

# Once Upon a Time...

## Storyteller Helps Businesses Use Stories To Further Communication

Story by Donna Olmstead u Photo by Morgan Petroski

Storytelling packs as much punch around the boardroom as it does around a campfire, says storyteller Susi Wolf.

A well-told story helps listeners understand their connection to each other and the bigger picture of life, she says.

“Business is built upon relationships, and story is the bridge to those relationships,” Wolf says. “The purpose of a story is to evoke feeling. When people feel, they get it. Listeners have a chance to think and reframe whatever problem they are facing.”

Wolf has been telling stories all of her life, and she’s taken that talent to the corporate level, developing a storytelling workshop that helps business leaders weave narrative into their presentations, reports and other communications.

Wolfsong Creative workshops help resolve employee conflicts, train employees for leadership, build teams, promote sales and marketing, she says.

Cat and mouse

To explain, she tells a story.

There is an Aesop fable about a group of mice that tried to befriend a cat. Though their numbers were dwindling, they continued to deny the cat’s appetite for eating mice. One day it became clear not one mouse would survive if they didn’t act. They put their heads together, and one of the young mice had an idea to tie a bell around the cat’s neck so they could hear him coming. Fine idea, the mice agreed. The wise elder mouse raised an objection: Who would put the bell around the cat’s neck? Whoever got that job would soon be a snack for the cat.

This story could be about teamwork, Wolf says, but it could also be about management trying to enforce ideas without a strategy for implementation.

“If you tell a story to 10 people, you’ll get 10 different interpretations,” she says.

A story’s value lies in that it stimulates the right brain, creating connection and innovation between ideas that didn’t seem to fit together before, she says.

“People are always asking me what a story means, and I tell them it means whatever their heart tells them. Stories have so many nuances and levels of meaning.”

She says that a story’s meaning may not be apparent immediately, but the story keeps generating energy until a light bulb of realization goes off. Often that happens when a situation appears that parallels the story.

“Stories have an incredible impact on people’s lives. They remember what is important to them,” she says.

At a recent Wolfsong Creative workshop for the business group Women Entrepreneurs, Stephanie Allen found tips for her business.

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"We're always looking for other ways to tell our stories," says Allen, whose business is The Proper Place, which helps customers create scrapbooks to memorialize life events. "A story helps recall feelings of the event."

Barbara Champion, president of Women Entrepreneurs, says the same week she heard Wolf, she attended another business seminar conducted by a storyteller. "It really focused me on the importance of storytelling. It was absolute verification. Like they say, 'Words tell. Stories sell.' "

Champion, a distributor for Shaklee products, was able to tell her personal story of vitamin deficiency in a much more effective way to customers after hearing the storytelling presentations. "Stories help give you credibility," she says.

Originally from Arizona, Wolf, came to Albuquerque several years ago. She studied acting and clowning in Texas before becoming a corporate trainer. In Texas she learned the therapeutic value of storytelling for people in crisis. She continues that work here with survivors of domestic violence.

Stories can heal when people have deep emotional pain, she says, because the words and rhythm of a story open a door to an individual's heart that screaming and yelling close shut.

"Story comes in moccasined feet. When you tell a story, you are standing on sacred ground," she says. "Story is ancient, spiritual and sacred. Story doesn't need me. Story comes through me. I listen to what Creator whispers in my ear.

*Susi Wolf of Wolfsong Creative is compiling her favorite stories into a compact disc, with a working title of "Peeling Life Makes Your Eyes Water." She plans to sell it through her Web site, [wolfsongcreative.com](http://wolfsongcreative.com)*



*Story comes in moccasined feet. When you tell a story, you are standing on sacred ground," says storyteller Susi Wolf about the power of narrative in her business workshops. Wolf also teaches workshops to domestic violence survivors.*