



Embrace Detours

In this story you will learn how to connect a personal story with a corporate message.

The situation ...

One of my clients, in order to expedite the process of installing a new IT program, used an existing platform, rather than creating a new, customized version. After almost a year's worth of efforts that included several postponed go live dates, management decided to stop the current project and direct the efforts toward creating a new platform. For those involved with the effort in the past year, this decision was very disappointing. It would be difficult to get the team excited about starting the project again, this time with a new platform.

The updated project was to be kicked off at a team meeting. I was in the role of the project lead and the client and I were discussing how to convey a positive message about this change in direction. It was clear to us that explaining the facts and data behind this decision might not be sufficient. It lacked emotional impact. We needed the team to embrace the new tool. The question was how to keep the team members motivated to re-start with a different tool.

It was decided that I would open the meeting with a personal story, a kind of parallel narrative account.

The Story ...

On a beautiful Bavarian morning, my husband and I began a hike in the Austrian Alps. We were the team. We carefully plan these hikes and had a clear picture of two possible routes to reach the top. The previous winter we had hiked half of the path on what was deemed to be the shorter route, and since we were familiar with that path, and because it was shorter, we decided that that would be the best route. As we began the journey, I envisioned what was ahead of us, how it would feel to get to the apex, and how wonderful the view would be when we arrived.

The air was crisp as we began following the trail up and down the route. As we continued, the trail changed and suddenly was encumbered with rock outcroppings. These unexpected hurdles slowed our progress, and when we checked our GPS for better navigation, it showed that we should take the next possible right...

But, instead of a path to the right, there were only larger stone boulders, I mean really big stone blocks. We had already spent more time climbing than we had anticipated, and I became concerned that we would not get to the top, which was our clear objective. Even though I wondered if we should stop and go back to the beginning, our car in the parking lot, we continued.

As we searched, we finally saw a tiny, narrow path to the right, a new way to move forward. We started on this detour from our original plan. The path was wet and muddy. Soon we became totally soaked as this path took us underneath a hidden waterfall. The waterfall was not high or wide, but it was breathtaking because of the rocks surrounding it. When we emerged on the other side, we stopped for rest and sat listening to the music of the falls.



Rejuvenated, we moved on. We followed a long trail around the waterfall. Progress was slow, though. It felt like we were not nearing our objective. I kept telling myself, “slow and steady, slow and steady.” I noticed, despite our slow progress, the route was enjoyable. The path was lined with little flowers in a huge array of colors. As we climbed higher and higher, a narrow pass between two rock walls appeared that we squeezed ourselves through.

Suddenly we had arrived. We were standing on a ledge looking at the valley below us. The view was incredible. The panorama in front of us was stunning, even more wonderful than we had anticipated.

The detour my husband and I had taken provided us with wonderful memories of the hidden waterfall, the beautiful flowers and the amazing view, but also gave us pride in our ability to overcome adversities, adapt to a changing environment, and still reach our goal.

Result and Message ...

After I told the story, I related to the team members that what I had learned from that experience was the truth that sometimes a detour can be better than the original plan.

I explained this was exactly what happened while we were running the current project. We recognized we were on the wrong path as we faced many technical issues, which slowed the progress of the project down, like the stone blocks and rocks on my hike. The objective has not changed on our project, only the way to it achieve has. We learned a lot from the original planned path. That information and experience will help us in completing the project.

At the end of my speech, I asked the following question: “Did you ever find yourself suddenly on a detour, which turned out to be the better route to take?”

This story was helpful for our team. Facts and data would not have had the same impact. The story aided the team in accepting and embracing the challenge of our current situation. The start of that meeting refreshed our members so that they could see the value of the new vision for the project. Our team came to realize that embracing the detour is sometimes more exciting than staying on the original plan.

Strong Business Storytelling is not a myth, it is a method which follows a set of rules...!

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