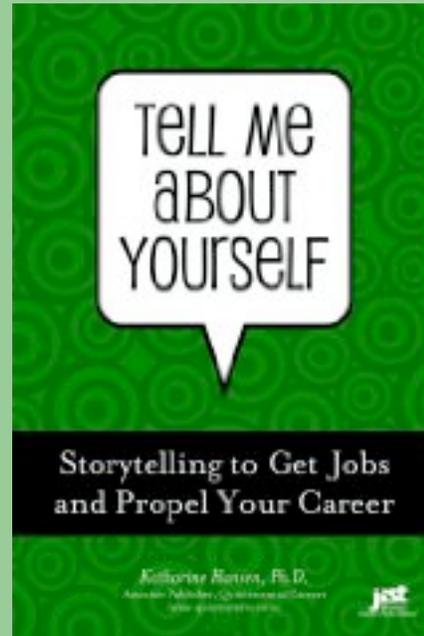


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*Tell Me About Yourself:
Storytelling to Get Jobs and
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**A Workbook to Develop
Better Job-Search Communication
through Storytelling**

By Katharine Hansen, PhD

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Blog: *A Storied Career* • <http://astoriedcareer.com> • Email: kathy@astoriedcareer.com

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Acknowledgments/Directory of Experts

I am grateful to the brilliant minds who inspired many exercises in this workbook. Rather than take up space in the exercise instructions with descriptions of these experts, I'm listing them here with, in most cases, their Web or blog sites. They are listed in the order in which they appear in the workbook.

Kerr Inkson. Professor and author: <http://mngt.waikato.ac.nz/staff%20List/staffhome.asp?user=kinkson>

Tom Peters. Inventor of personal branding: <http://www.tompeters.com/>

Center for Dependable Strengths trains professionals, in the helping professions, to facilitate the Dependable Strengths Articulation Process (DSAP), a process proven to help people improve their quality of life through meaningful work: <http://www.dependablestrengths.org/>

Sharon Graham. Canada's Career Strategist: <http://sharongraham.ca/>

Richard Bolles. Author of the classic *What Color is Your Parachute?* <http://www.jobhuntersbible.com/>

Gerry Lantz. Creator of STORIES THAT WORK®, a series of narrative-based tools, that help executives and corporations communicate more memorably and persuasively. <http://www.storiesthatwork.com/>

Mary Morel works with individuals and organizations to improve their writing – through speaking, training and online programs. The M Factor: <http://marymorel.blogspot.com/>

Ford Myers. The Executive's Career Coach. <http://www.fordmyers.com/>

Park Howell. Sustainable Storyteller. <http://parkhowell.com/>

Cindy Chastain. Creative Director, Strategist, Screenwriter. <http://www.linkedin.com/in/cindychastain>.

Elizabeth Sosnow. Managing Director, Bliss PR. <http://www.blisspr.com/>

Ardath Albee. B2B Marketing Strategist and the CEO of her firm, Marketing Interactions, Inc.: <http://marketinginteractions.typepad.com>

Judy Rosemarin. Sense-Able Strategies Founder and Executive Coach: <http://sense-ablestrategies.com/>

Stephanie West Allen. Author and blogger: <http://westallen.typepad.com/>

Karen Siwak. Award-winning Certified Résumé Strategist. <http://www.resumeconfidential.ca/>

Steve Denning. Organizational storytelling pioneer and author. <http://www.stevedenning.com/>

Tim Tyrell-Smith. Marketing Coach, Professional Keynote Speaker, Life Coach. <http://timsstrategy.com/>

Annette Simmons. Consultant and author of the seminal *The Story Factor*: <http://www.annettesimmons.com/>

Michael Margolis. Founder of "The New About Me:" <http://thenewaboutme.com/>

Introduction: How to Use this Workbook

This workbook is intended as a companion to my 2009 book, *Tell Me About Yourself: Storytelling to Get Jobs and Propel Your Career*. It is both an update and extension of that book.

In the time since *Tell Me About Yourself* was published, I've learned an enormous amount and gained many new ideas and insights about using story in job search and career from colleagues in the storytelling, career, and marketing sectors. This workbook offers a way to expand on the ideas and concepts of *Tell Me About Yourself*.

The workbook also provides a way for users to implement the ideas and concepts in a practical, hands-on way. Since *Tell Me About Yourself* was published, readers have asked such questions as:

- How do you tell a good story in the job search?
- How do you find your stories?
- How can my stories have the most impact?

Thus, this workbook is intended as the nitty-gritty how-to that goes beyond the concepts and examples in *Tell Me About Yourself*.

Do you need to have read *Tell Me About Yourself* to benefit from the workbook? I would recommend it so you understand the principles and benefits of storytelling in the job search. But you don't necessarily have to buy a copy. A free earlier edition is online at <http://tinyurl.com/5ff8t2>. Anytime I refer users to *Tell Me About Yourself* in this workbook, I give the page numbers from the print edition and the Web address of the online edition.

The workbook follows some of the content of *Tell Me About Yourself* closely, especially in story development, resumes, cover letters, and interviewing. I felt the content of *Tell Me About Yourself* was largely sufficient in explaining story concepts in areas such as networking, personal branding, portfolios, and workplace storytelling; thus, the workbook touches on them only briefly or not at all.

The workbook also adds a new content area that was not in *Tell Me About Yourself* at all. The entire first chapter is devoted to using story to help users determine a career path.

Should you do every exercise in the workbook? Probably not. First, if you already know your career path or know what job/career you seek next, you may not find Chapter 1 especially useful (though it is useful for getting to know yourself better). In later chapters, some exercises have overlapping ideas, and some may feel repetitive. Chapter 2, for example, contains a section on story structures. Although all are framed differently, the structures may start to seem very

similar. And they are. But I offer this variety of structures because one structure may resonate with you more than another one does. You may find it easier to construct your stories using a certain framework than you would using a different structure.

If I had to pick a few exercises that everyone should consider, they would be:

- Exercise 2.A.1: Identify raw accomplishment stories
- Exercise 2.A.2: Identify stories about your top four strengths
- Exercise 2.D.1 Story Inventory
- Exercise 5.A.8: A story for every interview question?

The workbook is meant to be a living document that you can write in. Writing space is provided for every exercise. One advantage of an ebook is that if you feel you don't have enough space to write a given exercise, you can print out extra copies of the exercise. Other options include:

- Printing exercises one-sided and writing on the back.
- Using the pages of extra writing space in the back of the workbook.
- Using your own paper if you need more space to write.
- Typing your responses to the exercises on a computer.

My goal for you in providing this workbook is that doing (some of) the exercises will result in an arsenal of memorable stories that you can use in networking situations, your resume, cover letter, and interviews. I wish you great success and enjoyment in developing your stories.



Katharine (Kathy) Hansen, PhD

Chapter 1: Storied Approaches to Finding Your Career Path

If you're confused about what to do with your career – or what to do *next* with your career – and you haven't gained insight from taking assessments, there is another way. You can learn more about yourself, gain insight into the best career for you, and plot out how to get there through creating stories.

A small but growing collection of research, for example, has looked at using story and narrative in career counseling. "Psychotherapy is based on the premise that we each create our own life story from the time we are born," wrote Jack Maguire in *The Power of Personal Storytelling*. Career counselors are increasingly using narrative approaches to encourage clients to build their career stories.

Authors Christensen and Johnston suggested in the *Journal of Career Development* that developing narratives can significantly help individuals to know what to emphasize in their career planning. They proposed that counselors perceive clients as both authors and central characters in their career stories, which they are "concurrently constructing and enacting." Constructing their career story, the authors said, enables clients to discover connections and meaning in their careers that they might not have otherwise. When individuals imagine their desired future stories, they facilitate their belief that their storied, envisioned future will play out in reality. The authors' research indicated that, indeed, clients who could tell these future stories tended to be "more effective in bringing those plans to fruition," while Maguire characterized the narrative-therapy process as revising or replacing negative stories with positive ones.

Instead of answering the question traditionally explored in career counseling, "Who am I?" by listing traits such as interests, skills, aptitudes, and values, narrative approaches articulate the job-seeker's preferred future. Larry Cochran, who has devoted an entire book to the use of narrative in career counseling, notes that the narrative approach emphasizes "emplotment," which refers to how a person can cast himself or herself as the main character in a career narrative that is meaningful, productive, and fulfilling. Plotting out a career story can also help a person conceptualize the steps needed to attain his or her desired career, remind the narrator of career goals, and enable him or her to stay on track in achieving the envisioned career.

This chapter contains a number of approaches to exploring your career desires and passions through story. Considerable overlap exists among these story exercises, so don't feel you need to use all of them. But pick a couple that resonate with you and use them to examine meanings, themes, and patterns in your career to date, as well as to plot out how to attain your career dreams. The last exercise in the chapter offers prompts for identifying themes and patterns.

