



the business
of story®

PARK HOWELL

21-DAY STORY QUEST

CRAFTING AND SPOTTING ABTs IN THE WILD.

"Quality is not an act, it is a habit"

≈Aristotle

*21-Day Story Quest:
Crafting and Spotting ABTs in the Wild*

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THE HUNT IS ON!

Build a Habit of Being Persuasive.

They say that you establish a habit after repeating a behavior for 21 days.

But some *experts* argue it takes 63 days.

Who knows?

What I do know is that the ABT is short AND sweet BUT tricky, SO it takes daily practice to make it a habit.

I encourage you to leverage the ABT 365 days a year, which began the moment you entered [The ABTs of Agile Communications™ online course.](#)

Now let's strengthen your storytelling skills with 21 Story Quests.

These are quick and easy assignments that have you spotting ABTs in the wild, crafting your own ABTs, sharing them, and commenting on others.

Do two Story Quests a week for 10 weeks and you'll grow your storytelling skills through 21 exercises over 63+ days.

Because increasing the persuasiveness of your communications is not an act, it's a habit.

STORY QUEST #1

**Cheers to People Actually
Responding to Your Emails.**



When you receive an immediate response to your emails, it feels great, doesn't it?

But it stinks when you get crickets.

Let's boost your responses with an easy Story Quest.

Today, write at least three emails using an ABT.

You have to write the darned things anyway, so take the opportunity to develop your ABT skills.

To make your Story Quests even more valuable, you'll receive Business of Story resources like this one:

[The ABT Helps You Sell More by Saying Less](#)

Story on!

STORY QUEST #2

Learn by Teaching.



How's your ABT email writing going? I've seen an increase in my response rate, especially with lukewarm audiences when I use an ABT in my emails.

But occasionally I default back to my own boring writing when I'm not intentional about building off of the ABT.

So keep practicing those ABT emails every single day.

However, today I want you to show two people the ABT.

You don't know what you don't know until you have to teach it.

I learned this while teaching for five years as an adjunct professor of storytelling for the executive master's program in the School of Sustainability at Arizona State University.

It can be a friend, family member, colleague, complete stranger, or anyone.

For instance, the following is an email I received from Jim Fritzemeier, a gentleman who took the online course for his business and then shared it with his daughters.

SUBJECT: ABT Good News – Bad News

A report on my daughter's Butterfly Grant and my two granddaughters' use of the ABT.

Jamee's Butterfly Grant was an outstanding ABT application.

But because she was asking for \$8M out of \$12M of the grant money politics got in the way so they had to spread it out.

Therefore, the Tourism department in the Secretary of Commerce office is a bunch of fools!

For my two granddaughters, Phoebe in 11th grade and Surrey in 8th grade are rocking and rolling using ABT. Surrey had to make a final 8th-grade presentation to nine adults: three teachers, three administrators and three parents.

But she had used the ABT.

Therefore, she got an A and the examining board told her they wished they had videoed it to show future presenters.

Phoebe is using ABT to write all her papers, including physics. She now writes better-composed and lucid papers in half the time.

Almost all kids hate giving presentations.

But those who organize their ideas and scripts using the ABT have great results.

Therefore, use the ABT for all your papers and presentations and eliminate the fear of presenting before people.

Presentations are now fun. And papers are a breeze.

Thanks, Park!

Do yourself and others a favor by teaching the ABT to two people today.

You can even share this Business of Story resource with them: [Learn From My 10-Year Journey With the ABTs of Storytelling](#)

STORY QUEST #3

How to Build Trust With Your Audience Using the ABT.



Earlier this year, I was working in Phoenix with an international sales & marketing executive for a large technology components firm.

He shared an ABT he wrote for a LinkedIn post.

I asked him who his audience was for his ABT.

He said LinkedIn.

I reminded him that LinkedIn is a channel, not a character.

His post was essentially all about his brand and product with little consideration taken for his audience.

We all make this mistake.

One of the most prevalent paradigm shifts I witness when people learn how to wield the ABT is that their story is NOT about them but about their audience.

Equal to that paradigm shift is the idea that their story is NOT about what they make but what they make happen in their audience's life.

