

Stories that Make People Pay Attention

A story involves something that happens. There is a before and an after, with your organization facilitating the change. The story of your organization, complete with facts, figures and funding sources, is not a memorable story! No one will read it, much less remember it. People remember overcoming obstacles and the emotions associated with the struggle.

1. Find a memorable person to profile. Ask your staff and volunteers to help uncover a story. Did something happen and you told your family or your friends? That's probably your story. It involves conflict, most often your hero has to overcome something that is in the way. That's the conflict. That's where the emotion lives.
2. Talk to the person about their story. Ask as many questions and you can think of. You will want to paint a picture involving as many senses as possible. Ask questions about the physical- what was seen, heard, etc., but most importantly, talk about the emotions- what did you feel? How did the experience change you? How are you living your life differently? Discovering the emotion is the key to a great story.
3. Get a few direct quotes from the person telling you their story and other interested people. Who else is qualified to talk about what happened? A family member? Someone from your organization who participated? An authority figure (a teacher or minister?)
4. Before you try and write the story, make a list of what happened in what order.
5. Match your quotes with the list, see where they belong.
6. Write a compelling first few lines of the story. This is the most important part of the story! This first sentence will determine whether anyone reads it. You can use suspense, you can tell about the person now and then say "but it wasn't always that way." You can tease the reader with one part of the story. Make them WANT to keep reading.
7. Tell the story. In fact, if you did #4, 5 and 6, the writing is more than half done. How was life before the challenge? What were the barriers? What happened? How is life different now?
8. Somewhere in the middle, bring in your organization and what it did for this person. This is where you can slip in a few of those facts/figures that are often pretty boring. Here, they feel natural.
9. Sprinkle in quotes from others- teachers, neighbors, family members, etc.
10. Resolution- Explain how the story ended and indicate the future for your subject.
12. Read the story out loud. If it doesn't sound conversational, pretend you're telling the story to a friend and use those words. Beginning writers almost always use too many words. Reading out loud will often point out those unnecessary words.
13. Ask a friend or colleague to read the story. Did they find it interesting? Compelling? Did it change their view of your organization?

For more help, see Network For Good's "Ten Tips for Writing your non-profit story"
<https://www.networkforgood.com/nonprofitblog/10-tips-writing-your-story/>