If career assessments that yield lists of possible careers have left you cold, consider a story-based approach to career exploration. You just might be amazed at how much you can learn about yourself and how you can design your future through developing your story. As Kerr Inkson writes in *Understanding Careers*, "By interpreting the past, we use narrative to make sense of the present and thereby see a way to the future."

Remember also that crafting the story of your career is an ongoing exercise in that you will need to reconfigure the story to account for new occurrences in your career and life.

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Exercise 1.25: Explore themes and patterns. Now it's time to review the exercises in which you chose to participate from this chapter and look for themes and patterns.

What skills and strengths appeared consistently in your stories? To what extent have you been able to use your skills and strengths in your current work?

What interests and passions appeared consistently in your stories? To what extent and in what ways might you apply these interests and passions to a direction – or new direction – for your career?

What did you learn about yourself from these exercises that surprised you?

What common themes did you see in your stories about overcoming obstacles, facing turning points, making decisions, and dealing with negative events in your career?

What did you learn about what you value in a job or career?

What was your overall frame of mind as you wrote these stories – hopeful? Frustrated? Sad? Confused? Excited? What is your mood telling you about the next step in your career?

As you look in your stories at reasons you chose your current career, what consistent themes appear? In retrospect, do you feel you chose your career for the right reasons?

What weaknesses did your stories uncover that might provide cautions about career paths you should avoid?

Exercise 1.25 ~ continued

What did your stories reveal about what motivates you?

What did your stories tell you about how you want to be remembered?

To what extent do your stories suggest that you should consider changing careers?

Review what you've learned from identifying themes and patterns. What career paths do these themes and patterns suggest?

Resources for Chapter 1

Understanding Careers: The Metaphors of Working Lives, Kerr Inkson, Sage Publications, 2006.

Job Joy: Finding Your Right Work through the Power of Your Personal Story. George Dutch.
http://www.jobjoy.com/E-book/jobjoy/sales_page.html

What Should I Do with My Life? The True Story of People Who Answered the Ultimate Question, Po Bronson, Random House Trade Paperbacks; 2003

Nobodies to Somebodies, Peter Han, Portfolio, 2005.

Quintessential Careers. Job and Career Resources for Career Changers. <http://tinyurl.com/3gun928>.

Quintessential Careers. Career Exploration Tools and Resources. <http://tinyurl.com/3er7vre>.

Real People Real Jobs: 40 People Tell Their Stories, David Montross, Zandy Leibowitz, and Christopher Shinkman, Brealey, Nicholas Publishing, 1995

Gig: Americans Talk about Their Jobs, edited by John Bowe, Marisa Bowe, and Sabin Streeeter, Three Rivers Press, 2001.

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Chapter 2: Identifying and Crafting Stories for Your Job Search

Before you can start using stories in various aspects of your job-search communications – networking, resumes, cover letters, interview responses, and more – you need to find your stories and experiment with the best ways to tell them.

This chapter begins by asking you to tell the stories of your accomplishments, strengths, and your Unique Selling Proposition, offering a large number of prompts to help you remember them.

Next, you have the opportunity to try out various structures for telling your stories. Choose one or more that feels comfortable for you. You may also find that one structure will lend itself to a given story, while a different framework is better for another story.

The following section requires you to have a targeted list of employers and to conduct some research into their needs. That way, you can experiment with story structures that target specific employer needs.

The chapter culminates with a product that is at the heart of this workbook – a Story Inventory that you can use as the springboard for all the stories you use in your job-search communications. With this Story Inventory, you have the raw material for networking, your resume, cover letter, and interview responses.

A checklist enables you to perform quality control on your stories, and the chapter ends with two exercises to give you practice in varying the lengths of your stories.

Part A: Identify and analyze accomplishment stories from past experiences

Exercise 2.A.1: Identify raw accomplishment stories. The starting point for job-search stories is your accomplishments in your current or past jobs. In later exercises, you'll have the opportunity to experiment with various structures for these stories, tailor them for specific uses (e.g., resume, cover letter, interviews), and finesse them for specific employers and jobs. But first, try to identify at least one story for as many of the following prompts as you can. A few guidelines:

- Focus on fairly recent accomplishments, say from your last two jobs, and ideally from the last couple of years.
- Try to tell stories of accomplishments that are specific and measurable.
- Quantify whenever possible. (Examples: Increased sales by 50 percent over the previous year)
- Considering using superlatives and "firsts." Use words such as "first," "only," "best," "most," and "highest."
- Stories should be a paragraph or two in length.
- If you need additional space, print out extra copies of the pages for this exercise, or use the pages in the back of this workbook.

Tell a story of something special you did to set yourself apart? How did you do the job better than anyone else did or than anyone else could have done?

Tell a story of what you did to make a job your own. How did you take the initiative? How did you go above and beyond what was asked of you in your job description? How have you added value? What did you do that was new to your job function to improve what was there before? Can you attach dollar amounts to your most successful projects? (In a blog post at <http://www.azzarellogroup.com/blog/2011/05/31/you-can-add-more-value>, Patty Azzarello writes about performing beyond one's job description. Convert the questions in her post to past tense to explore how you've added value in your job).

Tell a story of special things you did to impress your boss so that you might be promoted.

If you were rapidly and/or frequently promoted, tell a story about that accomplishment.

Exercise 2.A.1 ~ continued

Tell a story of how an organization has benefited from your performance. How did you/will you leave this employer better off than before you worked there? What critical strategy components did you identify to propel the organization to a better place?

Tell a story of an award you've won, recognition you've attained, or media coverage you've received.

Tell a story of the job accomplishment you are most proud of.

Tell a story of earning high praise in an annual performance review or a compliment from an employer, subordinate, or customer.

Tell a story of your role in bringing in new customers or satisfying the existing customer base.

Tell a story of something tangible you've created that provides evidence of accomplishment – publication you've produced, product you've developed, new technology you've introduced, business strategy you've deployed, program or policy you've initiated.

Tell a story of contributing to an employer's profitability, such as through sales-increase percentages. How have you helped your employer to make money? How did you contribute to the firm's Return on Investment (ROI)?

Exercise 2.A.1 ~ continued

Tell a story of contributing to operational efficiency, such as through cost-reduction percentages? How did you help this employer or a part of the organization to save money, save time, or make work easier? In what ways have you streamlined or automated processes?

Tell a story of contributing to productivity, such as through successfully motivating your team.

Tell a story of what you did to foster positive relationships inside and outside the organization.

Tell a story of your role in promoting business growth. Did you initiate mergers, acquisitions, partnerships, or operating agreements?

Tell a story of your role in executing the organization's mission, goals, and objectives. What is your track record in meeting deadlines and budgets?

What story would your boss tell of your most significant contribution?

Tell a story of a problem or challenge that you or the organization faced. What did you do to overcome the problems? What were the results of your efforts? Did you turn plummeting sales around? Did you fix weak financials? Did you raise brand awareness? Did you launch a new product? Did you penetrate the market?

Exercise 2.A.1 ~ continued

Tell a story that illustrates your bottom-line impact on a current or past organization.

Describe the result of something you did on the job as though it were a headline. Then back into the story to describe why your action was needed and how you executed it.

Tell a story that describes what would *not* have happened had you not done your job well.

Tell a story that compares your performance with optimal performance or success in a given job or function. What would the story of performing this job or function successfully and at its highest level look like?

Tell a results-based story of how you've demonstrated a skill in which you excel – far above the performance level of most people.

Tell a story that shows your open-mindedness and receptivity to new ideas.

Tell a story that illustrates your creativity and innovation.

Tell a story that shows how you excel in team projects. Be sure to make clear your role on the team and give yourself adequate credit.

Exercise 2.A.1 ~ continued

Tell a story that describes your approachability, your ability to listen to team members or subordinates, and your strengths in inspiring loyalty.

Tell a story that illustrates your motivation to do a good job and continually wanting to improve in your position.

Tell a story that demonstrates how you were the catalyst for beneficial change.

Tell a story that shows your integrity, trustworthiness, values, or ethics.

Tell a story that exemplifies your ability to learn from your mistakes.

Tell a story of how you've empowered or motivated others.

Tell a story of excelling in a customer-service situation.

Exercise 2.A.1 ~ continued

Tell a "rags to riches" story of starting out at a low level and then significantly advancing in your career.

Tell a story that illustrates your commitment to continuous learning and professional development.

Tell a story – or more than one that includes a "first" or superlative. Were you the first or only person to do something? Were you the best? Can you tell a story that includes "most" or "highest?"

Tell another accomplishment story that doesn't fit into the previous categories.

Tell another accomplishment story that doesn't fit into the previous categories.

Tell another accomplishment story that doesn't fit into the previous categories.

