

DAILY REPORT

LAW INC.

Knowing the story's destination, listeners pay attention to unravel the mystery of how you get to that destination.



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Hail to the public speaker-in-chief

OBAMA'S TALE OF 'FIRED UP! READY TO GO!' is a great lesson in storytelling

BARACK OBAMA MADE HISTORY this week for many reasons: a slumping economy, a brilliant campaign, a message that connected with voters and changing demographics.

Still another reason was Obama's extraordinary ability to communicate with listeners, connect with them and move them. Much has been written about his oratorical skills. His voice is so wonderful it could make the contents of a bottle of Nyquil sound interesting. And he has great speechwriters.

But President-elect Obama also is a great storyteller off script. I watched a clip of him telling the story of his chant "Fired Up! Ready to Go!" And how it originated in Greenwood, S.C. (You can find it on YouTube by searching "Greenwood, S.C.," and "Obama"). It's a wonderful lesson in how to tell a story.

Step 1: Start with the point

Like all good storytellers, Obama begins with the point. "I want to [tell] a story that some of you know. It shows the importance of one voice. It's a story of my first trip to Greenwood."

In addition to ensuring that your listeners get the point, starting with the "moral" creates a mystery that drives the narrative. Knowing the story's destination, listeners pay attention to unravel the mystery of how you get to that destination.

Let's say that you start by saying, "I want to tell you a story that illustrates how little mistakes can lose a lawsuit." If your listeners want to win lawsuits, they'll listen carefully to find out how.

Step 2: Narrate chronologically

Obama allows his story to unfold as a series of chronological events.

"I fly into Greenville and get in late. It's about midnight. I get to my hotel about 12:30. I'm exhausted. I've been campaigning for 10 straight days and I miss my daughters. I miss my wife. I'm dragging my suitcase into my hotel room when suddenly I get this tap on

my shoulder. I look back. It's my staff person who says, 'senator, we've got to wake up at 6 a.m. tomorrow.' I said, 'Why?' He said, 'Because we have to go to Greenwood like you promised.'"

Of course, Obama could have just said, "We woke up early and drove to Greenwood." But that wouldn't be nearly as interesting as allowing the story to unfold in movie-like fashion.

Attorneys can enliven their presentations with the same narrative style. You could say, "the judge was mad." Or you could say, "I went in to see the judge to discuss the motion. Sitting behind his desk, he looked angry. 'Well,' he said. 'I've decided that you're either an idiot or are trying to make me angry. Which is it?'"

The narration is more interesting.

Step 3: Details make it live

Obama includes vivid details. Once he arrives in Greenwood, S.C., he describes meeting Edith Childs, "she's dressed like she's going to church," he said. "She's got her church hat on." The church hat brings the story to life.

I worked with a lawyer who told a story about an emergency hearing held in a judge's home. He grabbed his listeners by describing the living room where the hearing occurred.

Then Obama explains how Childs started chanting "Fired Up! Ready to Go!" At first he was surprised, but soon his fatigue melted away and he felt "Fired up!" And "ready to Go!"

Step 4: Re-emphasize the point

Obama ends by reminding the listeners of the point: "One voice can change the world." Re-emphasis brings finality.

Step 5: Practice

Obama has told the Greenwood story many times, refining it with practice. Great storytellers rehearse a lot.

Learn to tell a story. As our president-elect knows, it's a skill that can take you a long way. 🎤