

Webinar on
LEVERAGING OUR STORIES
FOR EVERYDAY
INCLUSION AND CHANGE



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About the Webinar

Personal brand is a vivid indication of the best you have to offer – the performance, contributions, and value your society can expect from you. The brand you communicate with marks your career reputation and is in some respects a promise. When you carry a personal brand, your unique promise of value precedes you and has far-reaching effects throughout your life journey. Prajaahita Foundation organized a webinar on personal branding with the topic "Leveraging our stories for change & everyday inclusion" for Women with Disabilities as part of the Saukhyam Project on 29th March 2021 Monday from 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM. The speaker of the webinar was Rekha Saleela Nair [Personal Branding Strategist, Consultant & Coach, Founder of Dragonfiles Everywhere]. The session covers;

- The science of an authentic personal branding.
- How to get started in building a personal brand.
- To tell our personal stories so we can build influence and achieve our goals for ourselves and our community.

We can create change in the world only when we have influence. This means, we must be able to connect and influence a mass of people to listen to us, and to support the work we are doing to create inclusion and change.

Storytelling is one of the most powerful tools for building influence. We all are storytellers. It is through stories that we connect and communicate as human beings. But most of us do not use storytelling as a tool to foster inclusion, to build influence and to create change because we do not see ourselves as storytellers. We focus on the limitations we think we have, like everyday incidents are not stories, we do not have the language skills, etc. We overthink and overcomplicate an innate skill we have.

When it comes to storytelling, we must recognise that the limitations are all in our mind.

Our brains are wired to receive and respond positively when information or data is presented as a story. Storytelling done right has a simultaneous chemical and neurological effect on our brains. This means that if we tell a story with a plot, a hero, background, conflict and resolution, it impacts the neural chemistry of the brain as well as its neural activity. Different aspects of the story triggers the release of cortisol, dopamine and oxytocin which makes the listener attentive, focused, empathetic, trusting and most importantly, experience pleasure and be able to recall with greater detail. The neural activity that unfolds in the brain as the result of hearing a good story is an ability to process data 5 times faster, neural coupling which is the synchronisation of the listener's brain with the story tellers brain and mirroring. Each time we hear someone's story which was presented in such a particular way, mirroring occurs in the mind of the recipient. Thus, the same emotions and ideas come up in his/her mind thus they start to feel the story.

Our brain perceives and process information differently. How our brain processes when we read a news piece is completely different

from how it works when we read or tell a story. Firstly, because the brain works rapid and instant and the cortical activity is 5 times faster when we read or tell a story than when we present data. Certain chemicals in the brain such as oxytocin, cortisol, dopamine which are called 'happiness hormones' are released in our body when we read or tell a story. It is very important for us to understand this and most of the times this was not addressed in a storytelling context.

To tell a good story, we must recognize the 3 important components : the story teller, the story and the audience. Except these 3 parameters, language and others are all secondary in storytelling. These 3 parameters are triangulated, and there is a two way relationship between all three corners of the triangle. It is important for us to understand and recognize that the art of storytelling is about managing the relationships between the triangle. We have to recognize the push and pull dynamics between the three and craft our stories accordingly. It is only then that our storytelling becomes a process.

When a storyteller starts telling a story, the listener's brain works 5 times faster and releases chemicals in the body which create a space to generate positive emotions and energy in the body. The story thus creates receptivity in the listener's/audience mind through neural chemistry and activity. The end result is that the storyteller and the audience come on to the same page and it is in this state we build influence. But along with the story telling, we must also build the connections and relationships. This means we need to understand that storytelling is not a one-time process. Storytelling should be a daily- every minute activity if we want to build influence, when we want to have change and when we want people to support us to make change in our life. We have to evolve into being a walking-talking storyteller and we have to become storytellers who are conscious and aware so we are telling our stories in awareness or intentionally, allowing our audience to connect with us, support us and our goals. Thus, it becomes an ecosystem of relationship. That is, when the storyteller tells a story the audience perceives it and they will start to like both the storyteller and story and thereby the audience will automatically go on the second time thinking that it will be as good as the first one, that is the power of a good story.

