

IGNITE360

STORYMASTERS STORYTELLING FAILURES

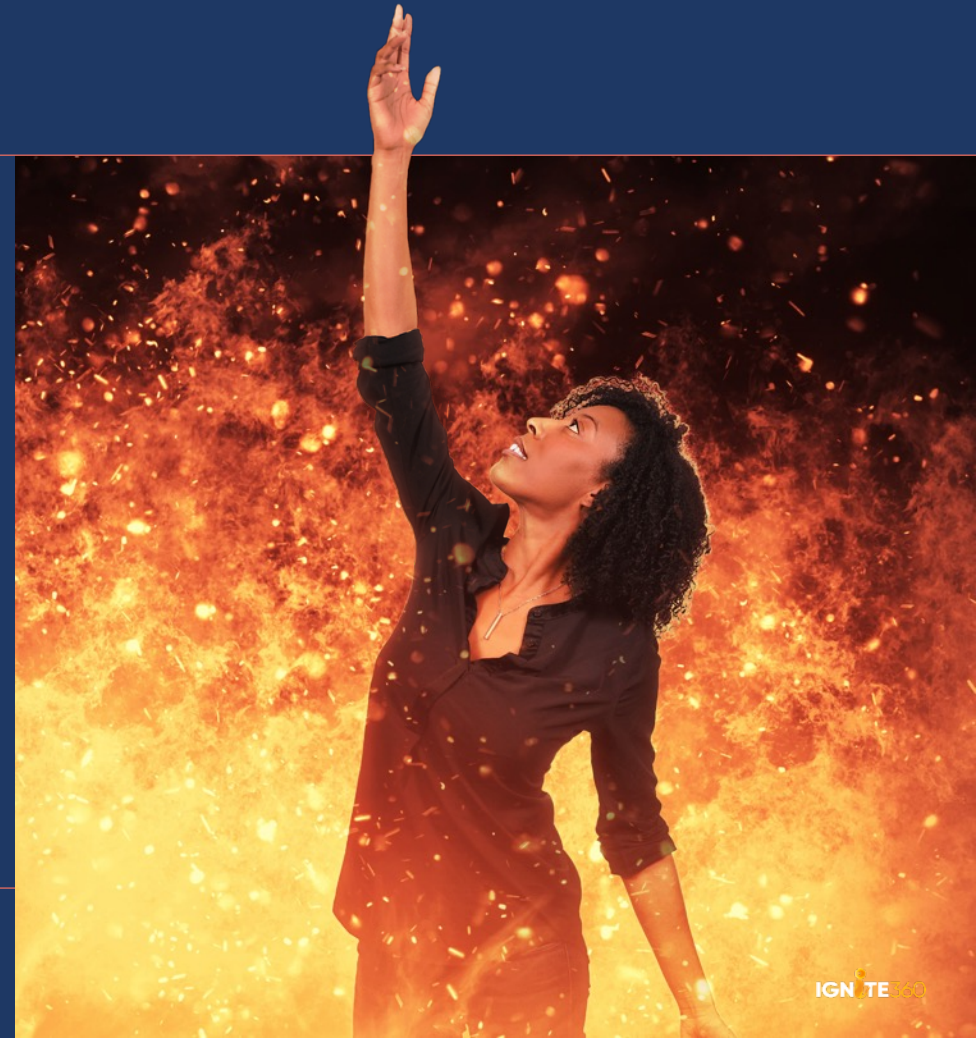


On a fundamental human level, it is deeply satisfying and useful to hear stories about overcoming failure.

Stories of failure get the message across. You wouldn't dare leave breadcrumbs to mark your trail in the woods, would you?

So, we thought, what better way to teach storytelling techniques, than through stories about failed stories?

“Failure forces you to think differently. You don't want to fail again so you become a student of storytelling. You have to be open to that student mentality.” branding specialist Claire Farber told Ignite 360. We asked three industry leaders about their own storytelling failures and what they do differently now.





LISA OSBORNE, COO IGNITE 360

Focused on the content and lost sight of the goal.

When I felt like something wasn't going over well and wasn't landing, I wasn't single-minded enough and focused enough on that North Star goal of impacting the audience - making sure that they understood that key big takeaway, and how they should think about it, and what should they do about it.