To help you make this shift, please write an ABT to one specific person in your life following these easy steps:

1. Name the person.
2. Define what they want relative to your offering **AND** why it's important to them.
3. **BUT** then describe their frustration for why they don't have what they want because of what obstacle or gap.
4. **THEREFORE**, illustrate what life will look like when they achieve it and how you are uniquely equipped to help make that happen for them.

When you focus your ABT on a specific audience, you build trust because you're communicating with them from their point of view.

As you know, the ABT uses the three forces of story of agreement, contradiction and consequence to hook the limbic brain.

The ABT also triggers what I call "The Three Forces of Trust Building," which include understanding, appreciation and empathy.

In your statement of agreement, you demonstrate to your audience that you understand what they want and appreciate why that's important to them.

But you also display empathy for their frustration about why they don't yet have what they want.

Trust is created because you're speaking from their view of the world.

This makes your THEREFORE Statement of Consequence, which essentially is your call to action, more powerful because you've quickly connected with them to build trust.

That's why it's so important to take the time to truly understand your audience to make your communication as effective as possible.

Write your ABT and bounce it off of the person you identified to see how it lands by the end of today.

Here's a fun Business of Story resource for you:

[10 Screenwriting Tips Every Brand Storyteller Should Know](#)

STORY QUEST #4

The Three-Act Story Structure of Making Coffee



Some estimate we use metaphors every 25 words. But they often go unnoticed because we use them so often.

Metaphors are powerful because they combine two disparate ideas into a third compelling concept to help explain life.

One of my favorite metaphors for the tripartite structure (three-act structure) in storytelling is when we make coffee (or tea).



AND



BUT



THEREFORE

You can agree that we begin with robust coffee beans.
In their status quo state, they don't do much for us.

But when we grind them (just like life grinds us) and up the heat by pouring boiling water over the grounds, they transform (just like conflict transforms us) into a delicious cup of Joe.

Set up, problem, solution.

So today, when you sit down with your relaxing hot beverage, take a moment to craft an ABT and share it with someone you know.

See if it perks them up.

One of my favorite books is *Metaphors We Live By*, by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson.

STORY QUEST #5

The Spooky Truth About Being Ghosted



When you get ghosted after sending an email or text, your brain will default to the worst-case scenario to explain the situation.

It's a survival coping mechanism. It will make you think...

"I did something wrong."

"They're mad at me."

"This relationship is over."

But in reality, the lack of response is often because people are busy. Overworked. Distracted.

Or your message was long-winded or confusing.

No worries. Just use an ABT as your ghosting buster.

Listen to episode #319: Why We Tell Ourselves Horror Stories When We're Ghosted.

Sam George, author of *I'll Get Back to You: Why Unreturned Messages Drive Us Crazy and What to Do About It*, emphasizes the "dyscommunication" crisis is caused by our reliance on impersonal digital tools like texts and emails.

STORY QUEST #6

**Write Down One Personal Goal
for Today Using the ABT.**



The great thing about the ABT is that you can use it nearly everywhere to clarify your story.

Especially those stories you tell yourself.

Like goal setting!

But you know how easy goals are to blow off.

So let's overcome our subconscious reluctance to change that can sabotage our best intentions. State your goal with a stout ABT. For instance...

I know how powerful my blog is for educating followers of the Business of Story. If I publish one post a week, then I'll help my readers grow as storytellers, enhance my website's SEO, and I'll learn something new about storytelling in the writing.

But my impact is reduced because I get lazy with my blog. I spend so much time producing my podcast that I don't have the energy to write an article (at least, that's my excuse).

Therefore, today I will publish a new post by 5 pm PDT about how to use the ABT for goal setting.

Here's the post I created from this goal: [How to Build a Habit of Consistently Creating Powerful Messages With the ABT.](#)

Ok, now that I've shared my personal daily goal with you, please draft your ABT goal and share it with someone.

Accountability in goal setting is everything!

I interviewed Joseph Templin on [How to Use Goal Setting to Craft an Epic Personal Story Arc.](#) I think you'll enjoy it.

Ready, set, goal!!!

STORY QUEST #7

Overcoming What You Think is Obvious About the ABT.



Last fall, I was doing a virtual mastery course for one of the nation's largest veterinarian associations.

