

**John Capecci and Timothy Cage**

# Living **PROOF**

**Telling Your Story  
to Make a Difference**

Essential Skills for Advocates  
and Spokespersons



Granville Circle  
— P R E S S —

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# Contents

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<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>Get Ready</b>	7
<b>Chapter One: Your Story as Living Proof</b>	11
Answering the Call	12
Why Stories Work	15
<i>Exercise: My Six-Word Reason</i>	20
When Stories Work	22
The Five Qualities of Effective Advocacy Stories	27
<b>Chapter Two: Map Your Experience</b>	35
Explore the Entire Landscape	36
<i>Exercise: Story Map</i>	38
<b>Chapter Three: Find and Focus Your Story</b>	45
Choose What to Tell	46
<i>Exercise: What Makes the Cut?</i>	50
Focus on Your Goals and Audience	54
<i>Exercise: Link to Your Goals and Audience</i>	55
Focus on Key Messages	57
<i>Exercise: Compose Key Messages</i>	59
<i>Exercise: Link to Key Messages</i>	60
<b>Chapter Four: Name the Change</b>	64
Stories are About Change	65
<i>Exercise: Name Your Change</i>	67

<b>Chapter Five: Craft Your Story</b>	71
From Experience to Story	72
Assemble the Flexible Story	74
<i>Exercise: Right-Size Your Story</i>	78
The Language of Lived Experience	80
<i>Exercise: Make Language Live</i>	82
Hooks and Headlines	84
<i>Exercise: Hook Your Audience</i>	88
<b>Chapter Six: Frame It</b>	92
Provide Perspective	93
<i>Exercise: Build and Name Your Frames</i>	96
<b>Chapter Seven: Deliver Powerful Presentations</b>	100
From Talks to Keynotes	101
Being Audience-Centered	103
The Speaking Context	106
Strategic Structures	108
<b>Chapter Eight: Give Great Interviews</b>	115
The Media Opportunity	116
Know Your Target Audience	119
The Interview Context	122
Stay in Story and On Message	125
<i>Exercise: Bridge from Anywhere</i>	130
<b>Chapter Nine: Practice</b>	134
Speak Improvisationally	135
Good Practice Habits	140
<i>Exercise: Eight Practice Runs</i>	145

<b>Chapter Ten: Where Stories Lead</b>	150
Stepping Forward, Making a Difference	151
 <b>Public Speaking: Tips and Tools</b>	155
Delivery Tips	156
Handling Questions from the Audience	165
Speaking Prep Sheets	167
 <b>Media Interviews: Tips and Tools</b>	175
Interview Tips	176
Interview Formats	179
Handling Questions from a Reporter	183
Interview Prep Sheets	184
<b>Index</b>	188
<b>References</b>	193
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	197
<b>About the Authors</b>	198



# Introduction

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**E**verybody likes ice cream, right?  
That's the bet Ocean Robbins made as he stood before an audience of 500 and told his story:

*My grandfather started Baskin-Robbins ice cream company. Thirty-one flavors. (Audience applauds.) And from his earliest childhood, my dad, John Robbins, was groomed to one day join his father in the family company. He grew up with an ice cream cone-shaped swimming pool in the backyard and a commercial freezer in the garage full of 31 flavors of ice cream at all times. He grew up working in the factory and he was expected to join the family business. But then, when he was in his early 20s, he was offered that chance and he said "no." And my grandfather was pretty hurt and said "Why? What has come over you?" And my dad said, "You know, dad, we live in a world under a nuclear shadow. Every two seconds another child is dying of hunger and malnutrition. The environment's deteriorating rapidly under the impact of human activity. And given those circumstances... I don't think inventing a thirty-second flavor is an adequate response for my life.*

Ocean delivered this keynote address at the National Alliance for Peace conference in Washington, DC. A tireless advocate for young people building a better world, he drew upon his experience to talk

about citizen responsibility and youth empowerment. He hooked the audience with his unique family history. And he told his personal story naturally and passionately.

While writing *Living Proof*, we've been fortunate to meet many people like Ocean who've found they can make a real difference telling their personal stories. Working for more than twenty years as communication trainers, we've helped thousands reach that same goal. Some, like Ocean, tell their stories on a national stage; many more share their stories in community meetings or with bloggers and local newspaper reporters. They're "ordinary" people and first-time speakers. They're also skilled presenters and media personalities. They speak in support of large and small nonprofits, local and national groups and publicity campaigns for the arts, the environment, education, health and youth. They stand at lecterns, sit in circles and knock on doors. They're interviewed over the phone and on-camera. They've appeared in high school gymnasiums, at The White House and on *Oprah*. But no matter where they're from or how much (or how little) experience they have, these people share the same objective: to tell a personal story with clarity, passion and purpose and to have that story make a difference for someone or some cause. They are advocates.