Tell another accomplishment story that doesn't fit into the previous categories.

Tell another accomplishment story that doesn't fit into the previous categories.

Tell another accomplishment story that doesn't fit into the previous categories.

Exercise 2.A.2: Identify stories about your top four strengths. The Dependable Strengths Articulation Process is a proprietary tool that enables participants to identify their “unique excellence.” Storytelling about Good Experiences comprises a significant part of the process. Ideally, participants should partake of an 18-hour Dependable Strengths workshop; however, users can attain the benefits in two other ways.

- Read about the process in this article, http://www.quintcareers.com/Dependable_Strengths_excellence.html, and informally identify your top four strengths
- Take Dependable Strengths for the Internet for \$24.49 (http://www.quintcareers.com/Dependable_Strengths.html)

Now, write a story that exemplifies each of your top four strengths.

Strength 1

Strength 2

Strength 3

Strength 4

Part B: Experiment with applying various structures to your stories.

Exercise 2.B.1: The Hero’s Journey. The Hero’s Journey is a classic story structure featured in literature and popular culture from the Odysseus of ancient times to the modern Luke Skywalker. The structure, broken down extremely simplistically, is:

- *Departure:* The hero realizes his or her life (or situation) is about to change.
- *Initiation:* The hero faces obstacles in confronting the change experience.
- *Return:* The hero undergoes transformation and learning.

(The Internet is packed with information about the Hero’s Journey; you can google it for more elaboration on the structure.) Choose a story from **Exercise 2.A.1: Identify raw accomplishment stories** and experiment with telling it using the structure of the Hero’s Journey.

Departure:

Initiation:

Return:

--

Exercise 2.B.2: SAR/PAR/CAR. The most common structure for stories in the job search is Situation -> Action -> Result (SAR), also known as Problem -> Action -> Result (PAR) or Challenge -> Action -> Result (CAR). You can find more about this structure, as well as a number of variations, and examples of using the structures in job-search stories starting on page 19 of the print edition of *Tell Me About Yourself* and at <http://tinyurl.com/3uw34wr> of the online edition. Choose a story from **Exercise 2.A.1: Identify raw accomplishment stories** and experiment with telling it using one of these structures.

Situation (or Problem or Challenge)

Action

Result

--

Exercise 2.B.3: Beginning, Middle, End is the most basic of story structures, but Sharon Graham has a special job-search take on the structure at <http://sharongraham.ca/2011/07/career-stories-that-capture-attention/>:

- *Beginning*: The challenge or event that started the story. Your role/how you got involved in the story. Surrounding details, such as tight deadlines, budgets. Outside perceptions of the extent of the challenge.
- *Middle*: Your role and key actions. Turning point.
- *End*: Results and impact. Effect on stakeholders. Metrics.

Choose a story from **Exercise 2.A.1: Identify raw accomplishment stories** and experiment with telling it using a beginning, middle, end structure.

Beginning

Middle

End

Exercise 2.B.4: Richard Bolles' Seven Stories structure. In his classic and perennial bestseller, *What Color is Your Parachute*, Richard Bolles recommends writing about seven experiences. Here's a paraphrased version of his recommended structure:

- Goal you wanted to accomplish
- Obstacle(s)
- Action steps
- Outcome/Result
- Metrics of Outcome

Choose a story from **Exercise 2.A.1: Identify raw accomplishment stories** and experiment with telling it using this structure.

Goal you wanted to accomplish

Obstacle(s)

Action steps

Outcome/Result

Metrics of Outcome

Exercise 2.B.5: What's at stake? Emphasizing what was at stake if you had not accomplished what you did gives structural weight to your stories. As you are describing a problem you solved for a current or past employer, tell what was at stake – what would have happened if you hadn't solved the problem. Would the company have lost money? Would a customer be disappointed? Would a sale have been lost? Choose a story from **Exercise 2.A.1: Identify raw accomplishment stories** and experiment with emphasizing what was at stake. *Source: Gerry Lantz.*

Exercise 2.B.6: Five P's. Adapted from a structure for proposal-writing from Mary Morel, this structure is as follows:

- *Position:* In what position or role did you find yourself in a past or current job?
- *Problem:* What issue or problem did you encounter?
- *Possibilities:* What options did you have for solving the problems? What avenues did you consider?
- *Proposal:* Which option did you choose to solve the problem?
- *Product:* What was the outcome or result?

Choose a story from **Exercise 2.A.1: Identify raw accomplishment stories** and experiment with telling it using this structure.

Position

--

Problem

--

Possibilities

--

Proposal

--

Product

Exercise 2.B.7: Ford Myers' Accomplishment Stories. Go to <http://www.careerpotential.com/bookbonus/>, enter your name and email address, and later receive a link to a Job Search Survival Toolkit from career coach and author Ford Myers. Click on "Accomplishment Stories" to click on a downloadable Word document, a worksheet emphasizing skills. Use Ford's suggested structure to develop up to six stories – or adapt up to six stories from **Exercise 2.A.1: Identify raw accomplishments**, using Ford's suggested structure.

Tell Me MORE About Yourself:

An interactive companion to

Tell Me About Yourself: Storytelling to Get Jobs and Propel Your Career

By Katharine Hansen, PhD

Blog: *A Storied Career* • <http://astoriedcareer.com> • Email: kathy@astoriedcareer.com

Part C: Identify target employers and adapt stories to them

Exercise 2.C.1: Sustainable Storytelling Worksheet. This exercise is adapted from Park Howell’s downloadable Sustainable Storytelling Worksheet at <http://parkhowell.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/SustainableStorytellingWrksht.pdf>. Substituting the elements below for those on the left side of the downloadable worksheet, you should be able to develop a story on the right side of the sheet following the structure of Hero, Back Story, Inciting Incident, End Game, Antagonists, Act II/“The Love Story,” and Finale. (See also Howell’s instructions here: <http://tinyurl.com/y9svvpx>.) After researching prospective employers and making a list of 15-25 that you want to target, craft a story. You may want to adapt a story from **Exercise 2.A.1: Identify raw accomplishment stories**. Substitutions for left side of worksheet:

- For the question, “What is your current market position?,” ask, “What is my position in the job market?”
- For the question, “What are your communication goals?,” substitute, “What are my career goals?” or “What are my goals for this specific job search?”
- For the directive, “Identify your target market(s),” instead, “identify your target employers.”
- All other questions/directives on the worksheet translate nicely – without tweaking – to a job search.

Hero

Back Story

Inciting Incident

End Game

Antagonists

Act II/“The Love Story”

Finale

Exercise 2.C.2: Enhancing “the Employer Experience.” Cindy Chastain writes about using stories to describe “user experiences.” This exercise adapts that idea to explore the way an employer can expect to experience you as a prospective employee. With a specific employer or set of employers in mind, follow the prompts below to create a framework for “the employer experience.”

What is your brand or Unique Selling Proposition? (see Exercise 2.A.3 on page 39).

What will you and your Unique Selling Proposition do for an employer?

Where do you fit into the employer’s organization?

In what ways might you create an emotional response that will inspire the employer to hire you?

Now, try developing a story that will show how the employer can expect to experience you as an employee. Identify an issue that a prospective employer might have that you’ve successfully handled in the past. Helpful phrases for kicking off this story might be: “Here’s what it would be like to have [your name] on your team ...” and “What I’ve done for past employers, I can do for you, and here’s proof...” You may want to draw from Exercise 2.A.1: Identify raw accomplishment stories.

Tell Me MORE About Yourself:

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Exercise 2.C.3: Story Frameworks for Employer Needs. Elizabeth Sosnow of BlissPR offers a worksheet that helps business-to-business marketers find their stories. I've adapted the worksheet for job-seekers. To see the two side by side, visit <http://www.scribd.com/doc/20919631/Find-Your-Story-Job-Seekers>. With a specific employer in mind, follow the steps below.

Apply your marketing themes to a content framework

• **Invent potential marketing themes that would leverage both your contribution goals for this employer (what you can do for the employer) and success factors from previous jobs.** *Example: I construct dynamic, top-producing sales organizations through proven leadership and management style, strategic partnering, design of tactical sales initiatives, and implementation of key account-management methodologies.*

1. _____.
2. _____.
3. _____.