And it feels really frustrating because we spend so much time, so many resources on these efforts, and certainly the client is spending a lot of money, typically. And we pride ourselves on story, and we do a great job with that. But if, in the moment of sharing it, your message is not coming across, if you're not having the influence and impact that you need, or you want to have, it's just like, "Wow. Was that all for not?" It's often a collective effort, but you know, you're the one standing up there.

There are several key things for me that I think about now. One is, have I spent enough time and energy really hyper-focused on my goal and intention for the share out?

So often we go in with this mentality of, "Okay, now it's time to share out the learning, and to talk about the key insights and to make our recommendations." And that's great, but I think we have to have a goal above and beyond that, which is to say, "What kind of action do we want the audience to take as a result of what we're sharing?" Like, if had to boil it down to one key sentence or two as to what our goal is for the session, beyond just sharing out and closing up the project, "What is that?"

(cont.)

LISA OSBORNE (CONT.)

Another pretty big contributor to a story not landing and one we've talked about throughout Storymasters is just not knowing enough about who your audience is.

You have to ask, "How can we plan ahead and make sure that our content and the story really speak to the audience?"

One other thing is story structure - how to be smart about story structure and the flow of your story when you're telling it. How can you really simplify it? How can you again help your audience see that goal? At the outset, let them know where you're going to take them and provide those moments of pause. Tell your audience, "Here's what I set out to say, here's what I've told you. Now, we're going to move on to this next piece of the story."

It's that pacing and that flow that seems so critical. I think we shy away from slowing down. We talk about this a lot when we're moderating. Don't be afraid of silence. I feel like the same thing applies to sharing out a story.

Sometimes you want the energy to be high and it can be intense, with a lot of information to be shared. But then there are moments where you want to say something and then just stop. Take a breath or two. I think that contributes a lot to people's absorption.

I don't consider myself to be an amazing orator by any means. It's definitely something that I have to work at. And I think that might be part of the journey - recognizing what my strengths are, what my challenges are, and just putting in the work and time to try to incrementally improve.

AS TOLD TO STEPHANIE SPENCER



Lisa is a RIVA trained moderator and facilitator with nearly 20 years of market research and consumer insights experience both as a supplier and a client. Lisa excels as a change agent for the teams she leads and the businesses she supports.

[Read Lisa's recipe for storycrafting deliciousness.](#)



Wrote a report not a story.

I was working on my first report. I often do a really, really detailed outline first before I even think of writing a report. It's because I want to try to make the report writing easier. It can be overwhelming to approach writing a deck. I don't know anyone that likes doing it. It's a lot of pressure. You have to break it down into its most manageable points. Thinking big and thinking small at the same time is really hard.

So, I wrote this detailed outline and I really thought it was the beginning of the report, you know, and I shared it with my boss and he really didn't like it. He was like, "It sounds just like a research report. I'm not getting a story out of it." The outline was just a series of what we learned about each thing, "I found about this and this is what I found about this and this is what I heard about this."

Right. So, we go into this meeting and the client says, "I'm really still curious about the [consumer] journey. What is the journey?" So, during a break, they had this huge board and I wrote a journey map, because I'm like, this is the president asking for this. I should really think about this.

So, I put it on the board, and it went over so well with the client. When I was talking to my boss afterwards, he's like, "You know, you could use that as the [story] framework. What if we like move everything around?" And I'm like, "That makes so much sense." So, we rejiggered the whole report.

When I was writing the journey map, I was pulling it all together, not realizing I was pulling it together. I just was thinking visually in that moment. When I wrote it visually, it just seemed like a story versus before. As soon as someone says the word "journey" you don't think in bullet points. By focusing on the journey, the whole report fell into place.

In some ways, one could say it was arbitrary because it just came from the president saying, "Oh, don't forget this one piece. I'm not sure we covered that enough." And then that became the whole focus of everything. So you might call it serendipity. And then my boss having the presence of mind to say, "Oh, we could use that as the framework." So that collaborative effort really helped.

You have to write the report, right? So rather than someone else asking you, "How do you make this not sound like a report?" you ask yourself that first. And it helps you be a better self-editor. Once you see someone else edit it, you're like, "Okay, I have a brain, I can at least do the first round of editing myself." It's teaching you.