One of their young, confident marketing writers, we'll call her Sarah, stopped me early in our second session and said in front of everyone...

"Park, I majored in journalism and I can see how the ABT might work but I'm not going to use it because it feels too stilted to me, so I'm going to keep writing my old way."

I grinned because I thought Sarah was messing with me.

Then I looked at all of the blank stares in the Brady Bunch-like collection of faces on Zoom. They all, including Sarah, looked at me like, "What are you chuckling at?"

I realized that none of them recognized that Sarah had used a perfect ABT to explain why she'll never use the ABT.

When I pointed it out to the virtual gathering, they all started laughing, even Sarah.

I said, "You see, the ABT is a natural way to communicate. It's intuitive, just as you have demonstrated. I want you to become intentional with its use to revolutionize how you communicate and connect with your audience."

If you have felt that the ABT is too stilted to be effective, feel free to get creative with it using the attached replacement words.

But the one thing I want to underscore is that even as the ABT framework becomes obvious to you, your audience has no idea what you're doing to them; the bewitchery of the ABT.

Because as I'm fond of saying, "You have to understand the magic to cast its spell."

Your Story Quest today is to write an ABT replacing the words AND, BUT, and THEREFORE with the words on the following list and see/feel how it works for you.

ABT Replacement Words

Agreement

AND

also
equally
identically
uniquely
like
moreover
as well as
furthermore
likewise
similarly

Contradiction

BUT

despite
however
yet
conversely
rather
whereas
although
otherwise
instead
albeit

Consequence

THEREFORE

so
thus
consequently
hence
thereupon
accordingly
as a result
henceforth
for this reason
in that case

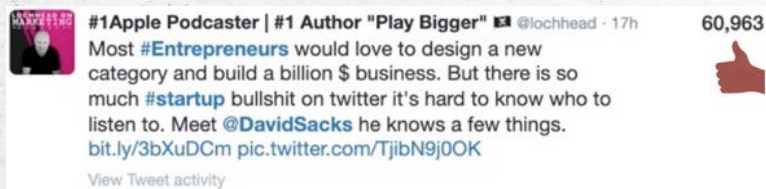
STORY QUEST #8

Crash Elon's Servers With Your Tweets.



Musk may fear Twitter will blow up like his SpaceX Starship for the engagement you'll get when you launch your Tweets using an ABT.

Remember from the course what happened to legendary Silicon Valley marketer Christopher Lochhead when he used the ABT for the first time on Twitter?



That 60,963 engagement number is out of this world.

Your Story Quest, should you choose to accept it, is to post one Tweet today using the ABT.

Please include me [@parkhowell](#). Heck, even use the hashtags #ABT and #StoryOn so we can easily track your progress.

Listen to my conversation with Christopher on episode #351: [7 Ways to Capitalize on the Direct-to-Creator Model](#). But be forewarned, he likes to pepper his insights with F-bombs.

STORY QUEST #9

Can You Spot ABTs in the Wild?



Like the arrow in the FedEx logo, now that you know about the ABT you will come across it everywhere. You can't unsee them.

Let's put it to the test.

Your Story Quest for today is to find ABTs hiding in plain sight.

- How many can you find on the cover of the New York Times?
- Listen to NPR and hear how many segments are promoted using the ABT.
- Spot ABTs in your favorite songs.
- Look for ABTs in social media
- Flip through a magazine and see if you can find an ABT in an ad like my wife Michele did when she came across this one from our client, McCormick & Company.



**YOU WANT TO SERVE
DEVEILED EGGS.
BUT YOU'VE NEVER
ACTUALLY MADE
DEVEILED EGGS.**

McCormick

**IT'S GONNA
BE GREAT™**

Paprika

Let's start deviling some eggs. Scan the code for this Tangy Mustard Deviled Eggs recipe and other great appetizers.

When you spot an ABT, capture it and share it with me via LinkedIn, Twitter, or shoot me an email.

Read how the above ABT ad was captured in the wild
[How to Spot ABTs in the Wild to Strengthen Your Communications.](#)

STORY QUEST #10

A Little LinkedIn Love.



Remember how we grew engagement by around 400% on LinkedIn for Trimble, the global SaaS company serving the construction industry?

We didn't rewrite the posts in their LinkedIn campaigns in five different countries. We just reordered their content to be narrative using the ABT.

