

## **Once Upon A Job...**

### **"Success" Stories Help Job Seekers Sell Their Skills!**

**by Craig Harrison**

Nothing succeeds like success, according to the old French proverb. And for job seekers nothing succeeds quite like *success stories*. Are you sharing yours? If not, why not? The secret is in *how* you share your successes.

As a toastmaster you're already skilled at telling short stories. You do it every week during Table Topics. *Success stories* are thirty- and sixty-second stories that can be shared in job interviews, at networking events or even socially in casual conversation. Did you know you had a storied past?

While your résumés' bullets and dashes accurately tell a reader what you've done, *success stories* tell a listener so much more. *Success stories* showcase your values, qualities and thought processes while telling listeners how you achieved these accomplishments.

During interviews, a quick-hitting story can make or reinforce a point in memorable fashion. *Success stories* may be told in response to a question, to punctuate a credit on a résumé, or even as an aside.

*Success stories* can showcase your acumen, demonstrate your facility with others, or profile your leadership qualities. Each story shows you succeeding in a work context, which is the purpose of your interview. Remember, the person interviewing you is trying to envision how you'll do in their work environment. Past performance is often the best predictor of future success so it behooves you to share your successes. Stating just facts or statistics leaves interviewers dry. Telling your story adds the color, context and realism to help your interviewer appreciate your skills and experience and how you applied each.

Stories work for several reasons. For starters they're more memorable than numbers, names and dates. Stories also work well because we enjoy the drama: a problem followed by a solution, a mystery solved with a twist, or a creative workaround to a seemingly insurmountable obstacle. Also, the listener can find him or herself in the story as well. A good story will resonate with listeners.

## Success Stories *Con't*

According to Gay Ducey, a past president of the National Storytelling Association, "we're wired for stories, individually and collectively. Since the time of Odysseus we've been told stories. Since we were little kids we've been read and told stories. This is how we've been conditioned to learn; our morals and our values are taught through stories." So our connection with listeners is an emotional one as well.

Look at your résumé and pick out an accomplishment. Now tell your interviewer the story behind the accomplishment. It states that you increased sales 60%. But tell *how* you did it; Give us a "before vs. after" description. What was the secret? Stories that reveal secrets captivate their listeners.

Your curriculum vita indicates you streamlined production time 40% in your last job. What was the key to this success? Why hadn't others done this already? What personal quality helped you succeed at this task where others before you hadn't?

### **The Three S's of Success Stories**

*Success stories* offer a setting, a situation and a solution. Remember, you're the hero of your stories. Your decisions, actions and insights made a difference and it's OK to say so. You don't have to be boastful, but make the late sportscaster Howard Cosell proud: "Tell it like it is!"

Here is an example of how one candidate summarized his most recent employment for a competitor:

"In my last job I was hired to manage a production department at war with the editorial department. I walked into an environment full of distrust and resentment, built up over years of animosities and recriminations. Through my implementation of cross training between departments, initiation of mutual social outings such as picnics and scheduling of project post-mortems we were able, after 6 months, to

## Success Stories *Con't*

convert resentment into understanding and competition into cooperation. As each department began to understand how the other one worked we were jointly able to improve the workflow and consequently shorten time to market with publications. Even quality improved as we better understood how best to work together. That showed me the importance of internal communication and how hard it can be, though not impossible, to change an existing culture.

Not only does this success story demonstrate the candidate's ability to solve problems, but it shows interviewers the candidate's understanding of interoffice politics and the human side of operations. This candidate took initiative, was a change agent and didn't shy away from a challenge. Notice how the same story can convey multiple qualities.

Stories can demonstrate your detail orientation, dedication, leadership, independence, researching ability, creativity or problem solving inclination. Remember that employers want well rounded hires so make sure they see evidence of your varied skill set. Here are a few examples:

- Your conversion of old equipment into new uses shows you can think outside the box and are resourceful.
- The non-monetary ways you recognized your staff shows your creativity, abilities as a leader as you demonstrate your understanding of how to motivate others.
- The weekly internal E-letter you created for employees not only boosted morale, it gave evidence of your strong communication skills.
- The canned food drive you initiated at your last job not only showed your commitment to your community, it also raised visibility for the company and improved their public relations.

