

Business For Superheroes Podcast Transcription: Episode Five - Storyselling



In an industry stuffed with marketing bullshit, empty promises and shiny-suited liars, one woman's had enough. She knows what it's like to have the wrong clients, no money and no time for fun, but she also knows how to fix it, and, on the Business For Superheroes show, she promises to tell the down and dirty truth about business, sales and running away with the circus! Here's your host: Vicky Fraser...

Vicky: Hello, and welcome to the Business For Superheroes Show. I'm Vicky Fraser and this is Joe.

Joe: Hello!

Vicky: How are you, Joe?

Joe: I'm pretty good thank you, I'm pretty good. I've had a glass of wine and I've had a nice weekend so I'm good.

Vicky: Good, good stuff. We've been to London this weekend and it's been really cool. If you're ever after a place to stay in London that's lovely, go to The Rookery in Camberwell because it's fab.

Joe: Farringdon

Vicky: No Farringdon station but the area is, oh no! It's Clerkenwell.

Joe: Really? I thought it was Farringdon.

Vicky: Err Farringdon, Clerkenwell... Anyway it's Farringdon tube station.

Joe: Get off the train at Farringdon and it's a two minute walk.

Vicky: Yeah, basically. It's a lovely hotel, it was built in 1764?

Joe: Yes.

Vicky: And it's got a house cat called Lady Grey and we stayed in the room Joseph Parkcroft, and it's just lovely isn't it?

Joe: It was, it's beautiful, a really nice place. I highly recommend it!

Vicky: Yeah, cool. Right! We're talking about Storyselling this week.

Joe: Storytelling.

Vicky: *Storyselling*.

Joe: Storyselling.

Vicky: Storyselling.

Joe: Storyselling.

Vicky: Yes, because the secret of selling is, what it has always been, which is a damn good story.

Joe: A damn good story.

Vicky: A damn good story. We're going to talk about why stories are so powerful and why you should be using them in all of your marketing. I'm going to start by telling you what I started reading before I even went to school, and it was Enid Blyton. I don't know if anybody out there has read Enid Blyton? Have you read Enid Blyton, Joe?

Joe: I've not read much Enid Blyton *Vicky gasps*, but I do remember having a secret spy book thing, that was based on Enid Blyton, that had all kinds of code wheels and things in it.

Vicky: Oh! I think I had one of those. Was it like the Secret Seven or something?

Joe: It had bits of film in it, with holes in it and you put it on certain pages and it's got words and things.

Vicky: Yeah.

Joe: Yeah, but I didn't read an awful lot of the actual books.

Vicky: You had a seriously deprived childhood because.

Joe: You're right, it was tragic.

Vicky: Dear listeners, this Christmas Father Christmas brought Joe a copy of *The Wind in the Willows* because I found out that he'd never read it.

Joe: Father Christmas found out.

Vicky: Father Christmas found out.

Joe: Maybe edit that out!

Vicky: That Joe had never read *The Wind in the Willows*, if you can believe that. I was shocked.

Joe: It's true.

Vicky: I have obviously read *The Wind in the Willows* and it was marvellous. Brum brum!

Joe: At what age was it marvellous?

Vicky: It was marvellous from the age of about 5, to about 15 or so. You need to read it, it's a fabulous story. Alongside *The Wind in the Willows* I also read *The Enchanted Wood* and *The Magic Faraway Tree*, which were awesome books, and the *Famous Five*. You must know the *Famous Five* right?

Joe: Yeah, yeah, sure.

Vicky: Lashings of ginger ale.

Joe: Ginger ale. And there was *Swallows and Amazons*, that was one, I read that one.

Vicky: Ok, yeah.

Joe: Lots of messing around on boats.

Vicky: Yes, and Treasure Island.

Joe: Treasure Island, yeah. That was a cool book. Lord of the Flies.

Vicky: Yes! Lord of the Flies was excellent!

Joe: Not so much of a children's book.

Vicky: No, more of a teenager's book. But the point is that you remember this stuff. I can still remember details from a lot of the stories of the Enid Blyton books I read. For example, in one of the Famous Five books I remember somebody's uncle, and I think it might have been George's uncle, and they were in a lightning storm. I think they were in a storm near a lighthouse and they were solving some mystery to do with smugglers in Cornwall, which they often did.

