

Structure your story well

There are many structures that story-tellers can use. But some structures are more useful than others for the purpose of networking. Here is one that works.

Before considering the structure, it is worth remembering the following:

- (1) The point of the story is to show the listener that the teller has the ability to help clients solve their problems. It isn't to educate the listener, so it doesn't have to be complete: it isn't an academic exercise.
- (2) All detail that is extraneous to this objective should be eliminated—however interesting and however much the teller thinks it should be included.
- (3) Because the point of telling the story is to show the listener that the teller has the ability to help clients solve their problems, the emphasis should be on the skills, abilities and attributes the teller brought to the situation, not what the teller did—however interesting etc.
- (4) When thinking through the content of the story, imagine that the listener interrupts you saying “but what did you *really* bring to the situation?”, “why did the client have to employ *you*, rather than anybody else?”.

Structure

The structure is in five sections:

Introduction

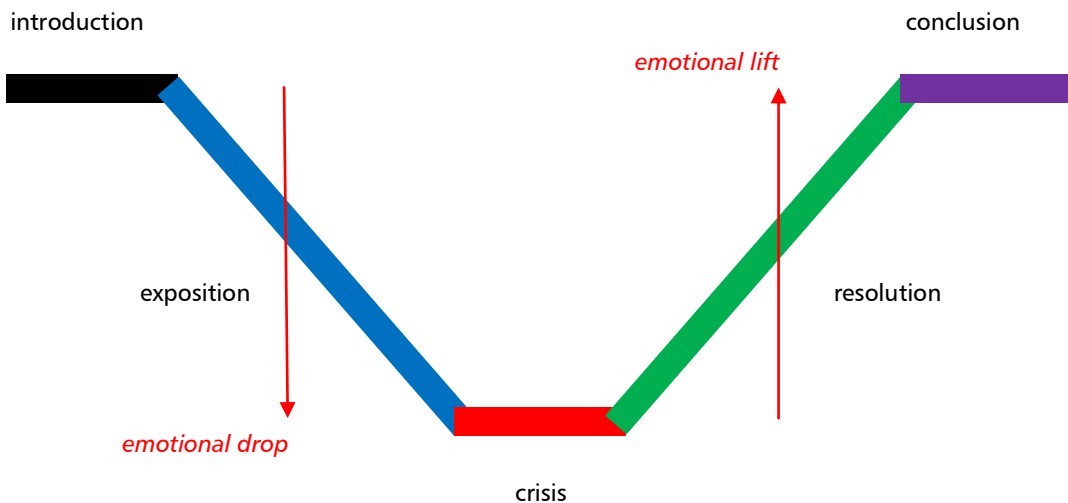
This is optional and sets the scene where necessary: it should be as brief as possible. It is intended to ensure the listener has some context for the story: it is best if it doesn't contain specific information on which an understanding of the story relies. (This is because you're getting ahead of yourself: this information belongs later.)

Exposition

This is where you describe the problem the client had before you arrived. You need to describe it as clearly as possible, and make sure the description can be matched later when you explain how you helped the client resolve it.

It is essential that this is not a dry, neutral, factual description. You need to “milk” it. Really get across the emotions the client must have been feeling, the complexity (no doubt) which was going to greet you when you arrived.

You need to create an emotional “drop” between the start and end of the exposition because you need to get the listener into their feelings (because in that state they are most likely to remember what you say next).



Crisis

This term is taken from ancient Greek drama, where it means "turning point". It might coincide with your arrival into the story, though that probably happened during the exposition, where you recount the problems that you discovered.

Ideally, the turning point should be a revelation, a realisation that the client has (probably as a result of your involvement).

Resolution

In this section you describe how your involvement enabled the client to resolve their problem. It should have an air of things getting better, people feeling more positive.

Once again, it is essential that this is not a dry, neutral, factual description. Again, you need to "milk" it. And, as much as possible, emphasise what you really brought to the client as opposed to the tasks you actually carried out—unless those tasks were so exceptional that they are the point of the estory.

You need to create an emotional "lift" between the start and end of the resolution to enable the listener to enjoy an emotional release from the feelings they were in just before the crisis. As that release will accompany your explanation of your involvement in the problem, the two will become associated.

Conclusion

You do not want the listener to end on an emotional high (because the moment you leave, their emotional level will drop). They should be just above the neutral state they were in before you started. So the conclusion just allows them to land gently. However, it should be brief and could be omitted, if appropriate.

Stories on the emotional intelligence at work website:

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