You may recall Kari Nelson's email to me:

Hi Park,

Thank you again for all the help with our LinkedIn posts.

Good impact news for you from the team! Your feedback and direction are working!

Region	March engagement rate	April engagement rate With the ABT
EN (UK + NA)	3.9%	6.7%
France	4.9%	17.5%
Benelux	2.6%	8.5%
DACH	4.4%	6.2%

But we want to know how we can do even better, and eventually take off the "training wheels."

Today's Story Quest is for you to post something on LinkedIn using the ABT and watch your engagement rate. Please include me at [@parkhowell](#) and use hashtags #ABT and #StoryOn so that we can easily track your progress.

You might also consider revisiting your LinkedIn bio to see how you can incorporate the ABT. You can use [my LinkedIn bio](#) as an example if you like. And while you're there, if we're not connected, let's link up.

Kari Nelson joined me on the podcast to discuss [How to Humanize Your Hi-Tech Storytelling for Growth](#).

STORY QUEST #11

Strengthen Your Website With an ABT.



When I first started my advertising career almost 40 years ago, I was stunned to learn that marketing and sales don't talk to each other.

That's like a football quarterback and his wide receiver running completely opposite plays at the same time.

Or a prima ballerina dancing Swan Lake to Wagner's Flight of the Valkyries.

Talk about being out of step.

This divide between sales and marketing can happen to us too. Most websites are driven by marketing hyperbole while what sales really need are powerful, authentic stories.

I saw this profound gap in sales and marketing when I was coaching Sharp Electronics.



As you can see, the above copy is:

- Non-narrative: You can basically place an "and" before every sentence, which means it's boring.
- Total navel-gazing: Sharp has placed itself and not its prospects at the center of the story. No one cares.
- Full of generalized superlatives hoping the audience will naturally arrive at the fact that Sharp is so marvelous that we must buy from them.

To demonstrate the power of the ABT during a workshop with Sharp, I revised their content to this ABT:

Shorter runs. Quicker turnaround times. Complete control over your in-house printing. It's what you want.

But your productivity is currently stuck on PAUSE.

Therefore, Sharp digital MFPs and copiers/printers will have you printing like a pro with our industry-leading innovation, user-friendly design, and boundless expandability.

The next day following the virtual training, Sheryne, the sponsor who brought me in to train, sent me this email she received from one of her national account leaders:

Hi Sheryne!

I don't remember the person's name from the training but I told him that I really, really liked his quick-hitting message phrasing. So much so, I put it to use in what is looking like a National expansion of one of my major accounts.

I needed to get a point across BUT not be too wordy so I took from his training and converted it into my own marketing piece. The client loved it!

*That last line "It's what you want". It's perfect!
Thanks!*

So let's put your home page and/or landing page to the test. Is it currently nonsensical hyperbole or does it use an ABT to entice your visitor into your story?

Feel free to share your original content and your rewritten ABT at our [S'more ABTs Campfire](#) on StoryPrompt.

STORY QUEST #12

**Make Your Instagram Posts
Worth 2,000 Words.**



You know the old saying that a picture is worth a thousand words?

Maybe that's why Instagram is so popular.

But your posts might not be getting the engagement you hope for because you're not amplifying the impact of your photo by telling a quick story about it in your comments using an ABT.

To illustrate this point, here's one Instagram before and after example I used for a hop grower in Washington State during a national conference...

BEFORE:



AFTER:



Do you see how Jackson Hop Farms missed the opportunity to connect with its audience and demonstrate its growing prowess through an interesting educational story using the ABT that made its compelling photo even stronger?

Now it's your turn. Post on Instagram and accentuate your photo with an ABT.

Please copy me in your post [@parkhowell](#) and add the hashtags #ABT and #StoryOn so we can track your success.

Given that Instagram is typically about people sharing photo stories of their personal adventures and conquests, check out this article: [How a Personal Adventure Will Help Your Sales Story Sell](#)

STORY QUEST #13

The Singular Narrative to the Rescue!



Please read this article that underscores the stunning power of a singular narrative in your ABTs and your stories: [Nikolas Kristoff's Advice for Saving the World](#).