Joe: Sensible.

Vicky: Very sensible. But they were in a storm and lightning struck a few feet away from them and I remember George's uncle saying that if they hadn't all been wearing rubber-soled shoes, he reckons they would all be dead right now. That has always stuck with me and I think that is the source of my mortal fear of electricity *laughs*.

Joe: I'm chuckling now because Vicky phoned me up a couple of weeks ago and I was at work, surrounded by engineers, and Vicky reported something had gone *bang* behind the TV, which wasn't on because she was at work - it's what she does during the day, not watching TV! Yeah, you were asking me what to do and I just said to turn it off and I'd sort it out when I get home. This room full of engineers heard me say the immortal words "you can stand on a book if you really want to, it probably won't help, but if it makes you feel better".

Laughter

Vicky: The thing is though I remembered the story about the rubber-soled shoes and I wondered if washing up gloves would help as well, not that I have any washing up gloves because I don't really do the washing up, but the point is that all these many, many years later...

Joe: You're still traumatized by the idea of having to go near to something electrical.

Laughter

Vicky: Yeah, I don't touch batteries or anything do I! It's pathetic.

Joe: It's quite funny.

Vicky: The thing is though I seem to attract an awful lot of static electricity and it really hurts. I remember my hand hurt for a couple of hours once when I got a static shock off something.

Joe: I had the biggest static shock at work several years ago.

Vicky: Really?

Joe: Absolutely ginormous. It was huge. We used to move large aluminium plates around and they were separated by sheets of plastic and anybody who's designed capacitors knows that large sheets of metal separated by thin sheets of plastic, trundled around on trailers with nylon wheels, is a recipe for disaster. I was a junior engineer with a metal...

Vicky: Is that not really dangerous?

Joe: Measuring stick, I was measuring the flatness of these as they came off the trailer and I touched one of them and it blew me across the corridor! It was horrible *laughs*.

Vicky: I mean you're laughing now but isn't that really dangerous?

Joe: Yeah, I reckon if I was old or pace-maker. At the very least I could have banged my head on something as I came down because I did, I literally went across a roadway.

Vicky: Isn't that why old windmills were always wooden? All the moving parts were wooden weren't they?

Joe: Nothing sparky.

Vicky: Nothing sparky at all because flour is extremely flammable, it's very explosive.

Joe: You get special tools for dealing with vehicle electrics, so you don't create sparks and things.

Vicky: One day, listeners, I'll tell you the story of my shonky, old motorbike, that day is not today though because

Joe: Because we have a plan, we're going to talk about storyselling.

Vicky: Yeah, well you know there were stories about static electricity there which lead on from Enid Blyton and my memories of rubber-soled shoes and now I can't ever touch anything electrical.

Joe: To be honest if you're going to get struck by lightning, I'm not convinced that a pair of rubber shoes is going to help.

Vicky: No, no the lightning struck a little distance away and he was saying that because lightning travels through the ground...

Joe: Did you know that cows are much more vulnerable to lightning strikes than people? Because...

Vicky: There's more of them that are outside?! *Laughs*

Joe: Not just because they're outside, in the rain, on a hill but because their feet are so far apart. So...

Vicky: Really?

Joe: Yeah, if you imagine there's a lightning strike in the centre of your bullseye...

Vicky: Yeah.

Joe: And then a few feet away the ground is at a certain voltage and then a few feet further away the ground is at a lower voltage, so because you, as a human, have feet that are relatively close together...

Laughter

Joe: There's only a small voltage drop between your feet. Whereas a cow could have feet 6ft apart and there's a much bigger voltage drop, so the cow gets a bigger shock.

Vicky: Wow! There you go listeners. If you're ever caught in a lightning storm make sure you've got your feet really close together!

Joe: And you're not a cow.

Vicky: And lie on the floor and apparently you're supposed to dig your fingers into the floor and stick your elbows in.

Joe: Because your elbows are the highest point.

