Business of Story Podcast with Dr. Paul Zak – "Building Trust Through Story"

Park: Welcome to the Business of Story where we help you understand how to use the power of storytelling in your life. Whether it's for career advancement, business leadership, brand development, content marketing, sustainability, whatever your mission is like, this podcast is all about how you can use story to advance your missions further, faster.

I've got a story for you. I've been working as you know, with Arizona State University and they came to me a few years ago about helping craft a communications curriculum around a new program called the executive masters for sustainability leadership. Our agency Park&Co, we've been in the business for about 20 years and have been doing a lot of work in cause marketing, social programs and whatever. So, we've had a lot of success with that.

They say, "Can you come in and work with our executive masters students to help teach them what you know about story so that they can advance their causes." Part of this program, ASU brought in over 30 sustainability executives from around the country to help inform the development of our curriculum. We had four main threads within the curriculum.

We had sustainability strategy, global context and systems thinking, sustainability leadership and then my thread of communications. And one of the things that I found that opened my eyes up that day when they were all in town in Tempe, Arizona and we were getting their input on what they thought would make the most powerful program, is they all completely dialed in to sustainability strategy. And of course, they all had lots of great ideas around global context systems thinking. Many of them were already sustainability leaders so they had a lot of great input about the leadership threads.

But, when it came to communications, I found that I would have an audience with a lot of crossed arms looking at me. And I couldn't quite figure out why they weren't connecting with it as much, until they started talking about communications, the soft skill. And I explored this a little bit more with them and what I found is that they were quite dismissive about the communications aspect of sustainability, leadership and so forth. And I think they looked at it as a gimmick.

That storytelling and communications was just more of a gimmick, that really where the tread hits the road is doing in strategy global context leadership and so forth. So, that underscored to me that I needed to find even more scientific proof and data that story is very much a part of our biological being and is as important to our survival, as our brain, as our heart and as our lungs. So, as I looked around and you met Jonathan Gottschall in an earlier show talking about the storytelling animal and how we're hardwired for story.

I came across Dr. Paul Zak's work in narrative story development and how it releases oxytocin in our minds which is the molecule that brings us trustworthiness, that connects us as social beings and emotional beings. And Paul has done a vast amount of work in this. He's written a wonderful book called, "The Moral Molecule." He has a fantastic TED Talk. He's got videos and work that backs that up. And so I invited Paul to the show today and he graciously has taken some time out of his busy summer and has come to tell us about oxytocin.

And what do we need to know as business communicators and leaders on how we can get oxytocin released in our audiences to build trustworthy and connection so then again we can advance our missions further faster? So, with that, please give a warm welcome out there in podcast land to Dr. Paul Zak. Welcome, Paul.

Paul: Thank you, Park.

Park: So, tell us a little bit about your work starting with your title of a neuroeconomist. What is a neuroeconomist?

Paul: So, Park I know you have never made a bad decision in your life. That's your brother-in-law who was buying and investing in real estate in 2007 when everybody else knew there was a bubble. What's the deal with that? So, neuroeconomics is a field that helps start that measures of brain activity while people make decisions. And we were in particularly interested in social decisions. So, how decisions that I make are dependent on what I think you'll do. And we study things like cooperation and generosity and charity to understand why humans have this sense of who's safe to be around, who to trust, who I want to affiliate with. And if we can identify neural pathways that activate more on someone that we want to engage with.

Park: Well, you've been doing this a long time. You are the director of the Center for Neuroeconomics Studies and professor of economics psychology and management at Claremont Graduate University. So, tell us a little bit about your work in oxytocin and I've got to ask too, how did you end up with a nun as a mother?

Paul: Yeah, let's take the second one first.

Park: Okay.

Paul: For the Catholics out there, there are certain levels of being a nun. So, you've got novice nun and then you try out things and anyway at some point you have to be all in. It's the same thing for priests by the way. So, they want you try out the lifestyle before you go in. So, before she got to the highest level, she decided it wasn't for her and so she later met my dad and had kids and was a wonderful mom. But growing up in a very Catholic household drove my interest in moral behaviors. And my mom's view is that it says in the bible, that's what it is and I wondered why we get good behaviors for people who are not religious or are Buddhists or God forbid, people who are protestant.

Anyway, so we began studying more behaviors in an active way rather than just asking people, "Are you a good person, have you ever given money to the homeless?" I don't know. The brain is not great on self report. We don't know what we do often and what has gone past. We surely don't know why. So oxytocin is a chemical the brain makes that is classically associated with child birth and breastfeeding. But in a dozen years of experiments we showed that once you interact with a stranger who you perceive as safe, who signals to you that he or she is safe or trustworthy that your brain makes oxytocin and that motivates you to interact in turn. So, reciprocate good for good. So, it's a biological substrate of the Golden Rule. If you treat me [inaudible 00:08:13].

Park: Do only humans have oxytocin, I'm sorry Paul, is it only found in humans?

