

# Do You Know Stories by Other Names? They Can Fuel Your Job Search and Recharge Your Career Aspirations

By Marilyn Tullius, June 2024

As with many other trendy words in the world of work, the term, “story” has lost its edge through overuse. Let’s pull ideas of story out of the abyss of generic usage and take a fresh dive that will allow us to more fully appreciate how stories can help in meeting job search and career goals.

For career purposes stories emphasize your achievements and compel interest in knowing more. The inset diagram traces the use of stories along the array of interactions in work environments:

- **You are exploring a job change.** Stories create connections and interest
- **You are getting your information together in pre-interview documents.** Resume, cover letter, and portfolio of work samples.
- **Hooray!** You are a candidate for the job. When interacting with recruiters and during a succession of interviews, stories elaborate
- **Finally, on the job or contract/consulting settings.** Stories opens minds to new ideas, dramatize solutions, and inspire followers.



Analysis and graphic created by the author.

## Stories and Story Elements by Their Aliases

You may be surprised at the variety of ways we can lead into stories. Here are a few that stand out:

**Tagline.** A catchy phrase, or even a job title, that sums up identity (person, product, or service) and conveys the brand personality (Person example: A human capital leader and learning coach.)

**Elevator Speech.** An opening gambit to begin a connection with someone and create the opportunity to learn more or extend the connection

**Soundbite.** A few words delivered within 8 seconds (often used in TV interview shows). A zinger that carries a message with impact and memorability

**Persona Line.** A one-liner that characterizes an individual’s expertise or their career value. A copywriter might use “Bring ideas to life across a spectrum of subjects and audiences.”

**Heading.** Labels on resumes and LinkedIn profiles that position an individual by career interest and job function. Typically signals the next job target

**Testimonials, Accolades, or “Commended for.”** One or more from credible references that support your job candidacy

**Known for.** Your values, attributes, and traits such as: building trust, going beyond the job, authenticity, and high energy

**Ask Me Abouts.** A one-page very quick “read” to bring to networking occasions or reinforce a positive impression from an initial meeting. Designed to elicit Wows and stimulate 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> questions from the reader. Helps you control the conversation



**Mission Statement.** Important in some industry sectors, such as higher education. Usually limited to a page that covers guiding principles, achievements, commitment, and expectations going forward

## A Story Outline Recommendation

In its simplest rendition a story used in career settings starts with a “before scenario” which may be a problem or an undeveloped opportunity followed by the “after scenario,” which is the triumphant solution and its benefit. You can enrich the before-after story form by adding suspense including how you met challenges and persisted to implement novel solutions. Stories of 80 to 150 words accommodate a beginning, middle, and end. Following is an outline that will help embellish your stories:

1. **Problem or Opportunity.** A challenge, need, or identification of change or alternative
2. **Importance.** Dire consequences if no action is taken or a proposed alternate action. Scope and scale may be important
3. **Approach.** Ingenious solution and strategy used
4. **Obstacles Overcome.** The massive hindrances you surmounted to complete the task
5. **Result.** The success achieved and the amazing result
6. **Benefit.** The value of the resulting difference, the enduring benefit of change, and the further influence beyond the initial impact

## Tips for Writing Your Stories

**Starter Ideas for Stories.** Your story prompts may include achievements such as:

Achievements	Projects executed	Productivity gains	Rapid scaling
Challenges met	Commendations	Process changes	Infrastructure
Initiatives led	Awards	Morale turnarounds	development
Differences made	Aha! Moments	Reversal of bad practices	Policy formulations
Milestones	Breakthroughs	Bottlenecks removed	Training

As a next step, annotate each story topic that relates to your career goals and the job postings you plan to submit to. At this point restrict yourself to phrases. Avoid sentences and editing until later. Now you are prepared to develop stories using the outline of the previous section.

Adhering to the outline will ensure that you develop a story in a sequence that will be easy for the reader to follow.

### A Remedy for Being Heavy on Process and Light on Achievement

What if your job seems devoid of achievements? In work that is process rather than project intensive jobs entail performing a set of tasks each day. You achieve performance excellence by you meeting expectations and keeping pace with the workload at a commendable rate. If this fits your situation, you may find your stories by reviewing the non-routine challenges you have met: New programs, initiatives, methods, technologies, and organizational restructurings you have contributed to.



Photo credited to a French artist in William H. Ukers article

The basic job may not have changed, but as you have gained longevity with the organization, you may have trained others, led teams in making adjustments, served on a task force to improve productivity, and taken on more responsibility. These factors show that you have brought value to your employer. They offer potential for being focal points of stories.

## Enhance Your Stories With “Show, Don’t Tell”

Photo credited to a French artist in William H. Ukers article, *All About Coffee*.  
Republished by Coffee Crossroads in article by Brian Lokker, 2013

Note the difference in a story about the origin of coffee:

- **A descriptive approach.** Coffee is a beverage brewed from the roasted and ground seeds of the coffee berry. Coffee has been grown since the 15<sup>th</sup> century in the Arabian Peninsula.
- **A story approach.** Legend has it that coffee was discovered by an Ethiopian goat herder. One day, Kaldi noticed his flock munching on the red berries of a tall shrub and frolicking energetically to the next bush. He tried a few of the berries himself, and shortly he was dancing right along with the goats. A monk who happened to see Kaldi's coffee-induced dance decided to gather some berries for his brothers—who found that the fruit took them to a higher spiritual plane.

Good career stories include elements of emotion, risk of failure, insights, and leadership. In job searching, you need to select and write your stories to mirror the aspirations of the employer. In telling your story, set the stage to take the reader to the scene and encourage identifying with you and the challenges you have met. Borrow from the craft of fiction writers who hook their readers by the adage “show, don’t tell.”

## Ways to Include Stories in Resumes

When developing stories for your resume, concentrate on the requirements of a position you plan to submit an application to. Your analysis and reflections will help you identify aspects of your capabilities and qualifications that match the employer’s needs. Select story choices that are most relevant to the employer’s interests. In the best of cases a story can act as a springboard to prompt your reader to raise questions you would like to answer.

Consider preparing bullet points to introduce achievements broadly. Add shortened versions of one or more stories that amplify specific cases.

## Conclusion

Reflecting on achievements and preparing stories engages you in a process that adds traction in job searching and improves effectiveness in influencing others in work settings.

Does developing your stories make resume writing and career interactions more productive and enjoyable? Yes, according to client reports. But you will need to find the proof of this yourself.

Good luck! I will be grateful if you can loop me in by sharing your observations and experience in creating stories..

Marilyn Tullius writes on topics of career communications and job searching.

