

## Mark Sanborn | Executive Summary

For years, we used to say, “Leaders tell a better story.” Certainly there’s power in being able to tell an engaging and memorable story to get your point across clearly. However, I want to stretch your thinking today and suggest that leaders don’t just tell a better story, they make the story better.

Before you can influence someone’s story, you have to understand at which of the four levels of story they find themselves in life.

### Level One: Stuck

People who are stuck have given up hope and resigned themselves to their lot in life. What do those people need? They need a nudge in the form of hope.

1) Resell them on themselves.

I used to say, “Leaders sell people on themselves.” I no longer believe that. Watch kids; they know they’re valuable. No one has to sell them on their potential. They have vivid imaginations and big dreams. Unfortunately, many times through socialization they begin to be condemned and bullied, and they no longer believe in their own value.

2) Re-narrate their story

Have you ever heard someone say, ‘I tried that, and it didn’t work so I stopped trying?’ They took the exception and made it the rule. As a leader, you’ve got to raise the possibility that maybe they have misinterpreted their story. Convince them to go back and reevaluate their past.

3) Reenergize people

Hope is having something new to try and being willing to try it. As a leader, be the one to give your people and your organization the hope of better days ahead.

### Level Two: Struggle

Heroism isn’t possible without struggle.

1) Provide encouragement

Remind them that nobody is exempt from struggle.

2) Refocus them from their present struggles to their future hopes.

3) Redefine failure

What would happen if in our organizations, we defined failure and struggle as early indicators of success. If we said to people, “You’re struggling, that’s good, because without resistance there’s no hope of reward.”

### **Level Three: Shaped**

1) Look for the lesson.

Life puts us in courses we wouldn't voluntarily take. We get stuck in these courses, and we can learn or languish. No matter how bad the circumstances in your life are, you can look for the lesson.

2) Look for the destination.

Your resume is current until the day you retire; your legacy will live beyond you. What is the destination you hope to achieve in your work and life?

3) Look at the affect your story has on others.

It's selfish to think that we can live our lives in isolation. What we do affects others profoundly. The stories of our lives overlap, intersect, and make an impact.

### **Level Four: Shapers of Stories**

Positively shape, affect, and influence the stories of the people with whom you work.

Catch the other person's story

Respond to their story

Ask questions about their story

Feel

Tell Your Story

### **Action Plan:**

- ✓ Over the next month, make a concerted effort to uncover the plotlines in the stories of the lives around you. In particular, ask intentional questions to your teammates in an attempt to gauge which level of story they're currently living.
- ✓ This week, take initiative to inject optimism and hope into your teammates. People naturally get discouraged and bogged down in life. Be an encouraging and reenergizing force in their stories.