In Roman law, the *advocatus* was called to plead others' cases in a court of justice. Today, our use of the word *advocate* has expanded beyond the legal sense to include all those working to make the world a healthier, safer and more just place. We wrote *Living Proof* for these many people because we've seen how, with the right support and coaching, ordinary people can become extraordinary advocates.

Personal stories have a unique ability to affect audiences. But it's not by story alone that successful advocates convince others to take action, whether that action is donating money, improving public policy or changing behavior. Advocating with story takes a specific kind of

preparation. It requires practice with elements of persuasion, public speaking, media interview skills and storytelling—not to mention healthy doses of fortitude and commitment.

We also wrote *Living Proof* to provide advocates a single resource for this special kind of preparation, a one-stop shop that gathers together what you need in order to stand up next week and tell your story effectively at a town meeting or on national television. We knew from experience that such a book didn't exist. When participants in our workshops have asked for additional resources, we could point them only to the many excellent works on storytelling, personal narratives, public speaking, media skills, persuasion, autobiography, civic action, citizenship—but to no single, accessible guidebook that pulled together the essentials and specifically focused on how to tell a personal story in this unique context—as an advocate.

*Living Proof* is based on our experience training advocates and draws from the work of experts and colleagues in many fields. It focuses on the essentials: what you need to know to tell your story effectively in public (from talks to keynotes) and media interviews (from blogs to broadcast). At the center are **The Five Qualities of Effective Advocacy Stories**. These qualities form a simple, strong foundation for success wherever and whenever you tell your story. You'll find the Five Qualities echoed throughout *Living Proof*.

Preparation to tell a personal story publicly rarely follows a straightforward, linear path. It requires giving over to the fluid creative process—that back and forth, push and pull that will happen as you craft your experience into story, adapt to changing settings and audiences, and manage your identity as a public advocate. That said, *Living Proof* does follow a general sequence—from the exploration of the power of stories, to ways of finding, crafting and preparing your story, to the specific skills needed to deliver powerful presentations and

give great media interviews. You can certainly work through *Living Proof* from start to finish—over a weekend, a week or in conjunction with a course of study. You can also flip to the sections most useful to you right now or keep the book on hand as a resource. Like our workshops, we've tried to make *Living Proof* adaptable to individual needs:

- Each chapter title page previews what's inside
- *Exercises* help you explore and plan
- *Practice Runs* guide your run-throughs for specific speaking engagements or interviews
- *Tips and Tools* offer advice on public speaking and media skills
- *Prep Sheets* provide blank forms to use as you plan to give a talk or interview

Throughout *Living Proof* you'll meet advocates from diverse walks of life. Many have generously shared their stories and experiences of being an advocate and we're indebted to them for the richness they bring to this work. You can read more about them and view videos of their advocacy at [www.livingproofadvocacy.com](http://www.livingproofadvocacy.com).

Advocates frequently describe the experience of “going public” as a combination of great uncertainty and incredible potential—what psychologists and anthropologists might refer to as a *liminal* experience: betwixt and between. Paul Loeb, in *Soul of a Citizen*, captures this sense of standing at the threshold of social involvement—and the rewards that come with stepping forward:

*Rarely does social involvement place us in the path of destructive natural forces or armed opponents, but it does involve risk. At the*

*very least, it requires us to make ourselves psychologically vulnerable. It impels us to overcome distracting habits and petty concerns, to challenge internal fears, and to face criticism from those who call our efforts fruitless, foolish, or a waste of scarce time.*

*In return, social involvement converts us from detached spectators into active participants. We develop new competencies and strengths. We form strong bonds with coworkers of courage and vision. Our lives become charged with purpose (34).*

Your story *can* make a difference. We offer *Living Proof* as a guide. Advocate for the people and causes important to you, employing the single most powerful tool only you have—your personal story.

*John and Tim*



# Get Ready

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**H**owever you enter *Living Proof*—whether reading from start to finish or flipping to the sections most relevant to you—be sure to take these important steps.