To understand the push-pull dynamics between the storyteller, story and the audience, we must understand the key qualities of each.

- The Storyteller must have Credibility - If we want to influence people to build a relationship which supports our goals, we need to be seen as being credible so that the audience will trust us.
- The Story must be factual or data centered - We need to include facts in our story but it shouldn't be presented as facts itself, we can narrate it as a story. There are so many stories we can tell which are based on facts. For instance,

the condition we have, the challenges we face in the mainstream which exclude us etc. If we present our story in this way people will not take interest to hear us, but when we tell the same matter in a storyline like how it affects the other people, that will create an empathy in audience and thereby they will start to feel for us and they will mirror the information in such a way that they start to think about similar struggles they face in their life and they will be more sympathetic towards us and will be more interested in listening and supporting us. The other important thing in storytelling is that the story should have logic in it.

- Emotion is the most important thing a story must evoke in the audience. You need to make our audience feel. This is actually easy when compared to both credibility and logic. Because, whenever we tell a story our brain will automatically respond and an empathetic connection is built. So, we just need to try it.

The storyteller's credibility

A storyteller's credibility is built by his/her personal brand. A personal brand is your promise to the marketplace and the world. This promise is defined as what value we offer to the world and this is determined at the conjunction of who we say we are and how the world sees us. There is a common point between these two and that is where our personal brand sits.

During this pandemic, personal branding has become a buzzword. All are trying to build their own brand through external presentation i.e., various channels of social media. But, this will only cover the aspect that how others see you in an obvious way. It does not cover how we are experienced and this is important because our personal brand is like an iceberg. 90% of our personal brand is felt and not seen by others. To clearly define these invisible felt experiences into something that is consistently felt by the world, we have to ask ourselves some important questions: who am I, why do I behave in such a way, what drives/motivates me, what I actually need, what is my opinion, what is my vision and purpose and how do I want the 10% is visible to others to be like. Other people cannot tell us what is our vision or your purpose. We have to arrive at it by ourselves. The world will form an opinion about us based on the assessment of our behavior, presentation and capabilities. If we try to modify only the visible 10% of us for the world to accept us without giving priority to the invisible 90% then the top 10% will always be unstable and shaky. So, what we need to do is to fix the invisible 90% part,

then only we can shape the visible 10% and thereby our personal brand becomes strong. Thus, we can present ourselves to the world very smoothly.

Most of us get anxious on how to get to my 90% and take charge and shape my behavior towards the world. We can do this by understanding the Personal Brand Pyramid.

The Personal Brand Pyramid shows us how to construct our brand in a way it represents us correctly and in a manner that resonates with our audience.

To build our own personal brand pyramid, what we need to do is, to draw a triangle in a paper and divide the triangle into 4 parts; bottom segment, 4 parts in the middle and the upper segment. Always start from the bottom level, not from the top.

1. Identity

Our identity is about who we are. It includes our purpose, vision, values, passions, dreams, ambitions, what makes us special, etc. There is a difference between vision and purpose. Our purpose is the reason we wake up in the morning & what makes live. Our vision is when we scale our purpose to a larger number of people.

2. What are you?

It includes our characteristics, credentials (like I am doing a business, I am a school teacher etc.). We can assess what we are in two ways; either in a rational approach that is calculating scientifically based on our qualifications, performance and certificates or in an emotional approach that is, emotionally what I am. In emotional approach we are reconstructing our dreams and ambitions from our memories which will define 'who we are', 'there is right or wrong in this'. People can decide what is right for them.

3. What about you?

This is a critical component of the personal branding because it refers to what our audience expects from us. What is our audience feeling or judging us as? This is where our unique promise comes into the picture. We have to be able to present to our audience that we are credible, trustworthy and are unique in a way that others are not. It can be something small, like the person can be a good writer or can be a singer or artist etc. What we need to do is, we should be capable of identifying our uniqueness. But this is somewhat difficult for most of us since we are conditioned behave in certain manners such as we should be modest, humble and should not boast about our qualities.

