

[Transcript] The Diary Of A CEO with Steven Bartlett / Moment 101 - This 1 Skill Will Transform Your Life: Will Storr

In The Diary of a CEO, we have hundreds of questions that have been left by our guests and we've put them on these cards.

And on these cards, you have the question that's been left in The Diary of a CEO, the name of the person who wrote the question.

And if you turn it over, there's a QR code.

If you scan that code, you can see which guest answered the question and watch the video of them answering it.

Every time I've done this podcast and every time we've asked the kind of questions we ask here, I feel a tremendous sense of affinity to the guest.

And our aim with these cards is that you can create that sense of connection through vulnerability at home with the people you love the most.

And I have some good news for you.

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On that point of storytelling, you mentioned storytelling there in our narrative, your book in 2019 was about storytelling.

Having worked in marketing was very compelled to read this book.

Probably we talked before we start recording that a lot of people will see a book about, with the word storytelling on the front of it, and think that they can use it from a marketing capacity or in a business sense.

What have you learnt about how people can tell great stories in the context of business and marketing?

Yeah, well, so quite a lot, I teach business storytelling at Section 4, which is an American EdTech organization, so I do a course there in the science and storytelling for business.

And we are storytelling animals, we think in story, narrative is basically how we experience ourselves and life.

And so, as I say in that course, if you're not communicating with story as a marketer, you're not communicating, logic and facts and data and statistics, that's not the language of the brain.

The language of the brain is beginning, middle and end, a character overcoming obstacles.

I think a lot of the stuff we've been talking about is important, especially the idea that people think with their feelings.

It's feelings first, story second, the story justifies the feelings.

And so, if you want to tell persuasive stories, you need to first understand exactly who you're communicating with and you need to understand how they feel about the world, how they feel about themselves, how they feel about, you know, justice and what their values are.

And so, that means understanding them kind of tribally, what groups do they belong to, who are their heroes, who are their villains, what motivates them, what demotivates them.

So, before you can sort of write the story, you need to figure out how they feel about the world.

So, a bad story then would be one that was, because you know, I thought about this a lot and my previous business was very successful in storytelling.

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So, in my first company, Social Chain, it's grown to be a very big business, maybe a thousand employees worldwide, we started out as a marketing agency, never had a sales team, because we focused on telling stories, those stories were told on social media and on stage by me.

So, if we could go up on stage and talk about our agency to try and win business from Apple or Coca-Cola, whoever it was, I would actually start by talking about my relationship with my mother.

And that would be the first sentences out of my mouth when I walked on stage, if there was a thousand people or 15,000 people there, it would be about my mother.

And through that story about my mother and my upbringing and my battles and all those things, eventually you'd learn about our business and what we do and about the great work we do.

But that was the preface of it.

That meant we never needed a sales team.

I've always believed that if I'd walked on stage and started with a case study, I would have had to have a sales team at Social Chain, not one doors.

I think this is one of the biggest mistakes businesses make.

When they pitch, when they speak on stage, when they post on social media, I think they believe that the listener wants big numbers and to how many views they got for their clients and it just doesn't seem to be consistent with reality.

No, it's not.

I mean, so what you're doing when you're going into what your mother is, you're connecting emotionally.

So people are wanting, they're on your side immediately and you're making them feel good. You're making them feel things emotionally.

The kind of framework that I use for business storytelling is that essentially people's brains process reality in the same way.

And that's the, you know, so they're the hero of their story.

You're not the hero standing on the stage.

The company that selling to you isn't the hero, they're the hero of their own story.

They are, you know, they've got goals they're trying to pursue.

We will have, you know, that which are the plots of our lives.

The audience.

Yeah, the audience, the person you're selling to.

And then there's a brilliant story analyst called Christopher Booker who wrote this amazing book called The Seven Basic Plots.

And he writes about archetypal characters and storytelling that he calls light figures.

And so the light figure is the example he uses of the three ghosts in Christmas Carol, the Charles Dickens Scrooge story.

So Scrooge is the hero of that story.

But the three ghosts come in to show him Christmas past, Christmas present, Christmas future. They help him get what he needs, which is to become a better, more selfless, more generous, more loving, giving person.