- **Complete the two main exercises: *My Six-Word Reason* and *Story Map*.** *My Six-Word Reason* (page 25) is a great starting point, focusing immediately on your goals. *Story Map* (page 45) is the important foundation for much of the work in *Living Proof* and you'll return to it often.
- **Start speaking now.** While you may share your story in written form via blogs, websites or editorials, *Living Proof* is about the power of the *spoken* story. So speak out early and often. When you talk out your ideas, even stand and speak them, you train your body and voice—and this goes a long way in helping you become comfortable and confident whether on a stage or in a studio. Of course, there are times when you need to work things out on paper. But don't rely too heavily on the written word. Get used to speaking your work and you'll get ever closer to a comfortable and genuine telling.
- **Practice *free-telling*.** One way to get in the habit of speaking your work is to use *free-telling*, a composition technique based on *free-writing*. Free-writing is a stream-of-consciousness exercise

used by writers to generate material and break through writer's block: the writer sets an amount of time (say five or ten minutes) and doesn't stop writing until time is up. Not all of what is written is useable but the exercise forces the writer to put on paper whatever comes to mind—often, great ideas that were lurking just under the surface. The principle behind free-telling is the same and a number of exercises in *Living Proof* use this technique. Free-telling is particularly helpful as you search for the parts of your experience that will become your story, as you craft your language and as you practice for presentations and interviews.

- **Decide how you'll capture your ideas.**

Plan now how you'll keep notes or record your insights from the exercises in *Living Proof*: a written or electronic journal, an actual or online filing system, a tape or digital audio or video recorder.

- **Enlist partners.** Stories need listeners and speakers need audiences. As you work on your story, it will often take someone saying, "Hey, that's really interesting" or "I'm confused. Tell me more about that" or "Is that detail really necessary?" If you want to measure how your story takes shape or affects others, you'll need a

### How To Free-tell

- Find a comfortable, private space.
- Set a timer for two minutes.
- Begin speaking and continue until the time is up. Don't critique yourself or worry that your story is coming out sloppily; free-telling is the verbal equivalent of writing a first draft or doodling. If you get stuck, just repeat the last thing you've said until a new thought comes to mind.
- If you need to pause and jot down a moment of brilliance, do. But continue speaking immediately. If you're able to record your free-telling, listen for ideas or language you may want to keep in subsequent "drafts."

partner or coach. A partner may be another advocate working on the same goals, someone from the organization you're working with or a professional communication coach. Regardless of who you choose, make sure it's someone who can provide candid and helpful feedback.

### **Working With a Partner**

Be specific about what you'd like your partner to listen or watch for. Ask open-ended questions that prompt specific responses rather than questions that will get a yes or no answer. You'll get more useful information from "What part of my story can you visualize most clearly?" than from "So, was that okay?"



## Chapter One

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# Your Story as Living Proof



### IN CHAPTER 1

- How advocates and organizations use stories
- Why and when stories work—and why and when they don't
- An important exercise: *My Six-Word Reason*
- The Five Qualities of Effective Advocacy Stories

# Answering the Call

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*During a small fundraising event for a cancer-support organization in Minneapolis, Derek Cotton stands in a board member's living room clutching a half-page of notes. He tells guests what it felt like to be diagnosed with colon cancer and how, when he lived in Texas, the Dallas affiliate of the organization provided support that "... balanced me out. Kept me off the ledge."*

*Sitting with other parents in the library of her son's Brooklyn grade school, Theresa Greenleaf calmly tells what it's like being the mom of a kid with food allergies, how appreciative she is of the school's support and assistance—and how critical parents' cooperation is to safeguarding all kids at the school with allergies or asthma.*

*Loren Vaillancourt takes a deep breath as the news anchor of CBS' The Early Show asks, "You believe it was distracted driving that led to your brother's death. He was just 21-years-old. What happened in that accident?"*

**E**very day, millions of people go public.

They stand up at community meetings to address their friends and neighbors. They sit under bright lights in a television studio, waiting for the interviewer's next question. They approach lecterns, adjust microphones and look out at unfamiliar faces.

At rallies and fundraisers, in radio and television studios, in community centers, on the phone with local reporters and in front of web cameras, millions of individuals like you come forward daily to tell their stories.

They speak to raise awareness. They speak to change minds. They speak to educate, mobilize, give voice to under- or misrepresented people, promote a beneficial product or service and raise money. They speak for causes local and global—from creating safer schools to reducing the incidence of heart disease, from encouraging arts funding to ending homelessness. They tell their stories with anger, humor, hope, candor and passion. They go public with their personal and sometimes intimate stories not for their own celebrity—though they may, in fact, be celebrities—nor purely for dramatic effect—though their stories often are dramatic.

They tell their stories because they believe that they can help others and make a difference.

Like you, they are advocates.

Whether you call yourself a spokesperson, activist, representative, change-maker or champion, if you speak out on behalf of someone or some cause, you are an advocate.

