

Stories Open Doors

Learning to tell stories is an incredible skill. But learning to think in stories is even more fundamental.

A narrative arc is more memorable and impactful than factual bullets. The ability to create narratives is what allows attracting friends, collaborators, investors, customers, and fans.

Storytellers are interesting people who get interesting opportunities. Not just those who tell anecdotal tales, but those who weave all of life into layers of narrative. The price of wheat is not merely an economic fact, it's part of a story that started somewhere and will end somewhere. And it's probably nested in other stories.

But telling stories starts with thinking in narrative arcs instead of dots.

I've seen this illustration several times (I'm not sure the origin):



These are all different ways to see facts. But none of them weave a story. There's no narrative in the dots or the colors or the lines or the connections or paths. They are facts with relationships, but they stop short of a narrative arc. Yes, there is wisdom in seeing that point A follows a path to point B. But why? How? For what purpose? What happened when the path was completed? What was going on before?

A narrative thinker will see these facts and be able to construct a story – a beginning, middle, and end – with motivations and purpose involved. Stories have teleology, facts do not.

The ability to see a meaningful story in any person, event, or series of facts leads to the ability to communicate in narratives. You can connect dots for reasons, and show the future if the dots continue to connect.

Thinking in story helps you be more interesting because it helps you be more interested.

When someone tells you, “I’m an engineer”, instead of filing this as a fact in your mental Rolodex, you immediately want to know the story. How did they end up an engineer? Is this the end of a long journey, the beginning of a new story, or the middle? Curiosity drives you to ask good questions, good questions make connections, and connections lead to opportunities.

Discovering, telling, and re-telling your own story is a great place to start. Why are you sitting there reading this right now? What led you here? Why? What does it mean for the

future?