

# Using Stories To Increase Influence

## Are you under the influence?

Last year my wife and I were out doing some Christmas shopping (funnily enough, we weren't alone...). As we were looking at the decorations in the shops, she said "I wonder if we will ever get to a point in Australia where we don't have Christmas displays that include snowmen, sleighs and snowflakes?"

In recent years we have seen more "Australiana" in Christmas displays - kangaroos and emus, and Santa on a surfboard. But the old British or European images of snow and of a white Christmas are very powerful ones that have persisted for many years.

As of course has the story of Christmas itself! Regardless of what we "believe", most of us are still "under the influence" of Christmas - we do the things that are part of the story of Christmas: we give gifts, celebrate...and even sing Christmas carols in the shower!

## So what's this got to do with anything?

Well, it shows us how powerful stories are in influencing our behaviour. We don't do these things because someone is making a logical argument for doing them! We do them because we **believe** in the story that we are presented with - so we are willing to let the story influence our behaviour.

The same principle applies in the workplace. How often have you tried to influence someone to do something by telling them the reasons why they should - only to see them do exactly the opposite?

If we want to increase our influence, it's not enough to just make a logical argument for what we want. To be a more effective leader, manager, salesperson or colleague, we need to help people to **believe** in us.

## How stories lead to belief and influence

People don't need more information - what they are looking for is a reason to believe some of the information that they hear!

So why should they believe you? It all depends on the story you tell. Stories lead to belief because they connect with the common humanity in all of us.

The two main questions that people want the answer to before they will believe you - and before they will allow you to influence them - are:

**Who are you?** Where are you from? What's your background? What has influenced you? What early experiences made you who you are? If you can let people see who you are and help them to feel that they know you personally, they will be able to decide for themselves whether to believe you and be influenced by you.

**Why are you here?** What's your reason for doing this job? What part of it do you believe in? And what do you *really* want from this situation? Until they know that, people will assume that you have more to gain from it than they do!

**In summary: think about who you really are and why you're here, then tell that story - and watch people's belief in you grow!**