

How to Tell a Story...about Yourself



Making a Connection. Transparency. Empathy. Emotional IQ. Self-Awareness.

All the above are sought by interviewers who want to know:

- Who is this person?
- How will this person get along with others?
- How will this person represent the company?
- How might this person react to stress, problems, and adversity?
- How does this person solve or overcome problems?

The fact is, even if you have the skill set to get hired, interviewers require more. Not only are you competing with others for the same opportunity, but, to be considered, a company wants to feel confident that you will be an asset to its culture and values and that you intend to commit to them. So they will probe with questions that are about who you are as a human being, not just a worker. They want you to reveal your character.

The first step in telling a story of yourself is deciding what is appropriate per the company and opportunity you seek. We have thousands of stories that essentially make up who we are. Remember, we are shaped by events and our reactions to them. We are the characters in our own movies.

Watch the following video (first three minutes or so) of Bill Gates in a mock interview:

<https://youtu.be/5dQ6t7g5Vpo>. Bill Gates is the co-founder of Microsoft and is one of the wealthiest people in the world.

Pay special attention to the way he puts his character and personality into answers he gives about his skills, working with others, his ambitions, aspirations and fascinations. He is telling a personal story of his character sometimes by describing what he is not.

He becomes more than just a resume, because he has a consistent story in which he describes himself in a number of ways. The characters that come alive in stories, the ones that stand out and make us remember them, are not generalized abstracts of people. We know them by their deeds and actions, by their hopes and dreams, by their persistence and determination. Find the essential story of yourself, and you will stand out to others. You will be remembered.

There are a couple of essential things that every story needs:

- Character—this is simple. In a personal story, this is you. But more importantly, decide which characteristic(s) you want the story to show, but you might save this to reveal it at the end.
- Setting—this just allows your audience to understand “context” to make it real to them. It could be a historical moment, or a particular day or location.
- Plot—these are the events. Focus on the simplest way to tell the events, which is sequential.
- Conflict—what is encountered as a problem
- Resolution—how you overcame the problem, which should highlight your characteristic or character element. What this story taught you about yourself is what you want others to know.

Now that you know what to include, let’s write your personal story.

But remember, in an interview, you need to be short and to-the-point. You can’t worry about this when you draft it, but ultimately, you will need to revise this story and pare it down so that you might describe it quickly with an answer. You also need to decide how much of your character you want to reveal and think about appropriateness (avoid TMI—too much information). And you need to think of putting yourself in a positive, personable light.

We tend to think of our personal stories as relating to major events, but actually, a story is easier to tell, the simpler it is. Our values should play themselves out in any situation, not just the major ones. Others are able to relate to common experiences and it never hurts to put a little humor into it as long as you remain humble and avoid making fun of others.

Scenario:

You are interviewing for your dream job. The interviewer asks: How are you at handling stress?

Complete your personal story elements that begin on the next page:

Characteristic(s)—which characteristics do you want to reveal that are evidence that you can handle stress?

Setting—what is the context of your story, the circumstance in which it began?

Plot—what happened?

Conflict—what was the problem or dilemma that put you under stress, describe how stress may have been effecting you or what it threatened.

Resolution—what is your punchline? Even if the outcome was not totally positive, what positive lesson was learned and how did it shape you? What did you learn about your character and what do you wish to leave with others to make a lasting impression?

Now, take what you've learned about telling a story and apply it to four or five of following. Learn these stories so that you can tell them quickly and effectively in an interview or in other professional settings.

Common questions asked in an interview:

Source: [Indeed.com](https://www.indeed.com) (with examples of answers)

1. What interests you about this role?
2. What motivates you?
3. What are your greatest strengths/weaknesses?
4. Why should we hire you?
5. What type of learner are you?
6. What does customer service mean to you?
7. How do you define success?
8. How do you handle conflict?
9. Do you consider yourself to be a leader?
10. How do you handle criticism?