Advocates fight for the rights of others. Advocates publicly endorse valuable products or services. Advocates raise

.....  
 The Latin root of *advocate* is *vocare* (to call), closely related to *vox* (voice).  
 .....

funds for a cause. In each instance the action at the heart of advocacy remains the same: speaking out. You are answering the call to help others and—in the true spirit of advocacy—are being vocal about it.

You may have come to advocacy on your own, it may be part of your job or you may have been asked to “put a face” on a campaign by serving as its spokesperson. You may be part of a large advocacy group or acting as a one-person crusader. However you’ve reached this point, you share an objective: to have your story move audiences from apathy to empathy to action.

*When Derek Cotton told the people gathered in that Minneapolis living room of the support he received from Gilda's Club in Dallas, he was living proof of the value of this national cancer support organization. He advocated for opening a Gilda's Club affiliate in the Twin Cities, his new home. He spoke in support of others dealing with cancer and he wanted the people in that living room to open their wallets.*

*When Theresa Greenleaf described to other parents the night her son suffered a severe allergic reaction and collapsed in the cab as she rushed him to the hospital, she was living proof of the importance of vigilance. She advocated for compliance with school policies regarding allergens in packed lunches. She spoke in support of her son and others at the school. She wanted the parents in that school library to open their hearts.*

*When Loren Vaillancourt told the CBS anchor that her younger brother Kelson was killed in a traffic accident involving a distracted driver, she was living proof of the personal loss that results from a preventable accident. She spoke on behalf of others at risk on the road and wanted viewers to change their driving behaviors and open their eyes.*

Like Derek, Theresa and Loren you are an advocate because you, too, hope your story can move others to act.

# Why Stories Work

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**T**here are more than 1.5 million nonprofit organizations in the United States and the vast majority relies on people like you to share stories to help them deliver their messages. Commercial businesses, too, depend on stories that will prove the value of their product or service, whether it's a vaccine that saves lives or a light bulb that saves energy. And every day, individuals committed to making a difference in their corners of the world are standing up to say, "Let me tell you what happened. Let me show you what I've seen."

What these diverse groups and individuals have in common is the belief that stories can provide compelling answers to the question: "Why should anyone care?"

Everyday we see examples of how one person's story can make us care, inspire us or persuade us to act. An inspirational news feature shows an athlete overcoming personal challenges to win Olympic gold and we re-evaluate our own goals and motivations. A beloved celebrity talks candidly about his battle with Parkinson's disease and, thinking of friends similarly affected, we make a donation. A bereaved mother stands up at a local school board meeting and tells how her son, the victim of a hate crime,

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### **Google™ "share your story"**

and you'll get millions of responses including the Kansas City Public Library, the Native American Advocacy Program, the Human Rights Campaign, the National Council of La Raza, Susan G. Koman for the Cure, The American Bible Society, Harvard University, Greenpeace and The Alaska Tobacco Control Alliance. The organizations and causes that rely on people like you to share a story are numerous and diverse.

.....

complained about being bullied in the hallways and we change our minds about how safe and inclusive our schools are.

The questions of how and why we respond to personal stories this way constitutes a vast field of study, spanning anthropology, psychology, theater, communication and folklore, as well as public relations, advertising and marketing. The power of story is not news.

But some claim we are currently in a “golden age” of story, with storytelling skills encouraged in MBA and medical training programs, scientific institutions and law schools. The shelves of our local and online bookstores overflow with guides on how to tell stories to enhance our leadership skills, build community, alter our life’s direction, leave an oral or written personal history for our families, brand our business and sell more widgets. All these applications are grounded in the same fundamental truth: we are storytelling beings. And when we use our own stories as tools for advocacy, we tap into an essential and universal quality.

The ability to see our lives as stories and share those stories with others is at the core of what it means to be human. We use stories to order and make sense of our lives, to define who we are, even to construct our realities: this happened, then this happened, then this. I was, I am, I will be. We recount our dreams, narrate our days and organize our memories into stories we tell others and ourselves. So, as natural-

### **The Universal Need for Connection**

A recent study at The Wharton School asked participants to read three stories and contribute five dollars to alleviate hunger in Africa. In one version, their donation would go to a particular seven-year-old girl in Mali named Rokia; in the second, to millions of suffering Africans; in the third, to Rokia—but in this version, she was presented within the larger context of world hunger: “Rokia is just one of millions suffering from hunger.” The study found that people were more likely to give directly to the story of Rokia—not to anonymous millions and not to Rokia when presented as part of a larger scenario. Stories of individuals draw upon our universal need for connection.

born storytellers, we respond to others' stories because they are deeply, intimately familiar.