Paul: Only found in mammals. So, it's this Golden Rule. If you treat me nice, my brain makes oxytocin and most of the time motivates me to treat you nice in return and of course

most of the time is where the story gets interesting. But one of the things we wanted to look at was whether these kinds of personal interaction might occur at a distance. And so that's how we began studying the story about 10 years ago.

We started looking at the story as a potential stimulus for oxytocin release because as you said, we know that stories sometimes change our behaviors. We watch a documentary or we see a TV commercial and we get excited about doing something. So, we want to connect story to action and identify again, what makes a good story good and what are the key factors that motivate action after you hear a story or see a story.

Park: Now, you have a tremendous TED Talk on this that really takes the audience through it and I highly recommend everybody to just go and search Paul Zak in TED Talks. You talk about in there something that happened to you in the pigeon drop and I think it is a great example of how, well you demonstrated that the release of oxytocin. And it led you astray, but it's a good example of how folks can use it for good and not evil too in our communications work. Can you tell us about the pigeon drop?

Paul: Right, so when I was 18 I worked at a local gas station by the freeway in Central California. And that gets you really interested in human behavior. If you work at a gas station for a year, you see the gangbangers, the drug users, the prostitutes and you get curious about the humans. And anyway I was the victim of a classic con called the pigeon drop in which a person claims to find something valuable, in this case jewelry, and someone calls missing that jewelry and I take the call. But the guy who found it can't wait and there's a reward. And so he offers to split the reward with me if I just front him $100, I'll get the $200 when the guy shows up.

I think if I were over 18 I wouldn't have probably fallen for that, but I did. And as you said oxytocin makes us treat people we think are safe in an appropriate way because there's great value in having a big social community around you. And this good behavior is one way we sustain that social group or sustain ourselves in that social group. So, I thought this guy was an upfront guy, he was a good guy.

And so I did front $100 [inaudible 00:11:03]. The jewelry was cheap paste and the guy who claimed to offer the reward never showed up. So, this still can be used to manipulate people. So, the subjective experience for your brain making oxytocin is one of empathy, increased empathy. So, when we tell stories we do often want people to empathize with us or with the characters in the story and that makes us care about them, care about what happens in the story. How the story resolves.

But we are persuading people and so I think it is important to understand that although we're always trying to persuade the image around us, that we should do that with some care because stories sometimes can be used for ISIS recruiting, for people to join their terrorist organization is an example of a negative effect of storytelling. As you may know we worked a lot with the Department of Defense and intelligence community on stories to help them understand why stories are persuasive and how to generate counter messages. So, it's a really interesting emerging field that we're involved in.

Park: Now, if you study game dynamics and you hear a lot of people talking about World of Warcraft and some of those other games and how it helps release or it absolutely releases cortisol in the [inaudible 00:12:34], that really focuses attention or the neurotransmitter dopamine which helps well up and trigger optimism. How does

oxytocin play with some of those other chemicals in the brain to build that trustworthiness you're talking about?

Paul: So, it has actually a lot of effects. So, firstly you should say that oxytocin, like many other neurochemicals in your body, is both the hormone and a neurotransmitter. So, neurotransmitters are active in the brain and hormones are active outside the brain roughly. So, within the brain, oxytocin is an acute response to a positive social interaction and one of the key findings that we discovered in 2009 I guess, was that stories can trigger that same effect.

But because we're fundamentally interested in actions and not feelings, although again oxytocin increases our subjective side of empathy, we found we used stories that are associated with causes like we use public service announcements in many of our experiments. And we just identified when stories cause people to donate money they earned in the experiment to the causes featured. Even though none of these public service announcements asked for money, they just highlighted causes like don't drink and drive or childhood cancer or other things. So, we found that effective stories had two components.

One was attention and the other was this emotional resonance that's associated with oxytocin release. So, all storytellers know that attention is important. Neurologically, attention is a very scarce resource in the brain. This is why even though [inaudible 00:14:19] we can multitask, we really can't because your attention basically is a single focused beam. And it's an expensive beam to turn on in the brain and so your brain wants to save energy. And so the first thing I need to do is get your attention. If I can't get your attention with my story then whatever influence I want to have on you is going to fail. I'm sorry that my phone is ringing. Let me see if I can stop that.

Park: I feel your pain.

Paul: I will just take a break and I'll just pick up from right before it started ringing, I apologize.

Park: Yeah, no problem. Okay.

Paul: So, I'll start with attention is a very scarce resource in the brain and so every storyteller knows that if I don't capture my audience's attention, I'm not going to have any effect at all. It was shown in a variety of experiments that attention is not sufficient to motivate action after you hear a story. You need both attention in this emotional resonance that's associated with oxytocin release and the way that it occurs is something that storyteller's know and that is by creating a social conflict.

And so in classic storytelling mode, the story of Hero's Journey from Joseph Campbell, there is a moment of crisis. There's a moment in which the hero cannot resolve what's happening. And many classic short stories, TV commercials, even newspaper advertisements have that same kind of hero's journey structure. And that structure or more generally, sort of a dramatic arc, allows us to maintain attention but also still care about the characters in the story. So, when both of those things happen, I'm attending to the story and when I become emotionally engaged in the story then I can actually move people to act on the information in the story.