But why should we not? If we are good at something and have talents then we should embrace it with confidence, not with arrogance. Since we have that confidence in ourselves then we can easily represent and present ourselves to the outside world and thereby we get the courage and confidence to stand strong on our goals. If we are able to differentiate and define our unique value, then our personal brand is made. thereby we get the courage and confidence to stand strong on our goals. If we

are able to differentiate and define our unique value, then our personal brand is made.

4. Relationship

At the apex of the pyramid is the resonance we create with our brand in our audience. The question to ask is what is the relationship between me and you? Am I connecting to you or pulling away from you? What we need to identify is that, are we forming a relationship or making challenges to it. Another thing we need to focus on is, "are we supposed to keep the relationship with everyone"? The answer is "no". We need to focus only on people who can support our goals, growth, ambitions and dreams that is why our personal brand is there. We need to accept that we can't make everybody happy while forming relationships, it is not possible. Whenever we attain this acceptance, only then we can focus on who we want to work with and thus a genuine and authentic connection is formed.

To create our brand, we can use the **my brand pyramid model. In the My Brand Pyramid – Model, we stack the various key factors that make up the brand.** The base of the pyramid is our purpose; why do I live? The second thing is our vision, if I have a dream bigger than me that is my vision. It is not necessary to have both the vision and purpose altogether. We either need a vision or a purpose. If we have a purpose, we will eventually create our vision too. We need to understand our purpose only then we can differentiate it from the vision. For example: A doctor's purpose may be to heal people and his vision may be to build a hospital and provide healthcare to large number of people.

But, when a doctor runs a hospital, his focus may not be only into healing, he needs to think about the funding, medicines, staff management and other things which are different from his personal purpose. So, when we have a correct knowledge about our purpose, we can spend time on it, but that doesn't mean we need to spend our whole time on it, we can spend 50%, 30% or maybe 10% of our time to focus on the purpose. It depends on us.

Third thing is my values, this is a tricky area. It is best for us to focus on a maximum of 6 values, from which we can prioritize the top values. It is a very important area because when we engage with the world what people feel is our values. That's why it is necessary for a storyteller to be credible. If the storyteller does not have the value system, people won't believe them.

The next factor is our beliefs. Our beliefs motivate the way we act in the world and how we engage with people. Our values and belief system form our behavior.

Another factor is our credentials which includes our certificates, degree, course, hobbies. From credentials comes our skill sets; what I'm able to do.

Above this comes our uniqueness that is what makes me different from others. After defining all the above-mentioned factors, we get our image. Our image is how we present the sum total of the pyramid to the world. The reputation is how our world perceives and receives our image. Our Personal brand is something which comes in between our image and our reputation.

While assessing our personal brand in the gap between the image and the reputation, people usually have 3 kinds of thought process one is that I have to improve myself,

next is that I am good at everything but the other person have issues in understanding what I am. So, I need to improve my communication, and the last thought is I have good communication and image but the other person's opinion and value system is extremely different from mine so the gap is fine. All these thoughts are correct. Through all this process we can create a rough personal brand.

Who is your audience and why should they care?

There may be times when people won't respond to our stories, a zero like and comment situation. This is a common scenario or situation where all of us had experienced at least once. There is a reason behind it, every person has their own likes, passion and for them they are their own priority. There is a point where what you want to say and what they are interested in. While building our personal brand we need to answer "who is our audience and why should they care about us"? For that we need to define our stakeholder first.

Stakeholder management process

Stakeholders can be anyone; our friends, family, community, government, media,

research people, civil society, other nonprofit organizations, doctors and so on. It can be anybody, based on the vision and purpose of the storyteller. You need to identify and map out "who should I talk to" and "what we need from them?", "what is their behavior and ours?"