Vicky: You don't want the current to go through the centre mass of your body, basically.

Joe: Or your head.

Vicky: Or your head, that would be bad.

Joe: Through your elbows and into the ground. Good plan.

Vicky: So that's your first lesson for this podcast, don't get struck by lightning and if you do, make sure it's your elbows.

Joe: Cows don't have elbows, that's their problem!

Laughter

Vicky: Yes, that is their problem.

Joe: Particularly vulnerable to lightning strikes. Anyhoo...

Vicky: Anyhoo, back to Enid Blyton. The other thing I remember about Enid Blyton is Silky and Moonface from the Enchanted Wood. Because of that, I still look for little windows and doorways in trees.

Joe: Oh, ok.

Vicky: I know there are no fairies and things like that but part of my brain really wants to believe in them, so I can't help looking for little windows and doors. There was a whole thing, in certain woods, there's been this movement where people have put tiny, little doors in nooks and crannies in woods. Google it, Google "fairy doors". It's awesome.

Joe: Fairy doors?

Vicky: Fairy doors. People have made tiny, little doors and tiny, little gardens. It's quite cool. Joe's giving me a funny look now! But yes, storytelling. If you want people to remember stuff, tell them a story. Just look at the Bible, stories that have endured for hundreds of thousands of years, a few thousand years, from the Bible. The Bible is part of our rich history and our rich mythology. Just the same as the Celtic legends, and Aesop's Fables, and the Brothers Grimm, and Beowulf, and the Old English stories as well. We remember those and they were all passed down orally in the old days because people couldn't write. That's how people remembered stuff and things like Beowulf and the Brothers Grimm and Aesop's Fables, they weren't just for entertainment way back when. Nor was the Bible, it was all down to controlling people. The way people passed on information and important stuff that they wanted to remember was through storytelling. If you tell somebody a story about...

Joe: The Boy Who Cried Wolf.

Vicky: Yeah, The Boy Who Cried Wolf. There's a lesson in there.

Joe: It's educational.

Vicky: You guys are probably going to remember the story of Joe being knocked across the room by static electricity and the cows with their feet further apart. That kind of thing is all by way of saying "beware of this stuff". It's much more memorable to tell somebody a vivid story about something dangerous than to just say "don't touch that knob over there", or "don't stick your hand in the fire". Because that's really boring. So, there you go. Oh! Another book that's stuck with me by the way, and I don't know if you've read this Joe - and everyone should read this. I reckon it should be required reading in schools. It's called Black Like Me.

Joe: Nope, I haven't read that.

Vicky: Oh! I've got it, you need to read it, it's amazing. It was a white journalist called John Howard Griffith and he lived as a black man for six weeks in the 1950s in America's Deep South, which must have been quite an experience. Well it was quite an experience because I've read his book. His diary became his book and I think it has changed quite a lot of people's lives. You can have people say that racism exists and that it's awful, but if you don't live it, you don't notice it. I had this hammered home to me when I was talking to my friend Yinka a few weeks ago and she was telling me just the little, everyday stuff that happens to her. She's a 6ft tall, beautiful, amazing black woman. Just the little things that happen to her everyday that white people don't notice because it doesn't happen to them. It's like women get talked over in meetings and men don't notice because it doesn't happen to them, so they won't accept that sexism still exists. Anywa, read Black Like Me it's a fantastic book.

Joe: And Hello Yinka if you're listening! Thanks for the lift home the other night.

Vicky: Yeah. At the moment I;m totally obsessed with Stephen King because he's a master storyteller. Joe, what are you reading at the moment?

Joe: I'm reading the second book in the trilogy Wool.

Vicky: Ah, and is it good?

Joe: It's good stuff, yeah, I'm enjoying it. I think the first book was better. I get the impression that the publishers leant on him to get the second book out.

Vicky: I think that actually happened, yeah.

Joe: So it's a bit quicker. It's moving along a bit faster and it's a bit less thoughtful. But overall it's good.

Vicky: Ok, let me ask you this. Why did you enjoy Wool. What was it about the book, the story, that captured you?