But story also speaks to us differently than other types of communication. If you've ever sat through a mind-numbing "data-dump" presentation in which a speaker bombards you with statistics and diagrams, you've experienced the hunger for story. Through tears of boredom, you wish with all your heart the speaker would step away from the PowerPoint® of bar graphs and pie charts, look at you and say, "Let me give you an example of what I mean. On my way to the lecture today..." Ah, you'd prick up your ears, suddenly on familiar turf. Abstract ideas become concrete. Knowledge is colored with emotion. Not a world of generalities, but one of specific sights, feelings, drama, dialogue and people.

When the stories you tell are from your life, you give audiences an opportunity to feel and imagine with you, to understand in a meaningful way just why they *should* care. The enormity of problems like hunger and social injustice can certainly motivate us to act. We can be convinced logically of the need for intervention and change. But it is the story of one individual that ultimately makes the difference—by offering living proof.

When Derek Cotton was asked by Gilda's Club Twin Cities to speak on behalf of the organization and to share what he had experienced at the Dallas Gilda's Club affiliate, he had never told his cancer story publicly. He says, "When I was asked to tell my story, my first response was, 'I don't think I'm your guy. I don't have this fantastic story to tell. I don't have anything dramatic to say.' I had cancer. I got better." But the organization knew Derek had an important experience to share with their potential donors. Gilda's Club was raising funds to open a "clubhouse" in the Twin Cities. There was not yet a building they could point to and say, "This it is. This is what happens here. Support *this*."

But Derek had attended a Gilda's Club when he lived in Dallas. He knew what happened there, what it looked like, what it felt like, even how it smelled. Gilda's Club Twin Cities needed him to tell that story. So at a one-hour fundraising breakfast attended by 400 people, he helped the audience "imagine a place" where people living with cancer could receive emotional and social support outside the sterile hospital walls:

*It felt like I was going into someone's house. Right off the bat, when you walk in: "I'm not in a church basement, it doesn't smell like a hospital, I'm not in a little room with bare walls that's very clinical." I didn't feel like I had to walk in and say, "Hello my name is Derek Cotton and I have cancer" It's a totally different feeling. You walk into a Gilda's Club and you're in a home. And after a while, it sort of becomes your second home.*

*The first time I went, a very cheery woman met me at the door and said, "Hi, how are you? Let's go chat." So we go to this little room and it was like sitting in someone's den. I told her "I don't know why I'm here. I have cancer and I don't know what I'm looking for. I'm just lost."*

*She said, "We can handle that." And she showed me around.*

*They had cooking classes to better your diet, art, music, all sorts of different activities every day of the week. Even stuff for my boys: kid's night, games, movies, popcorn. There was a potluck every month. Sometimes, I'd just go there in the afternoon to do my work. I felt comfortable there. It was a place to go where my boys and I were understood, where we felt like regular people. I actually felt like I could get away from my cancer at Gilda's Club.*

*I was surprised when I moved to Minneapolis and there wasn't a Gilda's Club. The Mayo Clinic is near here, there are major health corporations headquartered here. It's a big city. I just assumed there would be one...*

Derek's story touched people at the breakfast fundraiser, many who knew intimately the emotional and psychological needs of someone dealing with cancer. In that one hour, with Derek's help, the organization raised nearly half a million dollars toward their capital campaign. He made a difference for Gilda's Club Twin Cities.

What difference did Theresa and Loren's advocacy make? After hearing Theresa's story and a talk by an allergist, parents at the Brooklyn grade school fully cooperated with new school policies regarding allergens packed in school lunches. Loren, an advocate for stricter distracted driving laws, gets emails from young people who pledge to stop texting while driving. She says the emails reading "Thank you so much, you totally changed my mind" keep her going and enable her to tell the difficult story of her brother's death.

What keeps you going? What *will* keep you going? Use the following exercise to find out.



This is a preview.  
Some pages are omitted.

## Explore the Entire Landscape

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**B**ecky Blanton is a journalist who, at times, has been homeless. The last time was following the death of her father, when she spent 18 months living in a 1975 Chevy van parked at a Walmart. Telling the story, she says:

*I don't know when or how it happened, but the speed at which I went from being a talented writer and journalist to being a homeless woman, living in a van, took my breath away. I hadn't changed. My I.Q. hadn't dropped. My talent, my integrity, my values, everything about me remained the same. But I had changed somehow. I spiraled deeper and deeper into a depression.*

Then a friend found Becky and told her that an essay she wrote about her father a year before had been selected for the book *Wisdom of Our Fathers: Lessons and Letters from Daughters and Sons*. The editor was the late Tim Russert, then host of NBC's *Meet the Press*. On tour to promote the book, Russert talked enthusiastically about Becky's writing. The irony of this—that her work was being noted in the national media while she lived in a parked van—struck Becky deeply and marked the beginning of her emotional recovery, her return to work and the eventual end of her homelessness.