Take a second look at your list of potential marketing themes. Which one holds the most initial promise, when considered in the context of the external marketplace? Write that theme down here: *Example: [Let's assume the theme you choose is the one above that begins "I construct ...".]*

Now, restate that theme. Turn it into a predictive, prescriptive or provocative statement. (This may feel uncomfortable. Do it anyway.) *Example: I will transform your sales organization to enable you to capture market share.*

Test your theme/Point of View against a story framework. Choose 3 of the following examples:

- Could it become an **instructive story or a lesson learned**? If yes, describe: *Example: Tell a story of a sales lesson you learned that led to later success.*
- Could it become a **"what-if" scenario**? Describe: *Example: What if I could solve your sales-management problems? (Tell story of how you've done that for a past employer).*
- Could it become an **underdog story**? Or, are you a "Goliath" that's helping the little guy? Describe: *Example: Tell a story of how you led a small company to grab market share in a field of much larger competitors.*
- Could it be a **romance**? Describe: *Example: Tell the story of how you are the perfect match for the employer.*

Exercise 2.C.3 ~ continued

- Could it be the story of a **villain**? If there is a bad guy or bad situation, leverage it. Describe: *Example: Tell how your sales leadership has enabled the sales team to hold its own even in the face of a downturned economy.*
- Could it become a **"what-if" scenario**? Describe: *Example: What if I could solve your sales-management problems? (Tell story of how you've done that for a past employer).*
- Could it be the story of a **hero**? Or even better, the **unexpected hero**? Describe: *Example: In a job-search situation, you are the hero who increased sales and turned the company around. Or perhaps you managed a problematic member of the sales team to become an unexpected hero.*

Content Gaps that must be filled to fully support the marketing theme: *Example: In a job-search situation, content gaps are generally gaps in your skills or experience, or ways you don't quite meet all a job's requirements. You can often fill these gaps though describing transferable skills and applicable experiences.*

1. _____.
2. _____.
3. _____.
4. _____.
5. _____.

Exercise 2.C.4: Urgency, Impact, Reputation. In her free marketing ebook, *Why Marketing Stories Have Catch* (http://marketinginteractions.typepad.com/Story_eBook_MarketingInteractions_0508.pdf), Ardath Albee's perspective suggests that employers can change the story they tell themselves by relating to the context of you, the job-seeker, meeting their needs and solving their problems. In this adaptation, employers are inclined to "participate" (by hiring the candidate) when they see themselves in the job-seeker's story. Stories that convey urgency, impact, and reputation will help employers do that. With a specific employer in mind, follow the prompts below. You may want to adapt stories from **Exercise 2.A.1: Identify raw accomplishment stories**.

What is the employer's priority? Tell a story that shows your ability to meet the employer's urgent needs.

What will happen for the employer that chooses to interact with you? What story could you tell that shows your expertise and how that expertise will have a significant impact on to the employer's success?

What is your brand, your reputation, your promise to this employer? What story can you tell to enhance your credibility with the employer?

By incorporating stories into your job-search strategy, you enable employers to envision a successful experience. You want them to live and breathe the successes of your current and past employers and picture just how much competitive advantage they can gain by adding your expertise to the company roster. You need them to see themselves succeeding.

– *paraphrase of Ardath Albee*

Exercise 2.C.5: Onlyness is yet another twist on the Quintessential You story (*Exercise 1.23*, page 26) and your Unique Selling Proposition (*Exercise 2.A.3*, page 39). Suggested by Rebecca Ruby, the “Onlyness” concept adds information about your target employers and people who know you to this story. Follow the prompts below:



Who are the employers likely to hire you?

What is your field or industry?

Where are your prospective employers located?

When do they need you?

Why are you important?

How are you different from other candidates?

Get an outside-insider’s opinion. Contact a former employer and ask why he or she hired you and not another candidate. Or find out what a variety of people think about you by using an assessment like the 360° Reach Personal Brand Assessment (<http://www.reachcc.com/360reach>).

Part D: Compile and refine a story inventory

Exercise 2.D.1: Select and title your best stories. Review all the stories you created in this chapter. Especially review **Exercise 2.A.1: Identify raw accomplishment stories**. Below, list all the stories that you are most comfortable with and confident about. Also keep in mind relevance to the kind of job and employer you’re targeting. Imagine you are in a job interview; which of the stories you’ve developed will you be most at ease telling? Rather than writing out each story again here, give each one a title, summarize it in no more than 10 words, and list the page number in this workbook on which the story originally appears. You’ll find that titling your stories will help you remember them more easily. How many stories do you need? Space is provided here for 50, but don’t be concerned if you don’t have nearly that many. Later, you’ll narrow the list down for various job-search communications. You also may want slightly different lists of stories for different employers and types of jobs.

Story Inventory

Title	10-word description	Page #
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		
13.		
14.		
15.		
16.		
17.		
18.		
19.		
20.		
21.		
22.		

Exercise 2.D.1 ~ continued

Title	10-word description	Page #
23.		
24.		
25.		
26.		
27.		
28.		
29.		
30.		
31.		
32.		
33.		
34.		
35.		
36.		
37.		
38.		
39.		
40.		
41.		
42.		
43.		
44.		
45.		
46.		
47.		
48.		
49.		
50.		

Exercise 2.D.2: Checklist for refining your stories. Apply this checklist to the stories in the Story Inventory you created in Exercise 2.D.1. Based on the criteria listed here, you may decide to eliminate or tweak some of your stories.

- Is the story recent?** Ideally stories should focus on the last two years and/or your two most recent jobs. Not every story needs to be recent; sometimes stories about early interest in your field can be effective. But the majority of stories should be fairly recent.
- Is the theme of the story clear?** Can the audience easily identify the accomplishment, skill, trait, passion, value, etc., that the story intends to convey?
- Is the story compelling?** Will it draw in the audience? Is it interesting? Will the audience want to learn how it turns out? Suspense isn't required, but it doesn't hurt.
- Compare to other job-search-related stories.** *Tell Me About Yourself* offers lots of sample stories throughout the book. These samples can give you a feel for the effectiveness of your stories.
- Does the story have an overall positive tone and end on a positive note?** It's vital and expected to have many stories that start with a problem or negative situation. Still, the overall tone of the story should remain positive. You should not cast blame or negativity on past employers or team members. Most importantly, your story should end on a positive note. A few stories in your inventory may simply not have a positive outcome, but end on an optimistic note by talking about lessons learned and how you will improve in the future.
- Have you given yourself enough credit?** Especially when talking about team projects, be sure you make your role clear and give yourself sufficient credit. Praise the team, but emphasize *your own* contribution to the team's success over the team's success itself.
- Have you asked yourself, "So what?"** Put yourself in the mindset of an employer asking "so what?" about each of your stories. Does the story address something that's important to an employer? If your story can't answer the "so what" question for a specific employer or type of employer, you may want to consider a different one.
- Have you included a variety of stories?** Your inventory should feature stories that cover a variety of accomplishments, skills, values, traits, interests, strengths. While most should come from recent jobs, it's fine to include a few from school, hobbies, sports, organizations, and your personal life.
- Have you added metrics where appropriate?** Numbers and percentages (such as number of people supervised, percentage by which you've increased sales, amount of money you've cut in wasteful spending) add power and credibility to your stories.

Exercise 2.D.3: Practice editing your stories for length. In the following chapters, you'll be adapting stories from your Story Inventory for various situations and types of communication. This exercise gives you practice in editing your stories down to shorter lengths. Choose five of the longer stories from your Story Inventory. (Of course, you can go through the same exercise with as many stories from your inventory as you would like.) Follow the prompts below to practice editing each story down:

1. Story title:

Write the story in 200 words:

Now, write the story in 100 words:

Now, write the story in two lines, approximately 35 words (think of the kind of abbreviated language used on resumes).

2. Story title:

Write the story in 200 words:

Now, write the story in 100 words:

Now, write the story in two lines, approximately 35 words (think of the kind of abbreviated language used on resumes).

Exercise 2.D.3 ~ continued

3. Story title:

Write the story in 200 words:

Now, write the story in 100 words:

Now, write the story in two lines, approximately 35 words (think of the kind of abbreviated language used on resumes).

--

4. Story title:

Write the story in 200 words:

Now, write the story in 100 words:

Now, write the story in two lines, approximately 35 words (think of the kind of abbreviated language used on resumes).

Exercise 2.D.3 ~ continued

5. Story title:

Write the story in 200 words:

Now, write the story in 100 words:

Now, write the story in two lines, approximately 35 words (think of the kind of abbreviated language used on resumes).

Exercise 2.D.4: Alternate practice: Orally editing your stories for length. This exercise is a variation on the previous editing exercise, but it focuses on the time it takes you to deliver your stories orally rather than strictly on word count. You will still need to cut out words, but rely on how the story sounds rather than how it reads to make your cuts.

Ideally record the story. You can use a smartphone, iPad, or computer application that times you as you're recording. Examples include SoundNote, SmartRecord, and Audioboo.fm (<http://Audioboo.fm/>).

If a story is longer than 2 minutes, start by editing it down to 2 minutes.

Next, edit it down to 1 minute.

Finally, edit it to 30 seconds.

Another option is to ask a partner to listen and ask what he or she thinks can be cut out of the story.