Here is an excerpt from the Outside Magazine article :

"If one lesson is the need to emphasize hopefulness, the second is that storytelling needs to focus on an individual, not a group.

A classic experiment involved asking people to donate to help hungry children in West Africa.

One group was asked to help a seven-year-old girl named Rokia, in the country of Mali.

A second was asked to donate to help millions of hungry children.

A third was asked to help Rokia but was provided with statistical information that gave them a larger context for her hunger.

Not surprisingly, people donated more than twice as much to help Rokia as to help millions of children.

But it turned out that even providing background information on African hunger diminished empathy, so people were much less willing to help Rokia when she represented a broader problem.

Donors didn't want to help ease a crisis personified by a child; they just wanted to help one person—and to hell with the crisis."

BTW, did you spot the ABT in the excerpt?

Write or revisit one of your ABTs and see how you can refine your singular narrative to make your communication more compelling.

Listen to: [How to Persuade a Judge and Jury With Your ABT](#)

STORY QUEST #14

Craft Your One-Floor Elevator Pitch Using an ABT.



The beauty of the ABT framework relative to articulating your brand story is that it doesn't take 12 floors to explain what you do and why people care.

You can nail it by the time you hit the second floor.

But you have to work hard to ensure it communicates what you want.

So please craft your one-floor elevator pitch using the following steps:

STEP 1: Name your #1 audience.

Have you ever heard of the Pareto Principle? It states that for many outcomes, roughly 80% of consequences come from 20% of causes. Other names for this principle are the 80/20 rule or the law of the vital few,

This means that 80% of your business comes from just 20% of your customers, that ONE specific group of people who cherish and share your product or service.

Who are they?

STEP 2: Define what they want relative to your brand offering AND why it's important to them.

STEP 3: BUT insert the frustration they're feeling because of what problem you will be solving for them.

STEP 4: THEREFORE, help them picture the positive outcome that will happen when they tap into your expertise.

For instance, my one-floor elevator pitch when people ask me about the Business of Story is built on this ABT platform:

Most business leaders communicate and care but bore, so I show them how to use the power of storytelling to excite their audiences to action.

That's my basic ABT. Then I'll vamp on it like an improv artist depending on how I read my audience and what's most important to them.

Here's an additional resource for you: [How to Use the ABT for a Powerful One-Floor Elevator Pitch](#)

"Ding," the door just opened for your ABT.

STORY QUEST #15

Write a Facebook Post Using an ABT.



According to [Influencer Marketing Hub](#), the best time to post on Facebook to gain the greatest engagement is roughly 9 am, 11 am, and 3 pm most days.

But if your posts aren't worth reading because they're non-narrative, then you may as well post at 3:14 am.

During a power outage.

I've been having a ton of fun working with Walmart Canada on their leadership storytelling. On the next page is one of their Facebook posts from last Halloween.

Now that you know how to craft ABTs, you'll appreciate how you can make this post scary good..



Walmart Canada

271,117 followers

6d • Edited •

Did you know... 🍬 About 803,000 pieces of candy will be sold every hour at Walmart in the month of October!

Canadians are gearing up for Halloween at Walmart – relying on us as the simple, one-stop shop for their spooky needs.

🍎 We're predicting close to a million pumpkins will be sold this year.

🍌🐝 Customers in Ontario's Kitchener West Walmart are buying the most pet costumes, including popular options like Bee and Hot Dog costumes.

See more fun facts about Halloween at Walmart here:

<https://lnkd.in/gTpPb2bm>



What has Walmart Canada done? They've made what could be a fun Halloween post all about them and inadvertently threw coal in the Trick or Treat bags with a bunch of statistics.

So let's say that communicating those stats is really important to the company. You can still do that with a powerful ABT:

You're looking forward to another gleefully ghoulish Halloween with your kids.

But what's really scary is how hectic it is prepping all of your tricks and treats.

That's why the only doorbell you need to ring to prepare for Halloween is your local Walmart Canada store.

Did you know that we'll sell about 803,00 pieces of candy every hour in October and close to a million pumpkins will roll out the door. And shoppers at Ontario's Kitchener West Walmart are buying the most pet costumes. Dressing up Fido as a bee or hot dog seems to be the go-to.