## Success Stories *Con't*

- By forming a lunchtime jogging club you helped bring employees from different departments together while improving the health, and mental health, of employees who participated. Your leadership and team building skills were further evidenced when your runners club formed a Centipede in the recent Bay to Breakers race.
- Your multilingual skills helped a project suffering from miscommunication between subsidiaries from overseas. Not only could you translate phrases and idioms of speech, your insight into cultural differences bridged a gap and corrected a wayward project. More than showcasing your knowledge of languages, you demonstrated the ability to liaison between different groups, negotiate and turn an important project around.

It stands to reason that when employers hire candidates with such skills and experience, similar stories will ensue. Your continued employment makes yours a never-ending story. Review your past work history and identify the stories within each accomplishment. Now tell it to others. Make sure you include the moral to your story. What is the point the story tells about you, your skills and credits? And remember, it's never too soon to tell your story: "once upon a job..."

---

*Professional Keynote Speaker Craig Harrison DTM is a past president of Dramatically Speaking Toastmasters (1580-57) in Oakland, CA and vice-chair of the Storytelling Association of Alta California ([www.storysaac.org](http://www.storysaac.org)). Craig presented this educational session, STORY TELL, STORY SELL, at our International Convention in San Antonio, Texas in 2002. Visit his web site at [www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com](http://www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com)*

# Toastmaster Success Stories

## Reap Recruiting Rewards

By Craig Harrison DTM

There was a setting you found yourself in, a situation you experienced and your resulting success...voila, you have a success story! Many Toastmasters share their membership *success stories* and in the process, enroll others in clubs. After all, success is contagious!

Why did you join Toastmasters? What was your aim? To learn to speak in public, sharpen your leadership skills, learn to speak off-the-cuff? Improve your vocabulary? When you share your Toastmasters *success story* with others they naturally see what it could do for them too. Your personal testimonial becomes more powerful than any brochure or website in showing strangers what awaits them when they join Toastmasters.

My story? Toastmasters transformed me from a mumbling, fumbling, stumbling whisperer into a confident communicator, so much so that I am now a professional speaker. Toastmasters has turned my fear into fun and I've seen it change others' lives too. If it can help me it can help you!

Think about *your* story, Other people you know you may already be telling it! They have seen the difference in "before and after" your engagement with Toastmasters. Paint the picture! What has opened up for you as a result of your Toastmasters membership? A new career? A promotion? The confidence to form or join a social group? Did you run for office? Did you meet your spouse through Toastmasters? Tell others your special story and they'll begin to understand what is available to them through our marvelous organization.

Stories abound. Once you've fashioned yours, think about others who've joined your club since you have. What does their success story sound like? I've seen shy and timid newcomers later become top officers, contest winners and master recruiters. I recount their stories to others as well. It's amazing what confidence and a taste of success can do.

Become a teller of Toastmaster tales. Tell the world of your success and soon they'll be knocking at your club's door for a taste of their own success. And we'll all live happily after!

## **Tips for Telling**

1. Use vocal variety, gestures and body language to reinforce your story's words
2. Tell yours in a conversational tone
3. Use pauses for effect
4. Give eye contact to convey your sincerity
5. Paint vivid picture with adjectives to add color
6. Tap universal themes: overcoming obstacles, your hero's journey, a search for solutions, etc.
7. Use your confidence derived from Toastmasters to showcase your strong communication skills.

\* \* \*

Craig Harrison DTM co-founded Speakers Forum (9338-57) in Lafayette, CA. Craig's Keynote address, TELL THE WORLD, recounts his 15-year Toastmasters journey from timid toastmaster to confident communicator to professional speaker using short success and "road to success" stories. Visit [www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com/toastmasters.html](http://www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com/toastmasters.html) for more on Craig's journey. Call (510) 547-0664 or e-mail [Craig@ExpressionsOfExcellence.com](mailto:Craig@ExpressionsOfExcellence.com) for more information and resources to help your club, business or organization.