Resources

Albee, Ardash. Why Marketing Stories Have Catch. http://marketinginteractions.typepad.com/Story_eBook_MarketingInteractions_0508.pdf

Atkinson, Cliff: Free story-building templates and resources, as described in the book, *Beyond Bullet Points* (Although the book is about PowerPoint presentations, the templates and resources can be useful for any kind of story-building): http://www.sociablemedia.com/thebook_resources.php4

Azzarello, Patty. "You can add more value." <http://tinyurl.com/66d2c25>

Bolles, Richard Nelson. *What Color Is Your Parachute? A Practical Manual for Job-hunters and Career Changers*. Ten Speed Press, 2012 and annually.

Buvala, Sean. *Measures of Story: How to Create a Story from Floats and Anecdotes*. <http://howtocreastory.com/>.

Denning, S. *The Springboard*. Butterworth-Heinemann, 2001.

Denning, S. *Squirrel Inc.: A Fable of Leadership through Storytelling*. Jossey-Bass. 2004.

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Gargiulo, T. L. *Stories at Work*. Praeger, 2006.

Graham, Sharon. "Career Stories that Capture Attention." <http://tinyurl.com/3fmt5op>

Howell, Park. Sustainable Storytelling Worksheet. <http://parkhowell.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/SustainableStorytellingWrksht.pdf>

Maguire, J. *The Power of Personal Storytelling*. Tarcher/Putnam, 1998.

Margolis, Michael. 20 questions that can support you in story positioning. <http://tinyurl.com/yac38u5>

Morel, Mary. "Storytelling in Marketing." <http://tinyurl.com/ylcvaef>

Myers, Ford. Worksheet for accomplishment stories: <http://www.careerpotential.com/bookbonus/>

Neuhauser, P. C. *Corporate Legends & Lore: The Power of Storytelling as a Management Tool*. PCN Associates, 1993.

Ruby, Rebecca. "Determine Your Organization's "Onliness" (Only-ness)." <http://tinyurl.com/bklxtb>

Simmons, Annette. *The Story Factor: Inspiration, Influence, and Persuasion through Storytelling*. Basic Books, 2006.

Simmons, Annette. *Whoever Tells the Best Story Wins*. AMACOM, 2007.

Whitcomb, Susan Britton, *Resume Magic*. JIST Works, 2003.

Your Unique Selling Proposition (USP). Quint Careers. <http://www.quintcareers.com/USP.html>

Chapter 3: Storied Approaches to Networking

Elevator stories, a variation on the elevator speech, are the networking communications discussed in *Tell Me About Yourself*.

The first two of three exercises in this short chapter are variations on elevator stories. They relate to storied ways of explaining “what you do” to a network contact.

The third exercise encourages you to brainstorm storied ways to energize members of your network about helping you in your job search.

Exercise 3.3: A Network-Energizing Story. Stories can be used not just to make an impression on new members of your network, but to invigorate your existing network and renew their excitement about helping you. The idea for a network-energizing form of story came from Tom McAlister's "Brandman to the Rescue," with himself as the superhero, Brandman. Unfortunately, the Brandman comic is no longer available online. But my own son, John Hansen, developed something similar, a storied comic-zine resume at <http://johnrhansen.com/>. Others storied forms, such as video, are possible for this purpose. Below, brainstorm how you might develop a storied form of communication to distribute among members of your network to get them excited about helping you.

Resources

Bolles, Richard N. (2011 and annually). *What Color is Your Parachute?* Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.

Hansen, Katharine. (2008). *A Foot in the Door: Networking Your Way into the Hidden Job Market*, 2nd edition, Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.

Quintessential Careers: The Art of Career and Job-Search Networking:
<http://www.quintcareers.com/networking.html>

Quintessential Careers:
Informational Interviewing Tutorial:
http://www.quintcareers.com/informational_interviewing.html

Chapter 4: Choosing and Refining Stories for Your Resume and Cover Letter

As I discuss in *Tell Me About Yourself*, compared to other job-search communications, resumes present arguably the most difficult challenge in terms of telling stories because of their clipped, bullet-point style.

This chapter confronts that challenge by, first, helping you to identify the most appropriate stories for your resume. Then, the chapter guides you into changing stories to the “backwards” structure I recommend for resumes, as well as editing stories down to short bullet points.

Because resumes need to be – as much as possible – specifically tailored to each employer targeted, the chapter encourages you to choose the best set of stories for each employer you’re targeting. You also have the opportunity to add some extras – metrics and a positive spin on negative stories.

You’ll have the chance to create a draft of the storied Experience section of your resume, as well as to sketch out two innovative takes on storied resumes.

Since cover letters are already more of a narrative form than resumes, stories are far more natural in cover letters than in resumes. The cover-letter portion of the chapter guides you in expanding resume stories into cover-letter form, applying a special structure to a storied cover letter, and brainstorming as many as 16 types of cover-letter story.

Part A: Resume Stories

Exercise 4.A.1: Spotlighting skills. You already have a significant start on resume stories through your Story Inventory, but let's get some specific practice in developing stories about skills. Find job postings for 10 or so jobs you'd like to have. Go through the postings and highlight all the skills listed. Make a list of the top five skills – the skills that appear most often across all the job postings. Now, develop a story to illustrate how you've demonstrated each skill. **Tell your stories in Situation (or Problem or Challenge) → Action → Result format.** (Find samples in *Tell Me About Yourself* beginning on page 19 of the print version and at <http://tinyurl.com/3sk3ueh> of the online version. Also see ideas for framing skills stories starting on page 22 of the print edition and at <http://tinyurl.com/4el9tdz> in the online edition.) Consult your Story Inventory, as you may already have five skills-based stories.

Skill	Story
1.	1. Title: _____ _____ _____ _____
2.	2. Title: _____ _____ _____ _____
3.	3. Title: _____ _____ _____

Exercise 4.A.1 ~ continued

Skill	Story
4. _____ _____ _____	4. Title: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
5. _____ _____ _____	5. Title: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

One way to present stories like this on a resume is to label the skill being demonstrated, along with the specific parts of the story, as in this example:

Streamlining Processes

Challenge: Recognized that holidays would double size of shipments to store and require new process.

Action: Completely overhauled stockroom organization and delegated runner who could carry boxes of product to their designated row.

Result: Cut receiving time from two or three days to less than six hours from the time the truck hit the dock.

The next exercise walks you through another way to present this type of story.

Exercise 4.A.2: Tell Your Stories Backwards. Because hiring decision-makers read stories so quickly (between 2.5 and 20 seconds), I recommend that resume stories be told backwards, giving away the ending first. A resume's readers will be most interested in the result or outcome, so let that be the part of the story that catches his or her eye as he or she is quickly scanning your resume. For this exercise, take the five stories you created in *Exercise 4.A.1*, and tell them backwards; instead of **Situation (or Problem or Challenge) -> Action -> Result format, tell them in Result -> Action -> Situation (or Problem or Challenge) format.** See examples of backwards stories in the Tell Me About Yourself blog: <http://tinyurl.com/3gts5uc>,

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Exercise 4.A.3: Edit your Backwards Stories. Stories on a resume need to be brief bullet points. For this exercise, take the five **Result -> Action -> Situation (or Problem or Challenge)** stories you created in Exercise 4.A.2, and, as you did with stories in Exercise 2.D.3, edit them down to no more than two lines, or about 35 words (see example bullet points in the print edition of *Tell Me About Yourself*, page 62 and beginning on page 66, and in the online version beginning here: <http://tinyurl.com/3mslgz7>). Note that when your stories are this short, you may not always be able to include the Situation (or Problem or Challenge); it's OK to omit that element if needed.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Exercise 4.A.4: Choose your top five non-skills stories. Refer back to your Story Inventory, *Exercise 2.D.1*, page 50. Start telling the stories from your Story Inventory with a partner. Choose stories that do not focus primarily on skills; they may mention skills, but the main theme is accomplishments, traits, strengths, expertise, or other non-skill characteristics. As you tell these stories, ask your partner to note when your eyes light up, when you seem most passionate and excited. List the five (by title or brief description) that your partner identified as those you were most passionate about. *Source: Karen Siwak.*

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

Exercise 4.A.5: Customizing stories by employer. Employers today expect resumes to be specifically tailored to match the employer. That doesn't mean rewriting your resume for every employer, but it does mean that not every story on your resume will be right for every employer or type of employer. To practice customizing a set of stories for each employer, choose five employers you'd like to target. Based on researching the employers, choose five stories that you could use on a resume for each employer. (List titles or a short description.) You can choose from the stories you developed in this chapter, or from your Story Inventory. Naturally, you'll find some overlap. Some stories may work for all employers.