Of course, there's more to the story than that. There were the periods of couch-surfing, managing her cat and Rottweiler, dealing with

summer heat and winter cold—and what Becky learned about societal attitudes toward the homeless.

A year later, Becky was given a six-minute opportunity to tell her story publicly for the first time. She needed to decide what—of this deeply personal and complex experience—would be best to tell for the benefit of others.

*It took a week of wrestling with the story to come up with the speech I did. I lay in the back of the van (I still drive it) and put myself back in time to relive parts of the experience. I had to drill down to the raw emotions of the experience and convey in six minutes what I'd learned and experienced in eighteen months. I asked friends who had recently learned of my situation what they wanted to know. I took that into account.*

When you ask someone “Will you tell me your story?” what have you really asked? Are you asking them to begin from their earliest memory, walk you briskly through the awkward teen years, detail their adult milestones, then describe the eggs they had for breakfast, say how their day’s been and end with whatever thoughts they had circling just before you asked, “Will you tell me your story?”

Probably not. Few people have that kind of recall and few listeners that kind of patience. But when you were first asked to tell your story as an advocate or when you first considered sharing your story, the landscape may have seemed just as vast: Where do I begin? How much do I tell? What is my story?

Don’t get paralyzed feeling you must find *the* right story, the *one* story you tell whenever you speak or give an interview. There are many ways to tell your story. Each time you do, you select bits of your experience and arrange them differently. While you may sometimes

have the chance to give a long interview or a keynote address that allows you to relate your experience in detail, most often you tell short stories. In the case of media interviews, *very* short stories.

The first step in deciding what to tell and how to tell it is to explore everything you have available as story material. Author Shirley Jackson, writing in *Experience and Fiction*, suggests a way to approach life to find the story: "...attack it in the beginning the way a puppy attacks an old shoe. Shake it, snarl at it, sneak up on it from various angles" (199).

Use the following exercise, *Story Map*, to shake and snarl at the whole of your experience: everything you've seen, heard, said and felt that urged you to speak out. Obviously, no one can access and recount all those experiences, and you won't bring everything you remember with you each time you speak. Not all will be relevant or safe or appropriate to disclose. But this is where you start.

## EXERCISE

### STORY MAP

***Objective: Create a visual map of your experience.***

***Use this exercise to:***

- explore the entire landscape of your experience
- recall the details of your experience
- find the potential for vivid and engaging living proof
- create a visual reference you can return to again and again
- look for "other" stories you may have overlooked

For this exercise, you'll construct a visual map of the experiences that led you to be an advocate. If that sounds like a huge investment of time or if you don't consider yourself a gifted visual artist, relax. You can give as little or as much time to this as you'd like: sketch it out quickly in preparation for an upcoming talk or make it the basis of an elaborate and ongoing journal of your experience. Either way, it's important to find out what you've got to work with. *Story Map* asks you to be

## STORY MAP (*continued*)

expansive, to generate as much material as you can, much more than you could possibly use—a story so big and full of detail you'd never be able to tell it at once.

Why start here? Because memory fails us. Because you may find the story you thought you should tell is not the one you end up telling—or, at least, not the only one.

### *The exercise:*



- **Use whatever media is comfortable and at hand:** a pencil and paper, a pen and the back of a napkin, marker and whiteboard, sticky notes on the wall or a computer application. Have your note-taking method with you to record ideas that come up while creating the *Story Map*.
- **Draw an elongated oval.** Imagine you've drawn it around the whole bundle of experiences that made you want to speak out. Within this oval there may be a lifetime of events or perhaps only a period of your life.
- **Draw a horizontal line** through the center of your oval, with the ends of the line extending beyond the oval.
- **Label the area to the left of the oval *Then* and the area to the right as *Now*.** *Then* represents you before your journey to become an advocate. *Now* is you as an advocate. The line connecting them is your timeline of events: this happened, then this happened, then this.
- **Mark and label events and moments on the timeline with X's or dots.** Begin with the obvious: most of our experiences center around a key



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# Hooks and Headlines

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**A** hook is a phrase that dangles before you and gets your attention, teases you, grabs you and takes hold—just like a fishhook:

*“Two years ago, I died on the operating table.”*

*“My grandfather started Baskin-Robbins ice cream company.”*

Like a coat hook, it’s a place for you to mentally hang things, a reminder of the theme or importance of a story:

*“I had proudly served a country that was not proud of me.”*

*“I was the same, exact person. But the world around me had changed.”*

Like the hook on a dress or a jacket, it fastens things, secures them in your mind so you repeat them to yourself and others.

