

Using Story For Idea Generation

Presented courtesy of Kat Koppett, Koppett & Company

Introduction: *Storytelling activities are a great way to get your team warmed up and generating ideas. Why? Because they help remind people that they are naturally creative, and can improve listening skills, spontaneity, and the ability to accept and build on ideas. Besides, by fictionalizing a situation you can help participants feel safer about thinking "outside the box" or voicing what seem to be silly ideas – which are both at the core of innovation.*

How to do it? Try using the Story Spine, a simple template originally created by Kenn Adams, a playwright and improvisational actor, and adapted for organizations by StoryNet LLC. The Story Spine provides just enough structure to make individual or group storytelling fun and engaging, and actually helps people to craft satisfying stories.



STORY SPINE EXERCISE

SET UP

- Explain how this exercise will be used as a creativity warm-up or to generate new ideas directly, depending on your agenda.
- Divide participants into groups of 2-5 or have them work individually
- Post or hand out the Story Spine (see page 2)

STORYTELLING

- Have participants create a story one sentence at a time, using the cue words from the Story Spine (see following page allow 3-4 minutes per person)

DEBRIEF

If used for a warm-up:

- Was that easier or harder than you expected? What most surprised you about others' stories? Your own? Did the structure help or hinder you?

If used for idea generation:

- Allow participants who choose to to share their story with the group.
- What elements of the stories seemed most outlandish to you? Which would be most desirable if they were possible? Which might be most promising for further brainstorming?

NOTE: Don't worry about being overly formal with the template. Some learners will enjoy working within the structure more than others. We suggest that you provide an environment that supports choice.

The Story Spine

*See Koppett, Kat (2001). *Training To Imagine: Practical Improvisational Theatre Techniques to Enhance Creativity, Teamwork, Leadership, and Learning*. Sterling, Virginia: Stylus. 199-200.



Story Segment	Your Story	Comments
<i>Once upon a time...</i>		<i>Introduces the protagonist.</i>
<i>Every day...</i>		<i>Sets the scene before the trigger or catalyst.</i>
<i>But one day...</i>		<i>Introduces “what happened” – the trigger or catalyst that sets the story in motion.</i>
<i>Because of that...</i>		<i>Explains the response to “what happened”.</i>
<i>Because of that...</i>		<i>Repeat as needed to trace what happened.</i>
<i>Because of that...</i>		
<i>Because of that...</i>		
<i>Until finally:</i>		<i>...until the story reaches a climax or turning point.</i>
<i>Ever since then:</i>		<i>Resolves the story and describes what things are like now.</i>
<i>And the moral is:</i>		<i>(Optional): Tells the story’s main point or lesson.</i>