

# Creating Great Content

Working with program staff,  
conducting interviews, crafting your story



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**HUMANE SOCIETY**  
INTERNATIONAL



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# Utilize the Basics

## What you need:

- Transformation/Impact
- Emotion
- Urgency
- Donor centricity
- Clear call to action

## What you get:

HSI/India volunteer found a pup on the street that was being harassed by the local children. The volunteer took him home, fostered him, and reached out to us [HSI/India] to help let the community know he was adoptable.

Manoj and Misti adopted him and named him Bravo. They said: “Bravo is very playful and has completed our family.”





# Manage Internal Audiences

## Advocating for Marketing

- Are there internal misconceptions?
- Be clear about what you need for your story content
- Create a designated point of contact for sharing stories
- Get people excited about what you do
  - Pick your most interesting tests (with completed performance results) and have staff vote on what they think won
  - Share results! When program staff know their work raised \$X they're encouraged to continue sharing

Isn't print  
dead?

This doesn't sound like  
me. Donors will know I  
didn't write this.

If you only get  
1.6% response  
in acquisition,  
why do we do  
it?

Why is our  
mail so...  
*ugly?*

# Know Who To Talk To

## Same Question, Different Perspectives

### Person #1

“53 dogs rescued from a truck that was heading for the slaughterhouse. Dog trafficker was arrested. Dogs will be flown to HSI, HSI/Canada, and partner shelters to prepare for adoption.”

### Person #2

“Boss Man (dog) was given his name because he seemed to take everything in stride! Despite what he endured, he bounced back so quickly and took the younger dogs under his wing... encouraging them to play with him and learn to trust again. Boss Man has the best beaming smile and waggy tail, greeting everyone when they arrive; and he really is a testament to just how special these dogs are.”

# Interview With Purpose

## Best Practices for Interviewing

- Make sure participant understands purpose and intended use of interview
- Ask open-ended questions
- Listen, leave space for people to elaborate on their story
- Ask questions that speak to motivation, experience rather than outcome
- Ask for sensory details when relevant
- If you're using a translator, make sure they understand the importance of sharing everything the participant says



# Interview With Purpose

## Best Practices for Trauma Informed Interviewing

- Ask participant what they need to feel comfortable in the interview
- Get a basic understanding of their experience before starting the interview
- Let participant know they have the right not to answer questions, to stop the interview, or withdraw consent at any time
- Sharing their story may be retriggering. Are there resources available to them if they need support after your conversation?
- Record the interview so you don't have to follow up later with questions
- Mirror their language and terminology

# Sample Interview Questions

## Questions for Donors & Board

- Do you have a personal connection with this cause/issue? Is someone you know affected? Tell me about that person.
- There are other charities working in this arena, what made you choose this one?
- In your eyes, what makes this organization unique? What are they the best at?
- Have you had a chance to meet the people who are helped by this organization? Have there been any memorable moments—perhaps where you even got a little choked up?
- If you could talk with other philanthropists considering a donation, what would you tell them about why they should consider giving to this organization?
- Board: What is the strategic vision for the organization—how will it accomplish its work?
- Board: How will this community, our nation, or our world be different if you succeed? What does success look like?

Interview Questions  
Developed by:





# Sample Interview Questions

## Questions for Program Staff

- Is there something in your personal background that makes this cause especially important to you? A personal story you want to share?
- Of all the work you have done here at [organization], what are you most proud of?
- Thinking back on your work in the past year(s), were there any memorable moments? Perhaps a time when you got a little choked up?
- Can you tell me about someone who benefitted from this organization's work who made a particularly strong impression on you? Someone you will never forget?
- What has changed since you first started working here? How has the organization responded to that change?
- What keeps you going? What helps you get up every morning to do this work?
- If you could talk to our donors and tell them why their support is important, what would you say?

