

'*Stories for Work* will give you everything you need to be more inspiring and effective in your business communications. A must read business book!'

—Michael Ebeid, CEO & Managing Director, SBS

stories *for* work

the essential
guide to business
storytelling

Gabrielle Dolan

WILEY

Storytelling in business offers a powerful way to stimulate emotional connection, where real conversations can inspire and motivate effective employee engagement. With informed analysis, recommendations and case studies, *Stories for Work* is a comprehensive and practical 'how-to' framework for business professionals looking to maximise the impact of storytelling to achieve desired results.

Michael Ebeid, CEO & Managing Director, SBS

I work in companies and communities all over the globe. The capacity to translate strategy and business imperatives into authentic narratives that massively accelerate authentic execution is critical. Gabrielle's ability to unleash everyone's capacity to be influential through their own stories is extraordinary. *Stories for Work* is an essential and accessible guide to storytelling in business.

Colin Pidd, Global Partner and Managing Director Asia Pacific, Conversant

The power of storytelling to connect, inspire and create change can never be understated. Gabrielle's latest book provides wonderful insights and practical examples of how you can use this important skill in both your personal and professional life. We all have stories to share and Gabrielle has given us the tools to really bring this to life.

Christine Corbett, Chief Customer Officer, Australia Post

One of the biggest gaps in leadership today is storytelling. As businesses are continually required to move faster, leaders need to do a better job in helping to point the way and bringing people along with them. It requires a more sophisticated leadership approach; it requires storytelling. Gabrielle Dolan's *Stories for Work* will help you unlock the art of storytelling in business.

Joe McCollum, Group Human Resource Director, Spark New Zealand

If you think storytelling in the workplace is simply about 'once upon a time' then you couldn't be more wrong! Gabrielle Dolan successfully and very quickly teaches us something much more powerful ... presenting is auditioning for leadership and using personal stories for business purpose is demonstrating authentic leadership.

Jac Phillips, Head of Brand and Marketing, Bank of Melbourne

Gabrielle Dolan is the bomb. She explodes into your world like a force majeure, real, grounded and inspirational. Clearly she is Australia's leading corporate storytelling expert and her latest book, *Stories for Work*, is brilliant. The story wheel alone is an idea that opens your mind to the possibility of storytelling to influence and inspire greatness in your people. Gabrielle Dolan is a true thought leader.

Matt Church, Founder of Thought Leaders Global, Author of *Amplifiers*

If you care about meaningful progress (beyond the default), you need to harness the power of storytelling. This book is a perfect place to start.

Dr Jason Fox, best-selling Author of *How to Lead a Quest*,
Keynote Speaker of the Year and Advisor, pioneering strategy,
leadership & culture

Gabrielle's book highlights the different ways you can use stories to drive and achieve business goals. We have used storytelling to bring Bupa's purpose and values to life through our leaders sharing personal stories, to demonstrate what our purpose and values mean to them. This approach was hugely impactful for Bupa, with people quickly living our values, and I'm sure this approach would work equally well in other organisations too. Read, absorb, and start telling stories!

Dean Holden, Managing Director, Bupa Australia and New Zealand

Gabrielle Dolan is a master storyteller. In *Stories for Work* Gabrielle shares her in-depth knowledge, giving you the inspiration and know-how for you to start successfully using stories in business. It truly is the essential guide to business storytelling and a must-read for anyone in business.

Janine Garner, Founder and CEO, LBD Group,
Author of *From Me to We* and *It's Who You Know*

In *Stories for Work* Australia's leading expert in business storytelling pulls back the curtain on the art of sharing great stories. Gabrielle Dolan reveals the science behind what makes stories the most effective tool in a leader's communication kit and the step-by-step process for crafting the different types of stories you'll need. She's also included dozens of real life business stories that will not only illustrate what she's talking about, but will make you laugh out loud, and possibly tear up a little too. Compulsory reading for any leader wanting to get their message across more effectively.

Peter Cook, CEO of Thought Leaders Global, Author of *Implement*

Gabrielle Dolan is more than just a story-teller, she's a story-doer. Watching Gabrielle deliver her business storytelling expertise is an adventure worthy of a rollicking page turner—and this is it!!!

Dan Gregory, CEO, The Impossible Institute
and Co-author of *Selfish, Scared and Stupid*

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gabrielle Dolan is a global thought leader on authentic leadership and business storytelling.

She's worked with thousands of high-profile leaders from around the world, helping them to become better leaders and communicators using the art of business storytelling. Gabrielle is a highly sought-after international keynote speaker, and works with some of Australia's top 50 ASX companies, including National Australia Bank, Australia Post, Telstra and ANZ, and multinationals such as Accenture, Bupa, Ericsson and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

In the past, Gabrielle has held various senior leadership roles at National Australia Bank in change management and organisational change. She also co-founded One Thousand & One, one of Australia's leading storytelling companies, before launching her own practice in 2013.

In 2015 Gabrielle became an Australian and New Zealand partner of Thought Leaders Global, where she works with organisations to help them gain a competitive edge through thought leadership. In the same year, she was also nominated for Telstra's Business Woman of the Year award, one of the most prestigious business awards in the Asia-Pacific region.

She is a graduate of the Harvard Kennedy School of Executive Education in both the Art and Practice of Leadership Development and Women and Power: Leadership in a New World. Her other academic qualifications include a master's degree in management and leadership from Swinburne University and an associate diploma in education and training from the University of Melbourne.

Gabrielle is also the best-selling author of *Ignite: Real Leadership, Real Talk, Real Results*, which was published in 2015 and reached the top five of Australia's bestselling business books. Her other published books include *Storytelling for Job Interviews*, published in 2016, and *Hooked: How Leaders Connect, Engage and Inspire with Storytelling*, published in 2013.