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So they arrive in his story to kind of show him the way to help him get what he needs.
And so that's what I argue.
That's the appropriate position for most companies and organizations and leaders is not to be the hero because your audience feels like they're the hero.
You're the light figure.
You're there to help them get what they want.
So when you go straight in with his or my awards, here's what this person said about me.
Here's some statistics and stuff.
You're not a light figure.
You're presenting as the hero.
What people really want to know is how can you help me get what I want?
And that's the story that you have to tell.
What kind of example can you give me to really make that, make me understand that in a real practical sense?
Is there a brand?
You've seen do this really well.
Is there an example of a, I mean, my brain went to Nike for some reason.
Yeah.
Nike is a really interesting example.
So obviously one of the things that Nike has done recently is it's done that ad campaign around Colin Kaepernick, which is controversial, but did them, I think they're selling up to like 6% after that ad campaign.
And that's a really good example of an organization who is behaving as a light figure.
So that Colin Kaepernick ad campaign has nothing to do with shoes.
What they're not doing is going, our shoes will make you run 8% faster.
We've got these sprung souls.
We've got these amazing laces that won't trip you up or whatever.
Their stats list is not in there.
It's purely, they're telling a story.
They figured out that their client base are mostly believing certain, you know, this set of beliefs around the world.
And those are goals, you know, people who, you know, the target audience that they're appealing to want to achieve this kind of racial social justice and that's important to them.
So what Nike are basically saying is, you know, we are light figures in this story.
You know, we are on the side of the Colin Kaepernick's of the people who are kneeling.
You know, we believe that black lives matter.
And so they're presenting as a light figure.
And if you think about it rationally, it's kind of crazy.
Like, why would a shoe company have this political thing?
But it's because of the storytelling, because they're presenting as a light figure who was engaged in the kind of, you know, this particular mission, the world.

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And you know, in order to kind of to kind of join the mission, you buy the Nike shoes and it worked, you know, it works really well.

I mean, one of the archetypal examples that I talk about that I love is that there was an ad that was broadcast, I think it was in the 60s by Volkswagen.

And it was the first kind of modern advert, the first, it was the first advert that you would look at and recognize as the kind of advertising that we do today.

So before this Volkswagen ad, you know, all ads were just stats lists.

Here's this amazing, you know, tire and, you know, this will get you 0 to 60 and whatever.

And then this Volkswagen did this amazing ad where it just, it was black and white because it was still in the days of black and white.

And they had, it just showed this guy, it was all snowing, it's a big blizzard outside and this guy gets in his car, he turns, it's like, it's like, you know, just before dawn, turns on his ignition, drives his car through the blizzard, blizzard, blizzard, blizzard opens these huge shed doors and then you hear this big engine start up and out drives his snow plow.

And it's how does the guy who drives the snow plow get to the snow plow?

And it's just Volkswagen.

And that's a really simple, really effective story.

And it's showing Volkswagen as this light figure.

We are helping the hero achieve what he wants.

And you know, I don't believe that the Volkswagen was particularly good at driving through blizzards.

I don't believe that.

And there certainly weren't making any factual claim in the sense that we are better than Land Rover and whatever, whatever, whatever doing this because of this stat.

It was as simple as that.

And it revolutionized marketing.

It changed everything because they'd figured out that kind of light figure form of storytelling.

And in that, are they saying that the Volkswagen, Volkswagen enables you to be the hero that means the snow?

Exactly.

Yeah.

And Nike are saying that the Nike shoe, associating it with Colin Kaepernick enables you to be the social activist hero.

Hero, exactly.

Yeah.

Like Colin Kaepernick was.

Yeah, exactly.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Fascinating.

I'm just going to change a few things about my, a few of my companies, I think, basis of that.

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Yeah.

And I think in the course of business, we all forget that emotion is the most important thing.

I'm thinking about all the newsletters that my companies have been writing.

I've got various companies and the newsletters they write and the videos we make and how, and how sometimes we, we think that facts and figures and information is what the viewer is looking for in their lives, but the most compelling way to draw them in to whatever we're doing, whether it's a newsletter or a tweet or whatever is by putting emotion in first and really thinking about what the emotion of the content is.

Yeah.

Yeah, exactly.

And with the Nike example, I mean, we live in, since the global financial crisis, we live in heightened political times.

And so, you know, and people are always tribal.

And so, you know, one of the big things that the successful kind of persuaders do is to make those tribal appeals.

And you know, sometimes it works with Colin Kaepernick, like with the Gillette razor campaign, it didn't work because you're kind of essentially attacking your target audience.

So that was, you know, less successful.

I think there was a terrible Pepsi ad with Kendall Jenner, where, where, where, where they were kind of basically, yeah, where we were just making this, yeah.

Well, it put a super rich, beautiful model, white woman as the hero against social injustice and drinking the sugary drink is going to help, you know, so, yeah.

So I think organizations are sensing that partly how we can be a light figure these days is by, is by, is by presenting as people who are assisting in these, these political goals that have become very important to people, especially young people.

And some people are getting it right.

Some people are getting it wrong.

There's a real science to it, though, isn't there?

Yeah.

More we've spoken, I've realized how, how there is a science to it when you understand the, the roles and also the audience.

The roles of the characters in your content or your piece, and also where the, it's really about where the audience sees themselves, did you say?

Yeah.

I think they feel represented.