Failure forces you to think differently. You don't want to fail again so you become a student of storytelling and you have to be open to that student mentality. As a business person, you're supposed to be the one who knows the answers, you're never supposed to really admit when you don't know something. You need to be in a different mindset of, "Now I'm willing to be a vulnerable student."

If I'm writing from a worried place, like "I should say this," or "I should be writing this," it doesn't work. I need to write from a place of vulnerability and openness.



For close to 25 years, Claire has loved figuring out what makes consumers tick, and leveraging empathy and deep understanding of unmet consumer needs to build stronger brands with more relevant product offerings.

[Read more of Claire's work here.](#)

AS TOLD TO STEPHANIE SPENCER



ANDY ROSTAD, EXECUTIVE
PRODUCER AT MEDIA BEYOND

Created a visual
story for himself
not the target
audience.

The idea is sometimes expressed,
maybe inelegantly as killing your darlings.

It's this idea that when creating, there will become a point at which you grow attached to an idea either as a result of your own participation in its genesis or, if you're working in a small group, there's sometimes just this energy that collects around an idea.

I remember a very specific project where we had constructed a very elaborate method of putting information on screen. It was beautiful. It had a very rigorous logic to it. We were all so very proud of it. And when we presented it to the client. They said, "Could you just write the words on screen?"

And that hurt my feelings. There was this misunderstanding. My job was not to make the most elegant solution to this communications problem and feel good about it. It was to get it so that somebody who's watching the screen with one eye and typing an email with the other isn't going miss the key point.

It is demoralizing when somebody at some point says, "No, do it over." But work that isn't effective doesn't mean that the individual is ineffective, which is very hard, especially in a culture that sort of says you are what you do. The first thing that you have to do is let go. Your own value is not based on this particular output. It's not about bad output. It's about effective output. You just may not be the target audience.

(cont.)

ANDY ROSTAD (CONT.)

The best thing you can do is work harder upfront to understand your audience and to understand what's going to resonate with them, but that's a luxury that most time and resource situations don't afford.

It comes down to empathy - being able to imagine yourself in the shoes of somebody who does enjoy that or who is your target audience. That's why people like my former boss [Oprah Winfrey] were so successful because she understood and appreciated the very finest of things but also could relate to somebody who had nothing. She wasn't born the richest woman in the world. She was born into a world where her greatest joy was sharing a Snickers. She knows what it is to eat a Snickers bar.

What we ended up doing [with that “words on screen” project] was cropping in on the faces and putting them against a very clean graphic backdrop and having the words appear. Color text against a white background. And instead of being basic it had this elegance to it. And that really simple treatment started to resonate with the client.

When you're literally up against the clock and you're literally failing, you've got to find a way in. Sometimes we just overthink things. What would happen if we stripped it all down to its bare essentials and let things breathe? So often we think that to fix something we need to do more to it. Well, what happens if you let some things go?

There is a concept in graphic design, which has to do with the power of white space. It's a cliché of like, “What are the notes you're not playing?” But that can work too in video. We have this idea that video is so effective because you can show, and you can tell, and you can hear. And, you know, if you could make them taste, you would. But there's also this other aspect to it. The real power of audio visual is that you control the rhythm. I can't tell you how fast to read something, but with a video or an audio production, I can time out and I can give you intervals, during which you're going to sort of fill in the blank.

When confronted with something that's not working right. It's not a failure if you if you haven't run out of time and money. It's not a failure if you still have resources available.

AS TOLD TO ROBIN ALGAZE

Andy is a principal and founder of Media Beyond, a design and video agency (and one of our favorite video storytelling heros). Prior to that, he was an assistant editor/production assistant at Harpo Studios/The Oprah Winfrey Show. Andy collaborates with Ignite 360 on a myriad of video projects and has a knack for “finding a way in” and bringing the consumer story to life on screen.

[Watch Andy's visual storytelling projects here.](#)

Want to learn how to better kill your darlings, let go, think visually, or accept silences?

Email us at storymasters@ignite-360.com and we can find a solution to fit your story challenge.

We hope these stories were helpful!

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You can contact us with any specific questions at storymasters@ignite-360.com

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storytelling insights!

