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Ditch the deck: Share stories instead

By Teri Quimby, JD, LLM

“That movie was great!” Can you think about a time when you said that? Maybe it’s a line you can’t get out of your head or a suspenseful story scene.

Trailers—those short teasers made to draw viewers into a full story—help predict a movie’s success. If trailers are engaging, viewers tune in; if not, viewers tune out. The same can be said for board members listening to compliance reports or seeing slide decks of data. Learning lessons for compliance communication is offered by storytelling and movie neuroscience knowledge.^[1]

Researchers found that successful results are from decreased written and visual complexity—along with a great opening line. If too much is going on, focus is blurred, and confusion results. Engagement opportunity is lost, and the viewer—or board member—tunes out.

The first sentence is critical. I bet you are a bit like me and can recall when a speaker didn’t immediately engage an audience. We tuned out and turned our attention to other matters like emailing or making a grocery list. Can facts and figures be turned into relatable business stories to engage the board and others? Yes.

Business storytelling is a hot topic these days. Those in compliance should not ignore its importance. Time is well spent on learning to craft better stories. A recent *Harvard Business Review* covers this topic, with a feature article showing steps to communicate a compelling narrative.^[2] Not surprisingly, canceling complexity and using data sparingly to support a story is included.

Karen Eber also discusses data and stories in her 2023 book, noting that they can work well together. Although we may favor data to support our points, it’s possible to be more persuasive by using it to support our stories. Applying these ideas to compliance communication, good stories can bridge the gap between data and the board’s understanding. And that likely leads the board “to better insights, discussions, and decisions.”^[3]

How will you share stories to create dialogue?

¹ Miles Hatfield, “Using Neural Synchrony to Predict Box Office Success,” *Medium*, September 13, 2017, https://medium.com/@miles_writes/were-on-the-same-wavelength-7af012ca5b3.

² Frances X. Frei and Anne Morriss, “Story-Telling That Drives Bold Change: How to Craft a Narrative That Matters,” *Harvard Business Review*, November–December 2023, 62–71, <https://hbr.org/2023/11/storytelling-that-drives-bold-change>.

³ Karen Eber, *The Perfect Story: How to Tell Stories That Inform, Influence, and Inspire*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Harper

Horizon, 2023): 177–180.

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