Joe: Eehm. Different world, interesting timelines, the stories of people in strange places with difficult things to deal with. It's the people stuff I guess.

Vicky: Yeah, pretty much. Joe's just nailed it there because you can tell stories about 'things' and you can tell stories about 'this happened and that happened', but the reason we're interested. Take the Walking Dead, we're quite obsessed with the Walking Dead aren't we?

Joe: Vicky is very obsessed with the Walking Dead.

Vicky: You like it too!

Joe: Yeah, it's pretty good.

Vicky: The point is, it's a show about zombies and it's on to its sixth season now. There's only so much stabbing zombies in the head that you can really show before it gets a bit dull, because there's only so many ways that you can decapitate a zombie.

Joe: Mmm, many, many ways to decapitate a zombie.

Vicky: Yeah but you kind of reach the limit of that after a couple of episodes because it's all about mashing zombie brains.

Joe: But it's NOT about mashing zombie brains.

Vicky: But it's NOT, it's about the group of people that have survived this zombie apocalypse and the challenges that they face. It's not just zombies it's the threat from other people and it's the threat from the situation that they're in and the fact that they've got no electricity and they've got to re-learn how to do stuff. That's the stuff that makes the Walking Dead really interesting. It's the same with any other...

Joe: The struggle for survival and all that. The zombies are almost incidental aren't they?

Vicky: Yeah, it's all about their relationship as a group. It's about the people, their lives and their stories because we are interested in people. That's what you find interesting about any story that you read or watch or listen to. All of this is by-the-by. The point is that stories are really, really powerful, and they can be very positive but they can also be quite negative. If you look at what our media and our government are doing today, they're doing some of the same things that the Nazis did way back in World War I and World War II. They told stories about the Jews and made up stuff, and said they were in a conspiracy to take over the world. that's partly how they managed to commit the atrocities that they committed. Some of those opinions have persisted to today. The stereotypes have persisted to today, which is alarming. But our media is doing the same now with Muslims as terrorists, they're making people afraid of other people.

Joe: The Americans are certainly having a good go at that.

Vicky: Oh that's just Donald Trump...

Joe: Trump is just...

Vicky: A dick.

Joe: Unbelievable.

Vicky: Trump is another word for fart, which I love. Anyway, they portray poor people as stupid and worthless and lazy, which is obviously not true. They portray women as being most suited to being mothers and caregivers. I would probably eat my own young! That's a joke, I wouldn't

Laughter

But stories form our worldview and they're very difficult to shift. They can be used for good and for evil and they can be incredibly persuasive. Joe, do you know why stories are so powerful?

Joe: That's a big question. Because it's the oral tradition, because it's the storytelling, because it's... I don't know. Tell me why, Vicks, tell me why?

Vicky: *Laughs* Ok, there's a book called Wired For Story, which is great and I really recommend you read it.

Joe: Who's that by?

Vicky: It's by Lisa Cron. C.R.O.N. and she says that story was vital for our evolutionary development. So, opposable thumbs let us hang onto stuff, story tells us what to hang on to, which I quite like. I like that little quote. Opposable thumbs let us hang onto stuff, story tells us what to hang on to.

Joe: Sloths don't have opposable thumbs.

Vicky: They have all kinds of opposable digits.

Joe: Do they?

Vicky: I think so.

Joe: Are you sure? I don't think they're opposable.

Vicky: Well, they work quite well.

Joe: Anyway, they're rubbish at storytelling.

Vicky: *Laughs* They are rubbish at storytelling.

Joe: They don't know what they're doing.

Vicky: The point is, humans can imagine what might happen in the future and we can plan for it and prepare for it.

Joe: Unlike sloths.

Vicky: Unlike sloths. Although I reckon that higher apes, and elephants, and possibly some of the bigger marine mammals are storytellers, especially elephants - elephants have graveyards.

Joe: Mm, they do.

Vicky: That sets us apart from other animals, apart from maybe the elephants.