*“Cancer gave me membership to an elite club I’d rather not belong to.”*

*“The containers they walk around with to carry water are the iPods of Africa. Every child has one.”*

And like a boxer's right hook, it can pack a wallop:

*"We were told how much college would cost. I didn't realize it could cost me my son's life."*

Hooks are ear-catching phrases that make you want to hear more or read on. They are so perfectly pithy, catchy and crisp they may capture the essence of your entire story in just a few choice words. When you lead off with a hook, it becomes a headline. Hooks help your audience remember key content and the theme of your story. They make it easy for audience members to tell others what was memorable about your story. In interviews, your hook may provide the interviewer with the title of his article or the quote that accompanies your photograph. It may help editors select which clip to use from your television, radio or web interview.

Spend the time and challenge yourself to construct one, two or three really good hooks. For ideas, look at your *Six-Word Reason* (page 25), your goals (page 60), your key messages (page 62), your positive change (page 72) and the following exercise.



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## Deflecting/Blocking and Bridging

Sometimes a reporter's question can steer the interview to places you'd rather not go: to topics that don't relate to your story, uncomfortable areas or information you'd rather not be part of the interview. Certain statements by the reporter, too (such as an incorrect paraphrase of something you've said), might lead to misinformation, off-topic discussions or an inappropriate frame to your story. To avoid this, you may need to *deflect* or *block* a question or statement, then *bridge* to a more desirable territory.

Bridging means moving smoothly from where the interview is to where you'd like it to go. Before you bridge, however, you may need to redirect a question or statement by deflecting it. Other times you may need to completely block a statement before you bridge back to your story or message. The objective is to respond and bridge quickly so you don't give too much attention or weight to the question or statement you're deflecting or blocking. For example:

**Interviewer:** *In terms of heart disease, your arteries are either clogged or they're not clogged, right? Is that right?*

**Kathy:** *Well, no. There are different types of problems that can happen with your heart and there are different types of heart disease you can have...*

**Kathy Kastan**, heart health advocate, blocking and bridging during a radio interview

### Deflect and Bridge

*That's a question a lot of people have, but what's really behind that question is...*

*That's really the rare case. What we see much more often is...*

*Rather than that, it's really a matter of access. Let me tell you the good news...*

## **Block and Bridge**

*That's not my area of expertise, but what I **can** tell you is...*

*I can't go into those kinds of details, but what I can tell about my experience...*

*I don't see it that way. The way I see it is...*

Notice how, in these examples, the response does not repeat the incorrect or negative language the reporter may have used. Use nondescript pronouns or adjectives like *that* or *those kinds* rather than give currency to the reporter's phrasing.

Even when the interview's going well, you may need to bridge to your story or messages to ensure they're part of the interview. Again, don't wait for the right question to be asked. Bridge with simple statements such as:

*That's a great point. Another is...*

*Let me just add...*

*Let me put that into perspective...*

*What I'm really here to talk about is...*

*I think your audience would also be interested to know...*

*That's another great example of how...*

## **Flagging**

*Flagging* is the verbal equivalent of using a highlighter to draw attention to the words and statements that will make reporters and audiences sit up and listen. When you "raise a flag," you'll hear the clacking of a computer keyboard on the other end of the call as the reporter makes notes. Your radio listeners will keep the car radio on after parking. Your television audiences will pause in their walks across the living room and stop in front of the screen to hear what you're saying. By flagging, you

let your audiences and the reporter know what is most important about the story and your messages. Some flagging words and phrases are:

*What's most important for people to understand...*

*Here's why people need to hear this story...*

*What we really want to make clear is...*

*Here's what I think your listeners will be most interested in knowing...*

*This is the most dangerous misconception people have...*

## Headlining

Media interviews, whether print or broadcast, begin with the most important information at the top, followed by information that supports or explains. So provide the interviewer with a headline early in your interview, if not immediately.

Headlining is absolutely critical in a broadcast interview. These are typically very brief and you want to ensure your headline or key message is highlighted.

Even in a print interview, headlining helps the reporter understand what the main theme of your story is, even providing the actual headline to the written piece.

The next exercise, *Bridge from Anywhere*, was introduced to us by one of the advocates in our workshop.

If you're ready to practice for your upcoming interview, turn to the *Practice Runs* in Chapter 9.

### Want a Great Headline?

Turn to Chapter 5, *Craft Your Story*, for tips on creating memorable hooks.