See more fun facts about Halloween at Walmart here: <https://lnkd.in/gTpPb2bm>

Now it's your turn. Write a Facebook post with an ABT. [Please tag me](#) and add hashtags #ABT and #StoryOn so we can track your post's performance.

STORY QUEST #16

Share a Random ABT and
Make Someone's Day.



Have some fun with someone by sharing a surprising ABT with them.

Here's my silly ABT submission: a limerick from Princeton Tiger.

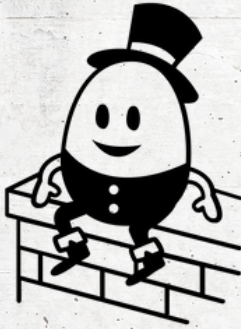
*"There once was a man from Nantucket
Who kept all his cash in a bucket.
But his daughter, named Nan
Ran away with a man,
And as for the bucket, Nantucket."*

What's yours?

Read: [How to Craft Your Purpose-Driven Brand Story](#)

STORY QUEST #17

Google Your Favorite Nursery Rhyme
and Test its ABT Structure.



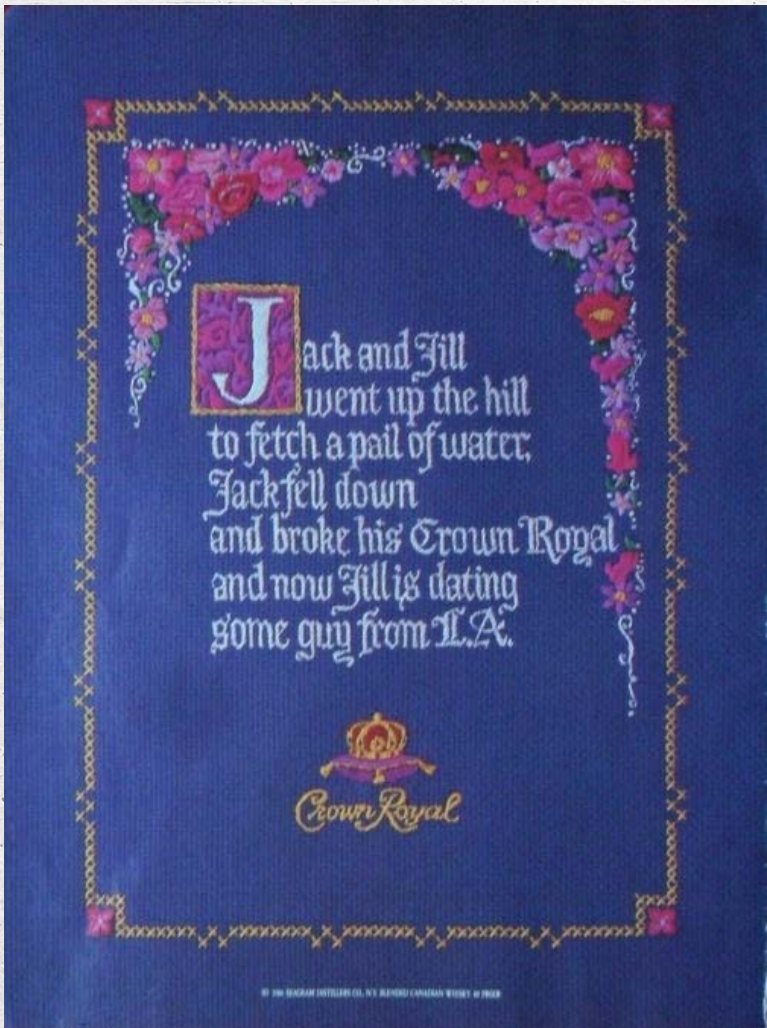
We all know what happened to Humpty Dumpty...he sat on a wall BUT had a great fall. You can complete the THEREFORE Statement of Consequence in your head.

Little Miss Muffet, on the other hand, sat on her tuffet,
AND she was eating her curds and whey.

BUT along came a spider that sat down beside her,
THEREFORE frightened Miss Muffet away.

Nearly all memorable nursery rhymes, like the ABT, are crafted on the three forces of story: Agreement, Contradiction, and Consequence.

In 1987, when I was a young copywriter making my way into the advertising biz, I came across this ad from Crown Royal and thought it was brilliant.