Joe: On the animal kingdom storytelling thing, squirrels. Everybody thinks squirrels have got a brilliant memory because they bury all their nuts and then they find them all next year. It's not true. What the squirrels have is a rule, they have rules as to where they put their nuts. So they don't remember where they have put nuts, they just know the rule under which they most likely placed the nuts. Rather than remembering this smattering of thousands of locations, what they'll do is go: "well, I put a nut $\frac{2}{3}$ the distance between a big tree and a smaller tree". That's where they plant the nuts. Then when they're looking for food because they're hungry, they go "well, I'll go $\frac{2}{3}$ between a big tree and a small tree and I'll dig there and I'll find a nut". They don't remember thousands of locations of nuts, they just remember a rule.

Vicky: So they might be stealing other squirrels' nuts then?

Joe: No, they all have different rules. Different squirrels have different rules.

Vicky: Oh, really?!

Joe: Yeah. Well otherwise they wouldn't be able to find their nuts.

Vicky: I'm going to research that, it sounds really interesting.

Joe: It's true. Even if it's not, it makes sense.

Vicky: Well, if it's not true it doesn't matter how much sense it makes.

Joe: It's a good story though, eh!

Vicky: It is a good story, yeah. This storytelling stuff is not speculation, neuroscience shows that our brains are hard-wired to respond to stories. Our brains change when we hear or read a story. They've done some research, well Spanish people - Spanish people! - Spanish researchers in Spain...

Laughter

Joe: Those Spanish people.

Vicky: I'm actually not drinking you know, this is dry January for me.

Joe: It's not dry January for me.

Vicky: Researchers in Spain have found that being told a story drastically changes the way our brains work. When people hear neutral words like chair, or table, or car key, the language processing parts of the brain called Broca's and Wernicke's areas are activated exclusively. That's the only area of the brain that's activated. But when people are being told a story, other sensory areas of the brain are activated as well. If you were telling a story using words associated with odor, smell, like perfume or coffee, that part of your brain would light up, as well as the information part of it. If you're just giving people cold facts about car keys and tables and chairs then only the language processing part of your brain is activated.

Joe: And is there an advantage to getting more bits of brain engaged in this?

Vicky: There is because we don't make decisions with information and facts and rational stuff, you will tell yourself and people will tell you, they will *insist* that they make rational decisions using all of the available information, but they don't. What they do is post-rationalise their decision with the information. So it's still important to give people facts and statistics but that's not what will make the decision for them. What makes their decision is their emotional reaction to the story, or is their emotional reaction to the advertising or to the marketing, or to whatever.

Joe: Ok.

Vicky: It's true. Joe's looking vaguely sceptical here because he's an engineer and he will insist that he's entirely rational.

Joe: Entirely rational, like a robot.

Vicky: Like a robot.

Joe: No emotion in here.

Vicky: But it's true and I shall prove it to you. Well I won't prove it to you, Antonio Damasio, who is a famous neuroscientist, has done some absolutely fascinating experiments with people who have had brain injuries, traumatic brain injuries. They've lost the decision-making, the emotional part of their brain, so they don't experience emotions in the same way that you and I can experience emotions. Well not Joe because he's a robot. He basically did experiments with them, not on them, with them! I hasten to add.

Laughter

He's found that people who lack an emotional reaction to a situation, struggle to make a good decision in that situation, even if they are otherwise quite intelligent. So if they're presented with a series of facts. If they're presented with two decisions, where one of them is clearly better than the other if they are given all of the available facts, they'll be able to do it. But if they are asked whether they would prefer tea or coffee they would dither.

Joe: They'd struggle.

Vicky: Yeah, they physically wouldn't be able to make the decision because there's no emotional detachment to either the tea or the coffee. Which is really interesting. This is explained way better than I just have in his book which is called *The Feeling Of What Happens*, which is a really good book. It's quite heavy-going but it's worth a read. There's all kinds of articles about this decision-making and emotional stuff. It's an accepted fact now that emotions are the key of decision-making. If you don't evoke an emotional reaction in somebody then nothing...In fact, Bill Bernbach who was one of the greatest advertisers of the 20th century said "you can say all the right things about a

product and nothing will happen” because if they don’t feel it, they won’t do anything. I’ve completely butchered that quote but that’s basically what he said. So if you want somebody to buy something, or do something, or take action on something, you’ve got to make them feel it. Storytelling is a really good way of making people feel stuff. Here you go, I’ve got some more proof for you here. I’ve just told you the interesting but quite nerdy neuroscience fact, but then there’s a researcher named Jennifer Aaker - that’s two As at the beginning and a K.E.R -

Joe: Ok.