Understanding stakeholder's behavior is important because there may be people who is really interested in our story and has the decision-making capacity to support us, but there are other cases too, like people may have interest in us but doesn't have the decision-making capacity and some people have decision making capacity but don't have interest in our story.

After identifying our stakeholders, we need to identify who has the power to change and who has interest to change. As we have very limited energy, we need to know how to manage them according to their interest and influence.

For stakeholders, with low power and interest, our effort is only to monitor them For stakeholders with high power and low interest, our effort is to keep them satisfied.

For stakeholders with low power and high interest, we keep them informed And for stakeholders with high interest and power, we work to manage them closely.

Power & interest balance

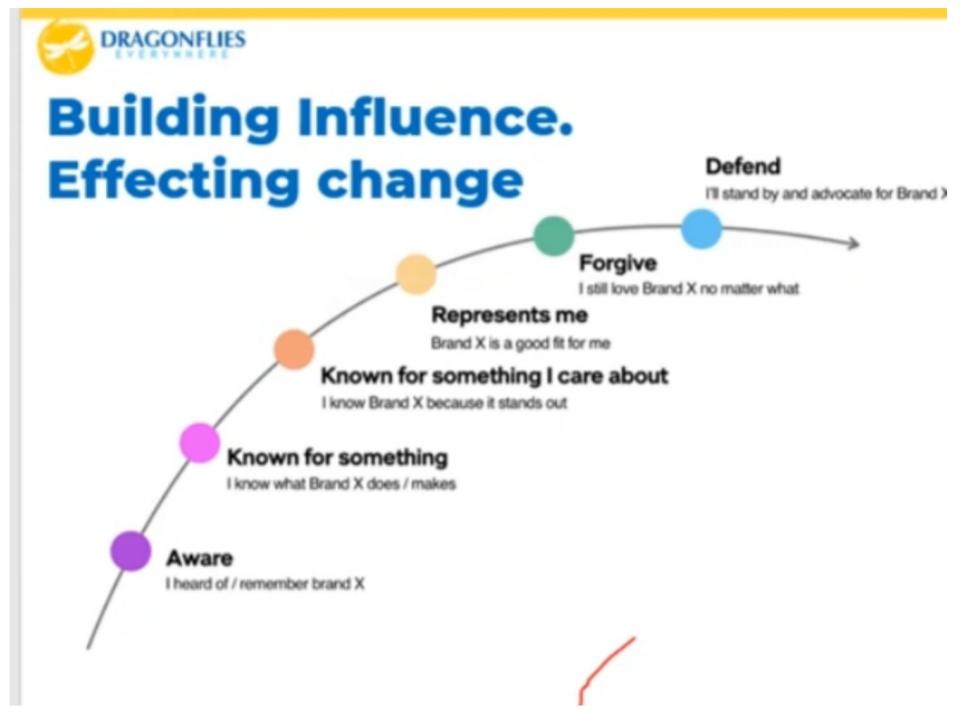
Based on the power and interest categorisation, we can design our communications strategy to manage our stakeholders. There are different ways for it;

The first is the pull communication for stakeholders with low interest and low influence. We pull them to our communications without spending too much effort on them.

The second case is the push communication, if the stakeholder has high interest and low influence. In this case we push our communications and messaging at them, so their interest is maintained. We can also rope them into higher participation by consulting.