It uses what we call "borrowed interest" from Jack & Jill to sell its whisky. I think the writing would be stronger if that last "and" was removed to make the Statement of Consequence even more obvious.

What's your favorite nursery rhyme and does it use an ABT to make it memorable over millennia?

STORY QUEST #18

Find the Embedded ABTs
in the Gettysburg Address.



Famous PBS documentarian Ken Burns produced a film about the Gettysburg Address called [The Address](#).

He unlocks the history, context, and importance of President Lincoln's most powerful speech, according to PBS.

But Burns doesn't cover the structure of Lincoln's roughly two-minute presentation from November 19, 1863, which may be the most important element given its brevity and vigor.

See if you can spot the three embedded ABTs...

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.

We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate -- we can not consecrate -- we can not hallow -- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract.

The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced.

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall

have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

One hundred years later, Martin Luther King referenced The Gettysburg Address in his "I Have a Dream" speech. [Watch MLK and listen](#) for how embedded ABTs propel his revolutionary speech forward.

Both Lincoln and King were spectacular intuitive storytellers who knew nothing of the ABT but naturally used the framework to win over the hearts and minds of their audiences.

It's a great reminder that you too are an intuitive storyteller. I want you to become intentional in the use of the ABT so that your stories can stand the test of time.

The rest is, as they say, history.

Please read: [All Powerful Leadership Communication is Built on the ABT](#)

STORY QUEST #19

Use the ABT as a Story Listening Tool.



As you know by now, the best stories are told from your audience's perspective to make your story their story.

If you listen intently to where they are in life relative to your offering, then you can leverage the three forces of trust-building that include understanding, appreciation, and empathy.

But we often don't build this connection because we haven't listened to what is really at the core of their problem. We're too excited to share our solution.

Now you can become a storytelling Svengali by using the ABT as a foolproof story-listening tool to inform the crafting and delivery of your messages.

Today, make a point of listening to someone's problem. Let them go on and on as long as they need to. Fight the urge to interrupt them.

Then rephrase their problem back to them as an ABT...

- What I heard you say was that this thing is important to you and if you had it then this would be the positive outcome.
- But you're frustrated because you don't have it due to...
- Therefore, you would enjoy this success if only this would happen...

That is the rough outline. Feel free to make it your own. When you do this, three things happen to build trust:

- Your audience will say or think, "Wow, you said that better than I did."
- "Gee, you actually listened to me, no one ever cares enough to listen to me."
- "You said that so clearly that I realized I forgot to tell you one more thing." (It's always that "one more thing" that is truly the crux of their problem, so you've already added value with your story listening.)

When you use the ABT as a story-listening tool, you become armed with the understanding, appreciation, and empathy you need to connect deep down with your audience.

Listen up: Why Story Listening is More Powerful Than Storytelling

STORY QUEST #20

**Fix an Obfuscated Message
With the Clarity of an ABT.**



I love that word "obfuscated." It just sounds confusing.

To clear things up, here's a fun spin on spotting an ABT in the wild.

Today, when you come across a message that clearly stinks because it's confusing or boring, rewrite it as an ABT.

You'll burn a few cerebral calories and several minutes in the process but the investment of time and energy is invaluable to growing your narrative intuition.

Where will you find them?

- Look for banal social media posts
- Tone-deaf spam emails
- Annoying LinkedIn messages

For instance, I received this unsolicited, non-narrative, uninteresting in-mail from RingCentral.

Sponsored

Today



• 6:33 am

Hi Park,

My name is [REDACTED] and I'm a Regional Vice President at RingCentral. We offer an enterprise-grade phone system that's easy for IT teams to deploy, manage across the globe, and enables teams to be more productive.

Companies like SoFi, Medallia, and Carvana use our product to keep employees connected, all while maintaining industry leading reliability and security.

If you take a meeting with one of my team members, we'll send you a \$100 gift card for your time!

No thank you

 Yes, let's book it!

What's wrong with it and how would you fix it?

As you may recall from [The ABTs of Agile Communications™ online course](#), I resurrected its narrative structure with the ABT to make it more compelling from the audience's POV.

Hi Park,

Your phone system is critical to your success. If it's easy for your IT team to manage across the globe then your people will be more productive.