Employer	5 Stories
1. <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
2. <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
3. <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Exercise 4.A.5 ~ continued

Employer	5 Stories
4. <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
5. <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Exercise 4.A.6: Add quantification, metrics to your stories. Because hiring decision-makers love numbers, this exercise gives you practice in adding metrics to your resume stories. Look for stories you can add numbers and percentages to – percentages of sales increases or cost savings, numbers of people supervised, for example. Try to add quantification to five of your stories. You can choose from the stories you developed in this chapter, or from your Story Inventory.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Exercise 4.A.7: Giving a positive spin to negative stories. In a blog post (<http://tinyurl.com/436az9p>), Barb Safani wrote that job-seekers don't need to gloss over negative situations in their resume stories, but that they "can show their ability to influence positive outcomes, even when the deck is stacked against them and business conditions are exceptionally challenging." Barb suggests (and gives examples for) stories of selling in a challenging market, providing leadership in environments plagued with infighting, salvaging a damaged client relationship, preparing for a failed company's closing, and managing poor performers. Choose five of your stories that have a negative taint, and be sure you have portrayed their outcomes in the most positive way possible. You can choose from the stories you developed in this chapter, or from your Story Inventory.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Exercise 4.A.8: Integrating your stories into your resume. Having gone through the foregoing exercises, it's time to preliminarily plug some stories into the Experience portion of your resume and see how well they read. Below is a template for an Experience section, with five bullet points for each of your past four jobs. Five bullet points is a good number to shoot for to keep your resume from becoming too text-heavy. If you need space for more than four past jobs, you can print out additional copies of this exercise. Of course, Experience comprises only one section of your resume; if you need help with other sections of your resume, see the resources at <http://quintcareers.com/resres.html>, especially those labeled "Worksheet." If you're happy with the content you fill in below, go ahead and incorporate it into your resume.

Current or most recent job

[Title/position]:

[name of employer]:

[city/state/province/country of employer]:

[dates of employment]:

Storied bullet points for this job:

•

•

•

•

•

Next most recent job

[Title/position]:

[name of employer]:

[city/state/province/country of employer]:

[dates of employment]:

Storied bullet points for this job:

•

•

•

•

Exercise 4.A.8 ~ continued

Next most recent job

[Title/position]:

[name of employer]:

[city/state/province/country of employer]:

[dates of employment]:

Storied bullet points for this job:

•

•

•

•

•

Next most recent job

[Title/position]:

[name of employer]:

[city/state/province/country of employer]:

[dates of employment]:

Storied bullet points for this job:

•

•

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Exercise 4.B.2: Conceptualize a slideshow resume. Laura Gainor is just one job-seeker who created a resume that tells her story in slideshow form (see <http://tinyurl.com/3ndkfxxy>). You can search more examples on SlideShare (<http://tinyurl.com/3ved5sd>; examples are mixed with slideshows about how to create a resume). How would you tell your story in a slideshow resume? Use the boxes below to sketch out your slides:

Part C: Telling Stories in Cover Letters

Exercise 4.C.1: Expanding on resume stories. In cover letters, where stories are much more natural than they are in resumes, you'll be doing the opposite of what you did in the resume portion of this chapter. Instead of reducing stories to clipped bullet points and telling the story backwards, you'll tell somewhat more expansive stories that have more narrative flow. In a cover letter, you'll also need to relate your stories to a qualification you're trying to emphasize. A good example of the transformation between resume-style stories and a cover-letter story appears on pages 20 and 21 in *Tell Me About Yourself*, and at <http://tinyurl.com/3zpsfnr> in the online version. In the cover-letter example, the job-seeker is emphasizing project-management skills. In this exercise, choose five of the bulleted resume stories you developed earlier in this chapter and expand them as cover-letter stories with narrative flow. Be sure you make clear the qualification the story is intended to emphasize. Also ensure to tell the story in a way that doesn't sound like a rehash of the way you told it in the resume version. For resume stories that originated with your Story Inventory, you may want to refer back to the version in the Story Inventory when developing the cover-letter version. You may also want to refer back to *Exercise 4.A.7* because cover letters provide a bit more latitude to give a positive spin to negative stories and explain challenging situations.

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Exercise 4.C.1 ~ continued

4.

5.

Exercise 4.C.2: Using a storied *Attention*→ *Desire* → *Reasons* formula in a cover letter. Storytelling guru Steve Denning suggests a formula that can be applied to cover letters and enable you to sustain storytelling throughout a letter: Get attention • Stimulate desire • Reinforce with reasons. Follow the prompts below to construct a series of stories for a cover letter. See an example letter here: <http://www.quintcareers.com/GetAttentionCoverLetter.pdf>.

***Get attention* by describing a problem the prospective employer has or a need the organization desires to fill. It must be a problem or need the employer has acknowledged – say, in a job posting or in a networking conversation.**

***Stimulate desire* by telling how you can solve the problem or meet the need for the employer.**

***Reinforce with reasons* by telling a story about how you solved a similar problem or met a similar need for a past employer. This technique works because employers know that past behavior is the best predictor of future performance.**

Exercise 4.C.3: Craft a variety of cover-letter stories. The print version of *Tell Me About Yourself* describes a number of types of stories you can tell in a cover letter and gives paragraph-long examples of these stories beginning on page 82 (beginning here, <http://tinyurl.com/3mqgnju>, in the online version). In this exercise, try to come up with a story for each of these descriptions. It's OK if you can't develop a story for all of them. Feel free to draw from your Story Inventory or stories you've developed elsewhere in this workbook.

Story of early interest in your career path and determination to reach your career goal.

Story that depicts your motivation, enthusiasm, and passion for the job you seek.

Story describing a specific project you've led or collaborated on, including results.

Story detailing a problem you've solved for an employer.

Exercise 4.C.3 ~ continued

Story – for new graduates – of how your education has prepared you for the targeted job.

Story that touches the heartstrings.

Story to back up a claim about yourself.

Story that tells how you are uniquely qualified for the targeted job.

Resources

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Hay, Allan. *Memory Mining: Digging for Gems from Your Past Good Work*. Book Publishers Network. 2007.

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Quintessential Careers: Resume and CV Resources for Job-Seekers: <http://www.quintcareers.com/resres.html>

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Vincent, Mary Jeanne. "Using Stories to Land the Job." <http://tinyurl.com/3f9t8ut>.

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Chapter 5: Getting Comfortable with Delivering Stories in Job Interviews

Of all job-search communication venues, interviews provide the most well-established and natural venue in which to tell stories. Long before career experts began to comprehensively explore storytelling in the job search, they were advising stories in response to interview questions, especially in behavioral interviews.

This chapter focuses both on perfecting stories for interviews and practicing delivering those stories orally. Some exercises ask you to enlist a partner to listen to and critique your stories.

The chapter encourages you to develop a “passion” story for early in the interview to help you feel more comfortable with the rest of the meeting. The chapter asks you to consider establishing a set of themes of each interview – the message you most want to convey about yourself to a given employer – and suggests that you develop stories around those themes.

Next, you are guided into adding detail and a conversational flavor to your stories and asked to think about stories that aren’t on your resume. The chapter also offers an excellent strengths-based technique for responding to “Tell me about yourself.”

The chapter’s *Exercise 5.A.6* is important because it includes a large list of typical interview questions. Those will help you determine if you’ve developed enough of the right kinds of stories for interviews.

Even better than telling your own stories in interviews is engaging the interviewer in telling stories, too. The chapter provides a couple of suggestions for eliciting stories from interviewers.

Given that you’ll occasionally encounter an interviewer who is impatient with hearing stories, the chapter gives two techniques. One involves teasing the interviewer with the beginning of stories, giving him or her the option to ask for more. The other asks you to observe signals and learn to wrap up your stories if the interviewer seems impatient.

Your practice with interview stories should ideally culminate in a full mock interview with a partner. The chapter provides a checklist to help the partner critique your story delivery.

Exercise 5.A.3: Make resume stories more detailed and conversational.

Stories told in interviews are the longest, most detailed, and least formal of stories in job-search. In this exercise, to an extent, you will do the opposite of what you did in *Exercise 2.D.3: Practice editing your stories for length*.

I. Choose five stories from the resume and/or cover-letter stories in Chapter 4.

OR

II. Return to your Story Inventory and choose five stories from it.

Make these stories interview-ready by adding more detail and more context. Also try to write the interview stories the same way you talk – in a conversational tone. You may find it helpful to imagine each story is a response to a specific interview question (see typical interview questions beginning on page 91). Aim for stories that are about 100 words in print and take about a minute to deliver orally.

If you choose option I, you will likely need to make the stories longer than they are in resume/cover-letter form. A good example of the transformation from resume-style stories to cover-letter style to interview stories appears on pages 20 and 21 in *Tell Me About Yourself* (with the interview story appearing on page 21), and at <http://tinyurl.com/3zpsfnr> in the online version, with the interview story appearing at <http://tinyurl.com/3d9xvc7>. You can also find plenty of examples of interview stories in Chapter 7, beginning on page 117 of the print version of in *Tell Me About Yourself* or beginning here in the online version: <http://tinyurl.com/4psltlc>.