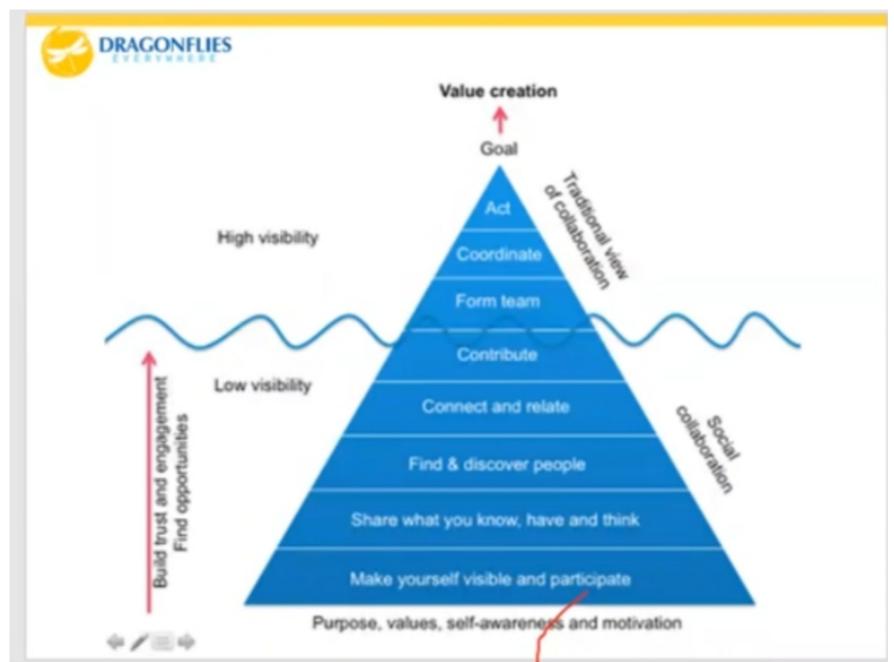
The third and fourth cases are of consultation and participation which is mostly for stakeholders with high influence low interest. And finally we have partnerships for stakeholders with high interest and high influence.

This is for an understanding, but when we define our stakeholders and identify ways to get their confidence, comfort, commitment then we can speak to our audience. When we map out our stakeholders it will automatically reduce our fears and worries regarding what other people will think and build confidence in us. The last and the most important component is our story. As we have already discussed, our story should be factual and logical. Our audience is emotional, when we tell something factual and logical, we need to ensure that the audience must care about it intellectually, emotionally, sensorially. They must be engrossed in the story with enthusiasm.



To level up to that standard we need to know what storytelling is not.

Storytelling Is:	Storytelling Isn't:
Useful Info in a Narrative	Any 10,000 Word Article
What Motivates Your Team	Your Sales Goals
What Your Brand Stands For	An Advertisement
About Your Customers	About Your Brand
Emotional & Engaging	Boring
A Beginning, A Crisis & A Resolution	Something "Cool" That Happened
An Interaction Between Your Customers And Your Brand	A Sales Pitch



Your Brand's Story Arc

To build a good story, we need a story arc. The below picture is of a story arc that we can use to construct a story in any situation.



Building influence

Why do I tell my story? The answer is simple: to build influence and influence is all about relationships. This relationship connects with our audience through certain steps/processes. Our effort is to climb the influence curve progressively. This we can do by building awareness and slowly increasing our visibility.

Questions & answers

Qn: Who am I, why am I living and what can I do? All these questions, I am asking to myself since years

Ans: It took me 1 year time to realize that what I really want in my life and that is the real happiness comes from small things. From there I started my journey. There are no readymade answers for questions like these but what we can do is rewind our life events, there we can find some events/ moments which makes me happy and thereby we will be able to discover our purpose.

Qn: Does it affect our reputation or image if we change our purpose or our vision?

Ans: No. There is nobody stopping you from changing it. But how do you communicate it, others should feel your change as natural and organic and they must continue to support you. Our storytelling makes it possible. You must clearly and honestly tell through your story why that change happens. Even though we change our vision/ purpose, our value system remains the same. It is something fundamental to who you are.

Qn : I am afraid to post my stories on social media. How can I get rid of my fear?

Ans: Even if I am a personal brand consultant and coach, I also experience fear while posting on social media. But what we need to do is bring courage and do it. What I usually do when posting sensitive content is that I have a group of people who support me, having the same viewpoint and vision like me. So, I know they will support me and like that way my story will reach out to more people. This is the phase where engagement matters, as like we wish for likes and support in the social media for our stories from others, they too expect the same. Do support others, they will surely do the same.