Interview Questions  
Developed by:



# Sample Interview Questions

## Questions for Beneficiaries of Services or their Family Members

- Tell me a bit about your family: Where did you grow up? What do your parents do? Do you have sisters and brothers? Can you tell me how this situation has impacted your family?
- What exactly did this organization do for you? What has that support meant to your family?
- What was the hardest part about what you went through? What was your lowest point when you really felt overwhelmed?
- How would your life be different today if it had not been for the help you received from [organization]?
- What else needs to happen to help your family? Do you see this organization playing a role in that?
- If you were able to sit down with Bill Gates and tell him why he should consider making a donation to this organization, what would you say?

Interview Questions  
Developed by:



# Storytelling that moves your audience

Jay Shepley, Communications Director, Food & Friends



# Why Stories?

- As deeply social creatures, storytelling has been part of human life since the beginning of time. NYT research shows that stories are 22 times more memorable than facts and figures.
- 80% of consumers want brands to tell stories as part of their marketing.
- Emotions drive decision making -- not logic
- Stories effectively communicate the soul, purpose and value of your brand

# What do you want to learn today?

- Share out from the participants!
- Have you tried stories?
- Did anything get in your way?

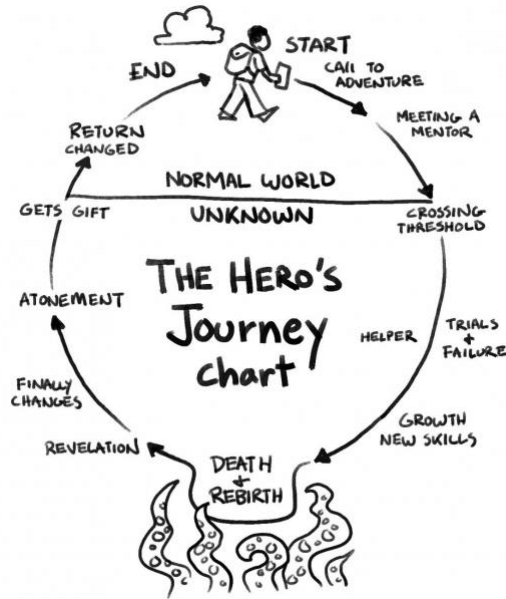
# The Art of Storytelling: The Key Formula

- **Exposition:** Introduces the character and setting
- **Rising Action:** Something changes; the characters meet a challenge or crisis
- **Climax:** The turning point and most exciting part of a story
- **Falling Action:** Events that follow as a result of the climax
- **Resolution (or Denouement):** The end that occurs after a conflict is resolved and a character has changed

# Ingredients for Good Written Stories

- They need tension or obstacles
- They must answer the question, “Why should I care?”
- They should be 5-10 minute reads under three pages
- They need pathos: something touching, humorous, relatable
- They need photos

# What is the Hero's Journey?





# What are ABT's?

- **The Beginning—And = Setup**  
“A story has three parts—beginning, middle, and end. A typical story begins with what is called exposition, meaning a laying out of a few facts—basically the setup of the story. The simplest and most common connector for stringing together the setup facts is the agreement word ‘and.’”
- **The Middle—But = Tension**  
So you begin with one or more facts joined together by ‘and’s.’ Then it comes time for the story to start (a story begins when something happens) and for us to enter the middle of the story. This is where the word ‘but’ comes in. ...What occurs with ‘but,’ because of the contradictory direction it forces, is the establishment of tension, or even conflict...Conflict is the driving force of all stories. ”
- **The End—Therefore = Resolution**  
“‘Therefore’ is a word of consequence. It is a ‘time word.’ It shows up after some amount of time and signals a consequence or effect. What is the central element in a story? Time. When we talk about advancing the narrative, we’re talking about moving things forward in time. That’s what ‘therefore’ does. It pulls things together and moves them further along...It becomes a cue, meaning ‘What’s your point? What are you getting at? Where are you going with this?’”