1.

2.

Exercise 5.A.4: Develop stories that aren't on your resume. Not all the stories you tell in an interview will come from your resume; after all, space on a resume is very limited. What kinds of stories are likely not to be on your resume but are fair game in an interview?

- Stories that originate in your personal life, hobbies, organizations, school, sports, volunteer work and the like – which might not be on your resume. Stories from these areas of your life may illustrate important skills, your personality, and qualifications, so telling them in an interview is fine as long as they're relevant.
- Stories that illustrate why the employer will be glad – a year from now, for example – to have hired you.
- Stories in response to specific interview questions. Certain questions may evoke stories that are not on your resume. See list of interview questions beginning on page 91.

For this exercise, see if you can develop (or choose from your Story Inventory) five stories that aren't on your resume (if you haven't yet created your resume, choose stories you think are unlikely to be on your resume.)

1.

2.

3.

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By Katharine Hansen, PhD

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Exercise 5.A.5: Develop underdog stories. As *Tell Me About Yourself* explains (page 118 in the print edition, and starting here in the online version: <http://tinyurl.com/4psltlc>), one of the best uses of storytelling in the job search is in response to behavioral-interview questions. A twist on behavioral interviewing is “motivation-based interviewing,” in which high performers are seen as achieving better results despite obstacles, while low performers think the obstacles are responsible for their not achieving the high performance. Thus, a new variation on the standard acronyms/formulas for stories used in response to job-interview questions is Situation -> Action -> Positive Overcoming of Obstacles -> Result, or SAPOOOR. Because studies have shown consumers are far more likely to choose an underdog brand, we can extend that finding to the job search and speculate that employers are more likely to choose the underdog candidate – the one who has overcome obstacles in a positive way.

For this exercise, see if you can develop (or choose from your Story Inventory) three stories that show you to be an underdog who has positively overcome obstacles.

1.

2.

3.

Exercise 5.A.6: Practice mental juggling with one story. Because interview questions – especially behavioral questions – are unpredictable, you may find yourself needing to adapt one story to a variety of questions. You would not, of course, tell the same story over again in response to multiple questions. The idea is that you might be able to recall only a limited number of your stories while under the pressure of the interview, so you might have to do some mental tweaking to make a recalled story fit into your response.

For this exercise, practice your ability to mentally juggle and tweak stories. Choose a single story. Ideally it will be a story that (a) encompassed multiple skills (b) began negatively but ended triumphantly thanks to your efforts and (c) involved teamwork or collaboration. Next, think about each of the interview questions that follow, and see if you can tweak the story in your mind so the response would fit that question. No need to write down the tweaked versions of the story; the idea is to stretch your brain and practice this skill. Test your story against as many questions as you can. Feel free to put the exercise aside and come back and test your story against more questions later. You can also try it with additional stories.

Your chosen story for mental juggling:

Typical interview questions

<p>How would you describe yourself?</p> <p>What specific goals, including those related to your occupation, have you established for your life?</p> <p>How has your college experience prepared you for a business career?</p> <p>Please describe the ideal job for you.</p> <p>What influenced you to choose this career?</p> <p>At what point did you choose this career?</p> <p>What specific goals have you established for your career?</p> <p>What will it take to attain your goals, and what steps have you taken toward attaining them?</p> <p>What do you think it takes to be successful in this career?</p> <p>How do you determine or evaluate success? Give me an example of one of your successful accomplishments.</p> <p>Do you have the qualifications and personal characteristics necessary for success in your chosen career?</p> <p>What has been your most rewarding accomplishment?</p> <p>If you could do so, how would you plan your college career differently?</p>	<p>How would you describe yourself in terms of your ability to work as a member of a team?</p> <p>What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?</p> <p>Given the investment our company will make in hiring and training you, can you give us a reason to hire you?</p> <p>Would you describe yourself as goal-driven?</p> <p>Describe what you've accomplished toward reaching a recent goal for yourself.</p> <p>What short-term goals and objectives have you established for yourself?</p> <p>Can you describe your long-range goals and objectives?</p> <p>What do you expect to be doing in five years?</p> <p>What do you see yourself doing in ten years?</p> <p>How would you evaluate your ability to deal with conflict?</p> <p>Have you ever had difficulty with a supervisor or instructor? How did you resolve the conflict?</p> <p>Tell me about a major problem you recently handled. Were you successful in resolving it?</p> <p>Would you say that you can easily deal with high-pressure situations?</p>
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Interview Questions ~ continued

Are you more energized by working with data or by collaborating with other individuals?

What personal weakness has caused you the greatest difficulty on the job?

What were your reasons for selecting your college or university?

Before you can make a productive contribution to the company, what degree of training do you feel you will require?

Describe the characteristics of a successful manager.

Why did you decide to seek a position in this field?

Tell me what you know about our company.

Why did you decide to seek a position in this company?

Which is more important to you, the job itself or your salary?

What are the most important rewards you expect to gain from your career?

How would you define "success" for someone in your chosen career?

What qualifications do you have that will make you successful in this company?

What skills have you acquired from your work experience?

What have you learned from your experiences outside the workplace?

What criteria are you using to choose companies to interview with?

If you were hiring for this position, what qualities would you look for?

How would you describe your leadership skills?

Which is more important: creativity or efficiency? Why?

What have you accomplished that shows your initiative and willingness to work?

What was the toughest challenge you've ever faced?

What two or three things are most important to you in your job?

Some people work best as part of a group – others prefer the role of individual contributor. How would you describe yourself?

How do you determine priorities in scheduling your time? Give examples.

What kinds of things have you done at on the job that were beyond expectations?

What, in your opinion, are the key ingredients in guiding and maintaining successful business relationships?

What sorts of things have you done to become better qualified for your career?

Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way?

Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation.

Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.

By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations and environments.

Describe a time when you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.

Give an example of a time in which you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.

Describe a time when you had to use your written communication skills to get an important point across.

Give me a specific occasion in which you conformed to a policy with which you did not agree.

Give me an example of an important goal that you had set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.

Describe the most significant or creative presentation that you have had to complete.

Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.

Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).

Sometimes it's easy to get in "over your head."

Describe a situation where you had to request help or assistance on a project or assignment.

Give an example of how you applied knowledge from previous coursework to a project in another class.

Describe a situation where others you were working with on a project disagreed with your ideas. What did you do?

Describe a situation in which you found that your results were not up to your supervisor's expectations.

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Interview Questions ~ continued

Tell of a time when you worked with a colleague who was not completing his or her share of the work. Who, if anyone, did you tell or talk to about it? Did the manager take any steps to correct your colleague? Did you agree or disagree with the manager's actions?

When given an important assignment, how do you approach it?

If there were one area you've always wanted to improve upon, what would that be?

When you have been made aware of, or have discovered for yourself, a problem in your work performance, what was your course of action?

Describe a situation in which you had to arrive at a compromise or guide others to a compromise.

What steps do you follow to study a problem before making a decision.

We can sometimes identify a small problem and fix it before it becomes a major problem. Give an example(s) of how you have done this.

In a supervisory or group leader role, have you ever had to discipline or counsel an employee or group member? What was the nature of the discipline? What steps did you take? How did that make you feel? How did you prepare yourself?

Recall a time from your work experience when your manager or supervisor was unavailable and a problem arose. What was the nature of the problem? How did you handle that situation? How did that make you feel?

Recall a time when you were assigned what you considered to be a complex project. Specifically, what steps did you take to prepare for and finish the project? Were you happy with the outcome? What one step would you have done differently if given the chance?

What was the most complex assignment you have had? What was your role?

How was your transition from high school to college? Did you face any particular problems?

Tell of some situations in which you have had to adjust quickly to changes over which you had no control. What was the impact of the change on you?

Compare and contrast the times when you did work that was above the standard with times your work was below the standard.

Describe some times when you were not very satisfied or pleased with your performance. What did you do about it?

What are your standards of success in school? What have you done to meet these standards?

Tell of a time when your active listening skills really paid off for you – maybe a time when other people missed the key idea being expressed.

What has been your experience in giving presentations? What has been your most successful experience in speech making?

Tell of the most difficult customer service experience that you have ever had to handle -- perhaps an angry or irate customer. Be specific and tell what you did and what was the outcome.

Give an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with. Why was this person difficult? How did you handle that person?

Describe a situation where you found yourself dealing with someone who didn't like you. How did you handle it?

Give me a specific example of something you did that helped build enthusiasm in others.

Tell me about a difficult situation when it was desirable for you to keep a positive attitude. What did you do?