But your phone system is clunky because you're shackled with old technology that hangs up productivity.

Help your colleagues successfully answer opportunities to grow your business with RingCentral. We provide industry-leading reliability and security for such companies as SoFi, Medallia, and Carvana.

I'm Joe Smith, Regional Vice President. I'm so sure you'll love our easy-to-deploy telephony that we'll give you a \$100 gift card when you take a call from one of my team members.

When is a good time for you?

Can you feel the difference?

The quantifiable ROI will come in the increased engagement and conversion numbers.

I have no idea what they are for this post because I simply used it as a case study.

RingCentral is not a client. Yet.

Your storytelling resource is the 250th episode of the Business of Story podcast where you travel through the 10-step Story Cycle System™ in the sharing of my origin story.

As you listen, think about how you can use this process in your own long-form communications, presentations and brand storytelling.

STORY QUEST #21

WHEW, you made it. Well, almost.



Welcome to your final Story Quest with Ernest Hemingway.

As legend has it, Ernest was in a bar with his buddies and bet them \$10 each that he could make them cry with a simple six-word story.

They bit.

"For sale: Baby shoes, never worn," he said.

Ernest won the bet.

How did YOU finish this shortest story ever told?

I bet you \$10 you closed the loop with the awful notion that... the child had died.

A horror story.

In reality, there were plenty of other endings.

...the shoes were lost and found by a stranger in mint condition who had no kids.

...the husband had brought home the identical pair of baby shoes his wife had purchased earlier that day and he couldn't return them.

...the shoes were too small for their healthy, growing child.

But these happy endings are too nebulous. There are too many of them. Our limbic brain wants finality to make sense of a story. What is more final than death?

Try this ABT parlor trick on your friends, family and colleagues.

Ask them if they have ever heard of the shortest story ever told by Hemingway. And then share it with them.

"For sale: Baby shoes, never worn."

Pay close attention to their reaction and see how they close the story loop you've left open.

The lesson here is that you never, ever want to open a story loop and not close it.

Why?

Because your audience will automatically create their own conclusion and it will often be negative toward your offering.

This is a great demonstration of how you use the ABT to invite your audience into your story loop:

- Set the stage with your AND Statement of Agreement.
- Raise the tension with your BUT Statement of Contradiction or Complication that begs for an answer to the problem you've introduced.
- Close the story loop with your THEREFORE Statement of Consequence on what are the natural steps forward with you.

Set up, arouse, and fulfill. That is the power of the ABT story loop.

Hemingway instinctively knew two things about his incomplete story:

AGREEMENT: For Sale; Baby Shoes...

COMPLICATION: But they were never worn.

CONSEQUENCE: (You, as the audience, will close this loop)

If we don't finish our stories our audience will.

We, as meaning-making machines, are driven by a negativity bias that will typically find the most conclusive ending to an open story loop.

Death.

In this case, the death of a child.

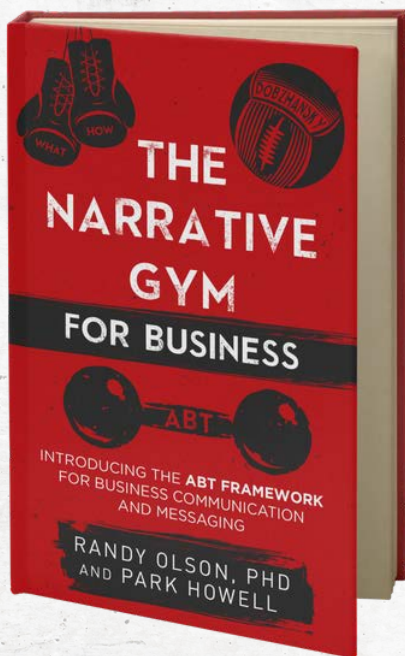
In your case, the death of your message.

On a happier note, congratulations, you have scaled Mount ABT!

If you have also taken [The ABTs of Agile Communications™ online course](#), then I'm honored to close this story loop by awarding you the ABT Achievement Badge.



Story on, my friend!



Grab your copy of
The Narrative Gym for Business,
your crisp 75-page companion for crafting ABTs.

Excel through the stories you tell.

**the business
of story[®]**

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