and associated pictures. Why stories? Because we are neurologically programmed to remember stories. For example, the story of the 'boy who cried wolf' is estimated to be thousands of years old and yet we have all heard it and can recite it. We can do this without having had it repeated 5-7 times and without having been on the receiving end of an expensive marketing campaign.

Good, compelling change stories get to the heart of why people need to do things differently and they self-propagate. The only thing people like more than a good story is a scurrilous one!

When a new automatic security barrier was installed into a delivery company's car park, the staff were told to individually swipe-in and not tailgate the person in front. However, tailgating was common, until the story of the person who had the barrier come down on their car was told. Tailgating stopped and people adopted the new norm.

When a well known dandruff shampoo brand first entered the market in the former Eastern bloc countries it used its usual (repetitive) advertising campaigns. Sales were soon soaring but then they inexplicably crashed. It was established that people thought the advertising claims were false. Instead, stories were circulating that the shampoo actually caused hair loss. These stories came from the fact that the previous communist government had repeated patently false stories as part of its political propaganda. People recognised the same repetitive nature in the shampoo advertisements and assumed that it was also propaganda.

So, stories are powerful because they are memorable and because they transmit easily. But, when using stories, make sure that they are grounded in the truth of the situation. Don't try to spin them to the 'corporate line' if it doesn't chime with the experience of your audience. Otherwise, you may find a different story being told.