Give me an example of a time you had to make an important decision. How did you make the decision? How does it affect you today?

Give me an example of a time you had to persuade other people to take action. Were you successful?

Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult person. How did you handle the situation?

Tell me about a time you had to handle multiple responsibilities. How did you organize the work you needed to do?

Tell me about a time when you had to make a decision, but didn't have all the information you needed.

What suggestions do you have for our organization?

What is the most significant contribution you made to the company during a past job or internship?

What is the biggest mistake you've made?

Describe a situation in which you had to use reference materials to write a research paper. What was the topic? What journals did you read?

Give me a specific example of a time when a co-worker or classmate criticized your work in front of others. How did you respond? How has that event shaped the way you communicate with others?

Everyone has made some poor decisions or has done something that just did not turn out right. Give an example of when this has happened to you.

Interview Questions ~ continued

How have you differed from your supervisors in evaluating your performance? How did you handle the situation?

Give examples of your experiences in a job that were satisfying. Give examples of your experiences that were dissatisfying.

What kind of supervisor do you work best for? Provide examples.

Describe some projects or ideas (not necessarily your own) that were implemented, or carried out successfully primarily because of your efforts.

Describe a situation that required a number of things to be done at the same time. How did you handle it? What was the result?

Have you found any ways to make a job easier or more rewarding or to make yourself more effective?

Give me a specific example of a time when you sold your supervisor or professor on an idea or concept.

How did you proceed? What was the result?

Describe the system you use for keeping track of multiple projects. How do you track your progress so that you can meet deadlines? How do you stay focused?

Tell me about a time when you came up with an innovative solution to a challenge your company/class/organization was facing. What was the challenge? What role did others play?

Describe a specific problem you solved for your employer or professor. How did you approach the problem? What role did others play? What was the outcome?

Describe a time when you got co-workers or classmates who dislike each other to work together. How did you accomplish this? What was the outcome?

Tell me about a time when you failed to meet a deadline. What things did you fail to do? What were the repercussions? What did you learn?

Describe a time when you put your needs aside to help a co-worker or classmate understand a task. How did you assist him or her? What was the result?

Give two examples of things you've done in previous jobs or school that demonstrate your willingness to work hard.

Describe the last time that you undertook a project that demanded a lot of initiative.

What is the most competitive work or school situation you have experienced? How did you handle it? What was the result?

What do you do when you are faced with an obstacle to an important project? Give an example.

Tell about the most difficult or frustrating individual that you've ever had to work with, and how you managed to work with that person.

Tell about a time when your trustworthiness was challenged. How did you react/respond?

Describe a situation when you were able to have a positive influence on the actions of others.

Tell about a recent job or campus experience that you would describe as a real learning experience? What did you learn from the job or experience?

Describe a team experience you found disappointing. What could you have done to prevent it?

Recall a situation in which communications were poor. How did you handle it?

Describe a time when you had to make a difficult choice between your personal and professional (or academic) life.

On occasion we are confronted by dishonesty in the workplace. Tell about such an occurrence and how you handled it.

What motivates you to go the extra mile on a project or job?

Describe a project or situation that best demonstrates your analytical abilities.

Give an example of when you took a risk to achieve a goal. What was the outcome?

Tell about a time when you built rapport quickly with someone under difficult conditions.

Some people consider themselves to be "big picture people" and others are detail oriented. Which are you? Give an example that illustrates your preference.

Describe a situation where you felt you had not communicated well. How did you correct the situation?

Describe a time when you took personal accountability for a conflict and initiated contact with the individual(s) involved to explain your actions.

Give me an example of when you were able to meet the personal and professional (or academic) demands in your life yet still maintained a healthy balance.

More questions? A simple search will result in question lists all over the Web. Here's one example:
<http://tinyurl.com/45374mm>.

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Exercise 5.A.8: A story for every interview question? Of course it's not possible to have a story ready for every interview question asked. For one thing, you can't predict what will be asked. We've already seen in *Exercise 5.A.6* that it's possible to manage with a small set of recalled stories by mentally juggling and tweaking stories to fit various questions. You can also, to some extent, predict the general topic areas of the questions you will be asked by identifying the skills the employer seeks. Go back to *Exercise 4.A.1: Spotlighting skills* and then look at the list of questions beginning on page 91. Predict which questions might be asked based on the skills you've identified.

Whether or not you can accurately predict the questions that will be asked, it's a good idea to take stock – to compare your Story Inventory with the list of questions. You may want to print out your Story Inventory and the list of questions and place them side to side. Go through the list of questions and think about whether you have a story you could use in response to each question. Look for the areas in which the greatest gaps occur. In which question topic areas are you most story-deficient? Consider whether you need to identify some new stories. In the space below, write down any adjustments you need to make based on your review of the interview questions.

Exercise 5.A.9: Practice shared narrative with the interviewer. "Discussions of our professional experience are truly opportunities for shared narrative," writes Walter Akana. "Trading stories with an interviewer about our shared experience allows for a sharing of meaning, and supports the kind of bonding that takes place in discovering the things we share in common." Obviously, bonding with an interviewer is advantageous when you seek a job. But how do you engage in shared narrative with the interviewer? Annette Simmons offers excellent suggestions in a downloadable PDF at <http://www.annettesimmons.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/StoriesJOBinterview.pdf>:

Ask an open-ended question and if they give a one-word answer, encourage them, "Can you tell me more about that?" Ask about a detail. "What happened when...X did X?" Who, what when where ... ask for specific details to help them remember the experience so they can narrate it for you.

Some obvious open-ended questions include, "How did you choose to work for this organization?" and "How did this vacancy come about?" In this exercise, brainstorm a few questions you could ask, and try to phrase them in a way so that the interviewer would respond in story form. You may want to keep in mind a specific employer/job.

Exercise 5.A.10: The analogous greatest challenge. Spinning off the previous exercise (5.A.9), you can ask an interviewer, “What’s the greatest challenge your organization faces?” Ideally you’ll have a story about handling a similar challenge in a current or past job. Your storied response gives you opportunity to strengthen your bond with the employer by empathizing with the challenge – and even better, showing how you tackled a similar issue in the past.

For this exercise, research one of your targeted employers, and try to predict what the interviewer’s response would be to “What’s the greatest challenge your organization faces?” Next, develop a storied response following the structure below:

I understand what your organization is experiencing. My current/former employer had a similar crisis/problem/difficulty/dilemma. [Describe the situation in story form]

My current/former employer endured the same trials/tribulations/made the wrong decisions/took incorrect roads. I wanted to change the situation. [Tell the story of the action you took to change the situation.]

I figured it out, and now I’m sharing it with you. [Tell how you could apply your action/solution to the interviewer’s organization’s challenge.]

Resources

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Chapter 6: More Tools for Your Storied-Career Toolkit: Personal Branding, Social-Media Profiles, and Transmedia Campaigns

The final short chapter in this workbook offers three exercises.

The two that are somewhat mainstream include the opportunity to craft a storied “about me” or bio, as well as the challenge to create a LinkedIn profile in story form.

The final exercise is rather offbeat, but it might just represent the future of the storied, online job-seeker presence – imagining a transmedia story campaign for the job-seeker.

Afterword

The beauty of an ebook is that it can easily be updated and revised. I plan to do that with this book.

I welcome your crowdsourcing help in making future editions of this workbook even better.

What suggestions do you have? Were any exercises unclear? Should any be deleted?

Have ideas for exercises to add?

See a typo or other error? Want to suggest a resource?

If you are an instructor or workshop leader using these exercises, I'd love to know how they play out with your participants and how they can be better.

I welcome all input and feedback.

I will also continue write about storytelling in job search and career in my blog, A Storied Career at <http://astoriedcareer.com>, in which I also report on other aspects of applied storytelling, so be sure to keep current there.

In the Tell Me About Yourself blog, which serializes the first edition of *Tell Me About Yourself*, and which is a blog within the A Storied Career blog, I occasionally publish updates and new information related to the book and its topic. Find it at: http://astoriedcareer.com/tell_me.

A Facebook page also is dedicated to the book: <http://tinyurl.com/3hauudk>.

To contact me with your feedback and suggestions:

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About me

Katharine (Kathy) Hansen, Ph.D., creative director and associate publisher of Quintessential Careers, is an educator, author, and blogger who provides content for Quintessential Careers, edits its newsletter *QuintZine*, and blogs about storytelling at A Storied Career. Kathy, who earned her PhD from Union Institute & University authored *Tell Me About Yourself*, *Dynamic Cover Letters for New Graduates*, *A Foot in the Door*, *Top Notch Executive Interviews*, *Top Notch Executive Resumes*; and with Randall S. Hansen, Ph.D., *Dynamic Cover Letters*, *Write Your Way to a Higher GPA*, and *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Study Skills*.