Vicky: She is a marketing professor at Stanford’s graduate school of Business and she did an experiment on her, or possible with her, students. *Laughs*. She made each of her students give a ten minute pitch, 1 in 10 students used a story within his or her pitch, while the other students stuck to more traditional pitch elements, such as facts and figures. If you look at most marketing and advertising it’s boring facts and figures and when people pitch they’re like “fact, fact, fact, fact, fact”.

Joe: Buy this thing because.

Vicky: Yeah. The professor then asked the class to write down everything that they remembered about each pitch and 5% of students cited a statistic that they’d heard but a whopping 63% of students remembered the stories that they had been told.

Joe: Back to the old oral tradition stuff.

Vicky: Back to the old oral tradition stuff because you need to get emotions involved if you want people to remember stuff, if you want people to make decisions, if you want people to do anything basically. And if you don’t want to bore the shit out of people as well because most marketing bores the pants of people because it’s crap. I feel quite strongly about this. It’s so easy to stand head and shoulders above your competitors, it really is because all you have to do is be a real, human person and tell stories. Don’t make stuff up, although you can as long as you make it clear that you’ve made stuff up. What I would suggest you do is: tell stories about the people who buy our products. What problem did they have? How did your product help them overcome it? Where

did they end up because of that? There you go, you've got a story. Bang. Tell it in an engaging way and you're sorted.

Joe: Cool.

Vicky: Yeah. I'm going to leave you with a couple of suggestions. Watch everything that David Attenborough has ever made if you want to see a master storyteller in action. I'm going to give you a URL to go to as well, if I can just find it. It's all about hermit crabs. The URL is: www.tinyurl.com/bfs-hermitcrab . That's BFS for Business For Superheroes. It's all about hermit crabs and it's all about how they move house, basically. I'm going to sit here and tell you that hermit crabs find bigger shells, when they outgrow their old shell they find a new shell. That's pretty dull. Now go and watch the David Attenborough clip and find out how you get people to remember this stuff because it's just amazing. After you've done that, go and Google They Lived by Subaru. It's a 30 second car advert and it's a masterclass in telling a story in 30 seconds. It's not the product that's powerful, it's the story that Subaru tells and it absolutely nails the concerns of its target audience, which is parents who drive their kids around. So go and watch everything David Attenborough has ever done.

Joe: That might take a while!

Vicky: Then also compare it to George Monbiot, I don't know how you say his name. I think he's modelling himself as the next David Attenborough and whilst he's doing decent things, he's doing amazing things, he's doing documentaries etc. and the subject matter is really interesting; but watch a David Attenborough and then watch a George Monbiot and see the difference. David Attenborough is a master storyteller and George Monbiot just doesn't have it, he doesn't have the storytelling. It's really interesting to watch the two of them and see what David Attenborough does that George Monbiot doesn't. Really interesting. So there you go, storytelling in a nutshell. Let me ask you people: What are you going to do? Are you going to give people a boring list of features and benefits about your product and service? Or are you going to tell stories about them? If you are smart and you want to sell your stuff, or to change people's minds - this is particularly important for charities and for social enterprises - you've got to make people feel something. You're never

going to change the world, or even your life, if you don't tell stories. Thanks Joe.

Joe: Cool, you're welcome!

Vicky: By the way if you want to know more about storytelling, my Inner Circle members have access to a teleclass that I did - it's like an hour-long , online teleclass - about storytelling and I went into a lot more detail than this. So if you want that kind of *amazing* information, you can go to: <http://www.businessforsuperheroes.com/inner-circle/> and join us. Other than that, the next podcast is the same time next week and we're going to be talking about habits.

Joe: Habits.

Vicky: Habits, a bit more neuroscience. Habits.

Joe: Cool.

Vicky: So I'll see you guys there!

Joe: Take it easy!

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