



# Signs that you are **A BAD STORYTELLER**

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Have you ever tried retelling an amazing story, and realised halfway through that your audience isn't responding to it as you'd hoped? You remember the story captivating you when you heard it, but you've already lost interest in ending it as you look at the expressions of the people around you. What went wrong?

Well, as a terrible storyteller myself, I can quite easily tell you what you did wrong. Here are some ways in which you're messing up that awesome story:

#### **MISTIMED LAUGHTER**

A big issue I struggle with is laughing at a story, before I've even told it. You have to pick your story and your timing right. Sometimes I end up laughing so much at an as-yet untold part of my story, that it exasperates my audience. Furthermore, many of these situations are only funny to the people who were present in that moment, so after all that build up of breathless laughter, when you actually reveal what is supposed to be funny, people end up unimpressed.

#### **ENDING BEFORE BEGINNING**

This is a problem I often have where I'm so anxious to avoid causing any undue stress to my audience that I tell them the ending before I get through the story. It

goes something like this:

*Me: "So, on my trip to the Niagara falls last year, we actually took a wrong turn on our way back to Toronto and ended up on a one way route to the US!"*

*Audience waiting to have their mind blown: "What?! How?"*

*Me: "Don't worry. We managed to get back without any trouble. So, this is what happened..."*

By telling them that nothing of consequence happened, I made the audience lose half the interest in the story. What I've learnt from great storytellers is, keep your audience on their toes, and don't reveal any information early on that doesn't need to be revealed. If like me, you find it difficult to play up a story and keep people keyed up knowing that in the end nothing happens, know that their temporary stress is better than the exasperation of listening to a long story with a known ending. You wouldn't read a book's last page first, or watch the ending of a movie before the beginning, so why tell a story backwards?

#### **FORGOTTEN DETAILS**

This is quite the opposite of the last problem, where halfway through your retelling of a story you realise you've missed out a couple of key details or plot points. Now you have to track back, and

explain those details before coming back to the story. This is another common problem I face, and it goes something like this:

*Me: "We were on our way back from the falls, and my uncle managed to get onto a road which he thought would take us back to Toronto, but actually went to the US border. We realised this once my brother checked Maps on his phone, but by that time we were stuck. We were thinking of how to go back, when US border patrol made us pull over."*

*Audience: "How did your uncle make such a big mistake? Couldn't you just take a U-turn?"*

*Me: "Oh, so you need to know this: the highways there aren't easy to navigate because if you miss your exit then you're basically doomed. Also, my uncle has some cognitive issues which make him forgetful and exhausted a lot."*

*Audience: "What in the world?! Why was he driving then?"*

*Me: "Oh, I guess I didn't mention this bit either. He was the only Canadian citizen in the car with a driver's licence. Oops. Anyway, so..."*

I'm all for non-linear storytelling in books and movies, but in real life, it has the potential to ruin your story. So try to remember the order in which the details of the story need to be revealed.

#### **STORY HOPPING**

A lot of people have problems sticking to a single story at a time, and they end up hopping from one story to the next without really finishing any of them. The issues with this are pretty obvious, and you leave your audience irritated by not satisfactorily ending whichever story you're on. I bet you've caught the drift of what I'm going to do next by now. Here's what the worst kind of story hopping looks like:

*Me: "...so there were five people in our car: the uncle who was driving, my brother, my mum, myself and another uncle of mine. This uncle actually lives in Norway. I've only been there once when I was a kid, and that was the only time I hadn't got lost abroad. That's a thing; I get lost every time I travel. It happened in Malaysia and Thailand too. Oh by the way, this Norwegian uncle's daughter just had her own daughter, and you wouldn't believe how adorable she is! Wait, I think I have pictures..."*

*Misled audience who just want to play along: "Aw! She's adorable!"*

Needless to say, that is not a good way to tell a story. Those are cute pictures though, so you're likely to be forgiven.

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