



# “Tell Me a Story, Please.”



A few years into our Fathom journey we had a bit of an *aha moment* regarding our culture. Over and over the term, “The Fathom Way” kept cropping up in internal conversations. It had become a catchall phrase for what made us different and how we worked. Pretty cool because the term had come to life organically and was embraced by all levels of the company as a kind of inside get. It was a descriptor of ourselves just for ourselves—a group who generated a lot of quality work and thinking without layers and nonsense—and, as a result, did it seemingly faster than most.

have it serve as a reminder to us all of what makes us stand apart and what brings us together. We called them Maxims. And we created ten of them. “Fast and Smart” was one. “Reach” another. “Enjoy the moment” another. And one that reminds us to always to “Tell a Story.”

We embraced storytelling as a Maxim because “The Fathom Way” would be marginalized without it. Years later, “Tell a Story” is undoubtedly the Maxim that gets the most work, day in and day out. After all, it shapes how we communicate to one another, our partners, our clients and ultimately consumers. If we can’t tell good, effective stories, then our best ideas and our hard work won’t get noticed the way they should.

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“Develop a bold new brand positioning, identity and communications plan in two weeks? Sure, it’s the ‘Fathom Way’.”

Since we had it, we felt we needed to clearly define what the “Fathom Way” was all about in order to codify the behavior for future generations of Fathomites and

The benefits of storytelling are rooted in science, and who can argue with science? Studies show that facts and data activate two parts of the human brain, while stories activate seven. It stands to reason because stories trigger what facts and data don’t—emotions. And emotions are what drive decisions. But don’t just take it from us. Here’s some food for thought from the good folks at Psychology Today: “When evaluating brands, consumers primarily use emotions (personal feelings and experiences) rather than information (brand attributes, features and facts).”

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So we decided we had to be great storytellers. And to be as persuasive and compelling as possible, we learned from the best storytellers—from business leaders and comedians to actors and politicians. Out of that we came up with our 15 Principles of Storytelling:

- 1 Embrace** storytelling as a winning strategy—it's the art of persuasion!
- 2 Identify** what kind of story you want to tell—there are many proven models from cautionary tales to *imagine if* stories and a whole panoply in between.
- 3 Have a point**—the best stories do.
- 4 Be brief**—the average attention span fades after ten minutes.
- 5 Highlight details** with precision—while people may not be emotionally moved by facts, they will give a good story more power.
- 6 Address** audience reservations quickly—nothing ruins a good story more than doubt.
- 7 Know** exactly where you're going and how to get there—it requires you to know the ending before you even start at the beginning.
- 8 Speak plainly** and use colorful language—that's the stuff people remember.
- 9 Ask** rhetorical questions—not the annoying ones, more like the Jerry Seinfeld ones (“Did you ever wonder...”).
- 10 Introduce** conflict and tension—it's why we love a good drama.
- 11 Be authentic** and draw from experiences—your audience will feel it.
- 12 Strive** for simplicity.
- 13 Commit**—go all in: your audience will appreciate it even if it makes you a little uncomfortable.
- 14 Have fun**—if it's not fun to tell, it's not fun to hear.
- 15 Practice, practice, practice**—that's the same way to get to Carnegie Hall, by the way.

Years later, these principles serve as a constant reminder to us to go beyond presentations—because stories just work better. And the results have been tangible: more passionate, eager storytellers. More engaged audiences. Better close rates.

Plus, who doesn't love a good story, especially one with a happy ending? ☺

# The End

# 15 PRINCIPLES OF STORYTELLING

1 **EMBRACE** STORYTELLING AS A WINNING STRATEGY

2 **IDENTIFY** WHAT KIND OF STORY YOU WANT TO TELL

- PURPOSE STORIES
- IMAGINE IF
- TEACHING
- PROOF
- CAUTIONARY
- INSPIRATIONAL
- EVERYDAY

3 **HAVE A POINT**

4 **BE BRIEF**

5 **HIGHLIGHT DETAILS** WITH **PRECISION**

6 **ADDRESS AUDIENCE** RESERVATIONS QUICKLY

7 **START WITH THE END—** KNOW WHERE YOU ARE GOING

8 **SPEAK PLAINLY**

USE COLORFUL LANGUAGE

9 **ASK** RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

10 **INTRODUCE CONFLICT TENSION**



DRAMA IS ANTICIPATION MIXED WITH UNCERTAINTY

11 **BE AUTHENTIC** DRAW FROM EXPERIENCE

12 **STRIVE** for SIMPLICITY

13 **COMMIT** GO ALL IN

REMEMBER

IF IT'S NOT FUN TO TELL, IT'S NOT FUN TO HEAR

14

15 **PRACTICE PRACTICE PRACTICE**