# Building a Culture of Storytelling

Key approaches:

- Develop Personas
- Listen and Observe
- Encourage Authenticity
- Incentivize and Motivate
- Thank and Follow Up
- Demonstrate Value

# Using Visuals to Boost Your Story

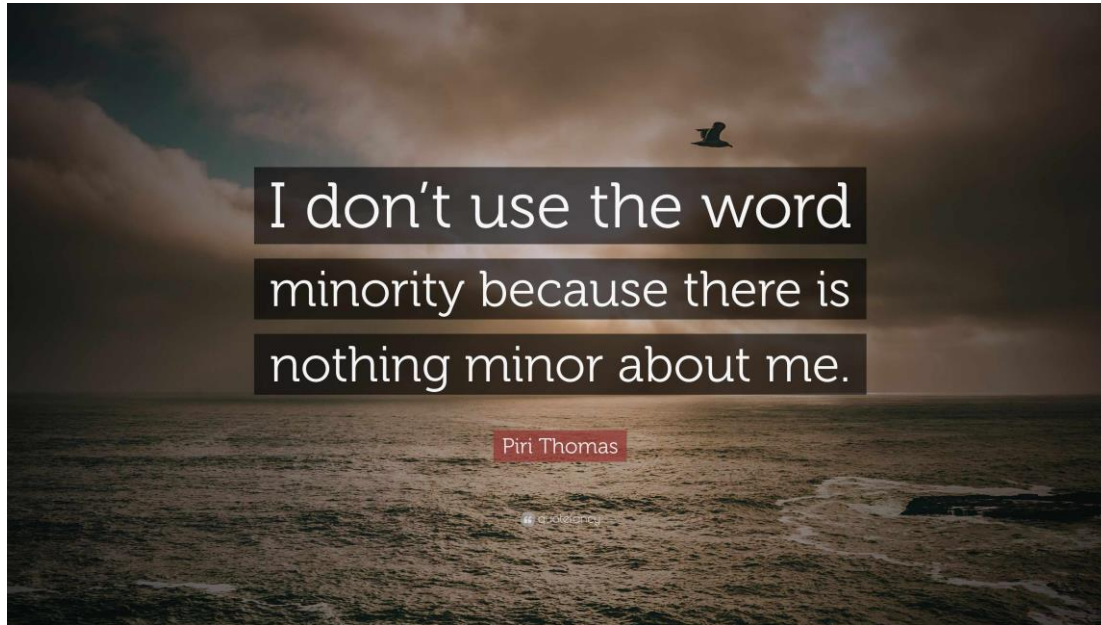
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2Hbp62AsUE>



# The Power of Telling Our Own Stories – A Point on Centering Racial Equity

I studied at the University of Nairobi under the tutorship of the famous writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o (who's now at the University of California). One of the first things that Ngugi did was to insist that there's a way in which, as Africans, we also needed to hear our own stories, to listen to our own voices, to read our literatures. He then, with two colleagues, worked to abolish what was then the English Department and insisted that it was, instead, going to be a Literature Department. By that he was looking towards a concentric understanding of literature in the sense that you start with local literatures and move out. The idea was never to be insular. **He was basically saying that for you to understand other people's stories, you need to understand your own stories, and you have to tell your own stories.** – James Ogude

# Be mindful of every word choice



# Some Storytelling Resources

Jay's Picks:

Out in the Boons: <https://www.outintheboons.me/>

ABT Storytelling: <https://businessofstory.com/services/storytelling-brand-strategy/park-howell-abt/>

Example of a nonprofit story by Jay:

<https://lgwdc.org/blog/the-enduring-love-mission-and-greater-purpose-of-minister-tom-lewis-97>

Laura's Picks:

- Save the Cat Writes a Novel (book)
- The Fundraiser's Guide to Irresistible Communication (book)
- [Future Fundraising Now](#) (blog)
- Absolutely anything by Jonah Berger