She is passionate about changing the way we communicate in business and is the founder of the Jargon Free Fridays global revolution [#jargonfreefridays](#) ([jargonfreefridays.com](#)).

When she is not writing or working, she can be found wandering in her vegetable garden at her 25-acre rural property on the southern coast of New South Wales. She believes the world would be a better place if there were more manure in gardens and less in business.

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This book was written in a short time frame but I feel like it is bringing together my work and passion from the last decade. Without the support of many people this book would never have been possible.

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Other clients I get to work with and am also proud to now call my friends deserve a special mention because they have supported not only this book but also me for a long time. These people include Jac Phillips, Monika Lancucki and Natalie Mina. I love working with you all and truly appreciate the ongoing support and mentoring you have provided.

I particularly need to thank all the people who contributed their stories for this book. It goes without saying that the book would not be a reality without you being so willing to share your stories. Thank you!

Doing the work I do, I get to hang out with some great mates such as Matt Church and Pete Cook, who run the coolest tribe you would ever want to be a part of. Thank you both for your inspiration, love and care, and for creating the commercially successful and creative space that is Thought Leaders Business School.

Another cool mate I get to hang with is my ‘chief of stuff’, Elise Turner. Massive love and gratitude to you for everything you do for me, including the support of this book. From doing the initial edits to managing the whole marketing campaign and all the time spent keeping everything else ticking along. I could not have done it without you.

And talking about hanging with people I love, a final huge acknowledgement goes to my husband, Steve, and my very cool daughters, Alex and Jess (who have made me promise to include our dog, Digger, in here). They continue to support me, give me the time to write and also let me write about them. Love you.

INTRODUCTION

I once had the pleasure of working with a wonderful woman, Merrin Butler, who confessed to sleeping or reading through the safety instructions on her regular Sunday night flight from Dublin to Glasgow.

She told me that catching the same flight every week for work made her, understandably, very blasé. So she'd either fall asleep or read the paper as the crew pulled on oxygen masks and pointed out the exits.

One night on her regular flight, after giving her usual lack of attention to the pre-flight demonstration, they hit some rough weather and the pilot had to abort the landing as they were coming into Glasgow. The plane circled around and tried again, but the rain and wind were getting worse and so the pilot abandoned the landing for the second time. Before making the third attempt, the captain announced, 'We'll make one final attempt to land but before we do, the crew will go through our safety instructions again.'

All the passengers sat bolt upright in their seats, their undivided attention on the crew. People asked questions about the oxygen masks, checked for their life jackets under their seats and physically counted out the rows to their nearest exit.

Thankfully, Merrin lived to tell the frightening tale, as did everyone else on the plane.

When she shared this story with me, long after the incident, I was helping her to implement a major organisational change at National Australia Bank. It was going to be a two-year process that would affect all the Human Resources professionals across the company.

I asked Merrin what was the one message she wanted to get across to her team when we announced the change. She said they'd all be thinking,

Here we go again... another change or restructure. But Merrin felt that it was more than that—although the change would be a long, intensive project, everyone would receive lots of information about it and, while at the time they might think it was boring or irrelevant, they needed to pay close attention because it was going to personally affect each and every one of them at some point.

As the Communications and Change Manager for the project, I suggested she share her story about flying into Glasgow. Her initial reaction was, ‘What has that got to do with anything?’ I convinced Merrin to share the story, however, knowing it matched her message—often we think information we’re receiving may not be relevant, but it does have an important purpose. I was confident the story would work...well, maybe not confident but optimistic.

The next day, Merrin shared her flight story with her team of HR professionals. I watched and waited for the response in the room (I’ll admit, by this stage the optimism had turned to hope). I should have been confident, because this became the first time I really noticed the positive impact of a personal story when delivered as a business message. Not only did her team immediately react with smiles and understanding, but they also continued to refer to the story months later.

I wasn’t aware of it at the time but that was a sliding-door moment for me. I realised the power of storytelling and this knowledge completely changed my career—and my life. From that point on, I noticed that all the leaders I found inspiring and engaging used stories to explain their actions and choices in some way.

I left my corporate career on a mission—a mission to change the boring and bland way we communicated in the business world with inspiring and engaging stories that hit the hearts and minds of leaders and their teams.

Over the last decade, this work has taken me all over the world—from Australia to Malaysia, Europe and the US—but no matter where I am, I’m always faced with questions and comments like the following:

- ‘Does storytelling really work in business? I mean, *really*?’
- ‘What stories do I need and how many do I use?’

- ‘How do you find stories?’
- ‘I don’t have any stories. I just lead a pretty average and normal life.’
- ‘Where and when do you share stories in business?’
- ‘I’ve never thought of using a personal story to communicate a business message. Are we allowed to do that?’

Hearing these kinds of questions and remarks from so many different leaders, managers and executives at all levels, in all industries and corporations, all over the world was the catalyst behind this book.

My aim is to show you the science behind why storytelling really works—because it does work, as the many examples in this book will show. This book also clarifies what types of stories are appropriate to use, how to find them and how to share them.

What I love most about this book is that it gives you a collection of tried and tested stories from people who have successfully used them in their business lives. I know from my own experience that hearing other people’s stories helps to ignite story ideas of your own.

My intention is to help you generate your own stories, show you where and when to use them and, most importantly, give you the courage to share your own stories to get great results.

So put down your paper and pay close attention—you’re about to fly into the wonderful world of storytelling.

PART I

Shaping

your

stories