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# Public Speaking: Tips and Tools



# Delivery Tips

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A collection of brief reminders and guides

## Staying Focused

- 1. Focus the rush of adrenaline.** Remember your goal is not to eliminate nervous energy, it's to channel it in a productive way. Few things are more dangerous than going into an important public communication without any concern whatsoever.
- 2. Be realistic.** You don't have to be perfect. If something goes wrong, remind yourself of your advocacy goal, why you are here and the positive change for which you advocate.
- 3. Repeat your advocacy goal to yourself before approaching the speaking area.** Remind yourself of why you're here and why you're speaking. Focus on the positive end result. Repeat your *Six-Word Reason*.
- 4. When speaking to a new group, greet or speak to a few audience members beforehand.** You'll be guaranteed at least a few smiling faces and positive nonverbal support when you start to speak.
- 5. Breathe.** Public speaking requires breath support. Mindful breathing also calms you and gives the audience time to process what you say. Plan spots in your speech or talk when you will purposefully stop and breathe.

## Managing Time

- 1. Be realistic in what you can achieve.** Know your time limits and plan accordingly.
- 2. Plan for less.** If given 15 minutes, plan for 10. Audience reaction—whether verbal or nonverbal—adds time.
- 3. Know where your timekeeper is.** Decide where you'll look to check your time. Take off your watch and place it on the lectern. Find the clock in the room. Have a colleague give ten- and five-minute signals. Don't worry about hiding the fact that you are mindful of the time.
- 4. Note your start time.** You may have so many things in your head when you begin speaking you may miss the obvious. Jot down your start time so you know how long you have.
- 5. Use technology.** Set the silent vibrating alarm on your cell or smart phone to signal when you're at the five-minute mark. Some presentation software, like Apple's Keynote, have great timers built in. There are also countdown clocks on most smart phones.

## Starting Strong

- 1. Shorten the run-up.** The run-up is the short sprint a high-jumper uses to gain momentum before jumping. It's also the time it takes a speaker to get comfortable in front of an audience. (Watch for it: you can see and hear when a speaker's body and mind relax.) When you begin, think of being the speaker who normally emerges two minutes into your speech. Begin with that speaker.

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# Media Interviews: Tips and Tools



# Interview Prep Sheets

## Prepare for your audience

<p><b>Demographic Information</b></p> <p>What ages are represented in the target audience?</p> <p>What genders? Religions? Racial, ethnic or cultural backgrounds?</p> <p>Does the target audience represent members of a particular group or organization?</p> <p>What is the socio-economic makeup of the target audience?</p> <p>Consider language levels, appropriateness of content, culturally significant material, values or beliefs of a certain demographic, issues of particular importance to them and points of difference and similarity between you and the audience.</p>	<p><b>Demographic Information</b></p>
<p><b>Situational Information</b></p> <p>Why has the audience tuned in or picked up the magazine?</p> <p>Are they passionately attentive or multi-tasking?</p> <p>If broadcast, will the audience be aware of any other news, good or bad, and have it in mind when they hear you speak?</p> <p>What are the specialties or concerns of the media publication or program?</p> <p>What is the focus or angle of the media interview or story?</p> <p>What led to this interview or appearance?</p> <p>Consider how your story relates to the audience's reasons for listening to you, the moods and attitudes they bring, their openness to listening.</p>	<p><b>Situational Information</b></p>

<p><b>Attitudes Toward Your Topic</b></p> <p>What do they know about your subject, cause, campaign or organization?</p> <p>What do they need to know?</p> <p>What do they want to know?</p> <p>What do they expect to hear?</p> <p>What is their level of interest?</p> <p>Consider how you frame your story, any background information you may need to cover, what may surprise them, how you “hook” them, how you bring them new information.</p>	<p><b>Attitudes Toward Your Topic</b></p>
<p><b>Attitudes Toward You</b></p> <p>What preconceived notions might they have about you?</p> <p>How much do they know about you and your experience?</p> <p>What information have they been given about you and your life experience?</p> <p>Consider how you frame your story, what background information you need to cover or preconceptions you need to address, where you start your story.</p>	<p><b>Attitudes Toward You</b></p>
<p><b>Attitudes Toward Personal Stories</b></p> <p>How open are they to the idea of hearing personal stories?</p> <p>With what level of disclosure is the audience comfortable?</p> <p>Does your story go counter to other stories of which this audience is aware or is your story familiar?</p> <p>Has this audience experienced something similar to what you will describe?</p> <p>Consider level of disclosure, how you frame your story as a story, what else you may need to include in addition to your story, how they may respond to the content of your story.</p>	<p><b>Attitudes Toward Personal Stories</b></p>