So, if one of those two aspects is missing then we find that there's no way to influence people's behavior.

Park: Paul, let's take a break for one of our sponsor stories and when we come back I would like to have you talk about, how does story actually work? How does it work in this dramatic arc to release this oxytocin and how can business folks, how can communicators use it to their advantage for good and not evil as we pointed out earlier? So, we'll be right back after this message with Dr. Paul Zak. All right, Paul how's it going on your end there?

Paul: Good, how are you feeling? You sound good.

Park: Yeah, I'm just trying to get that mojo going.

Paul: There you go.

Park: And Paul too when we get a chance, if you can talk a little bit about the video that you produced, the one empathy, neurochemistry and the dramatic arc.

Paul: Sure.

Park: I would love to drive people to that too to have them look at your work.

Paul: That would be great.

Park: All right, here we come. Welcome back to the Business of Story and my guest today, Dr. Paul Zak, neuroeconomist and the guy that tracked down the moral molecule called oxytocin. And why is oxytocin important for us business communicators? Because, when we tell story, use narrative with conflict, we're able to release the moral molecule within our audiences and build trust between them. So, Paul can you talk to us a little bit about how that happens and why really does story release oxytocin and how can we be better at that when we are addressing an audience? Whether it's a PowerPoint we're delivering, it's content marketing online, it's an ad, whatever it is that we need to do to connect and build trustworthiness with our audiences.

Paul: So, we've got some very specific findings from the neuroscientist experiments we've run on storytelling. But first is that as I mentioned earlier, attention is a scarce resource in the brain and we find that for almost in all short form stories, so that excludes movies and novels you've got about 15 seconds to capture attention. So, if I don't get your attention in the first 15 seconds, whatever happens in the next 15 or 20 or one minute doesn't matter much because your brain has sort of categorized this as uninteresting effect.

Having said that, every story doesn't work for every person. So, people who tell stories live which includes me and you, we know that sometimes there are audience members who just disengage for whatever reason. So, there are people who we can find who are behaviorally, we call super responders and those people have the strongest attentional response in the first 15 seconds. So, two take homes from that, 15 seconds to grab attention and if you can identify who is just digging the storyline I'll get out in the first 15 seconds, they are your super responders.

So, again we do that neurologically, but you might be able to do that just being a careful observer of your audience. So, these people may be the evangelists for you for whatever mission you want to go on and so it's useful to think about who those people are.

So, I live in LA and so in LA, in Hollywood speak we call that a hot open. Right, so I want to open hot. I want to capture your attention right away in effect to lay out 15 different conditions and talking about . . . it's not going to work. So, lead with a story and that story has got to have something that's going to capture my attention. The second key component is to generate this increasing tension so I continue to pay attention and I start to care about the characters in the story. So, we do that through conflict. So, stories that are told of human scale, that is that involve specific individuals as opposed to big ideas of which individuals to be more engaging because you can generate specific conflict.

So, I may be concerned about, I don't know, people cutting down the rain forest in the Amazon. But I can articulate that story by talking about one indigenous farmer who lives in the Amazon and his ancestors for thousands of years have farmed a particular type of tree, have harvested this tree. And that's a much more compelling story than a factoid like everyday 4,000 acres of the rainforest is cut down. So, once you have that human scale story then the story has to go somewhere. So, you've got to develop characters with a goal and characters that really show their emotions.

So, often in the business world we're told to "Be robots." It's all about the numbers Bob. It's about the numbers. It's not personal. But in fact we can't turn off our emotions. We can suppress them but we can't turn them off and so for storytellers in the business world you need to empower yourself to show those emotions. So, you can talk about the emotions of the people in your story, but it's better if you can actually reveal those emotions yourself if you are the vessel through which the characters' emotions are delivered to your audience.

And then once you have that emotional engagement by the audience or a big subset of the audience hopefully, then you have to allow whatever conflicts are occurring to resolve. And once that conflict resolves, there is an opportunity to put in an implicit or explicit call to action. So, now something has happened. We are attracted to stories because we have learned things about what the other humans are doing and once you show how your hero has resolved his or her story, then it's time to let your audience understand that they too could be in a similar situation and they too may want to emulate what the hero in your story did.

Park: It's all about creating meaning I guess in our mind's absolute need, thirst, recreating meaning in everything that's happening around us. And when we just bombard people with data, PowerPoint, bullet points, charts and graphs, there's not a lot of meaning associated with that to our mind and it's starts scrambling to develop its own meaning. And in my experiences when business leaders use story even just a little bit, I say a spoonful of story helps the data go down. They don't have to tell epic journeys, but little anecdotes around the data that they're trying to express, it just ignites the brain the subconscious and I've seen it with our students.

And in some cases you typically end up with students that are terrific at presenting their story and then you end up with a handful of them that just didn't quite get there. Yet, when they use some of the most basic story structure and even if their

presentation technique wasn't the greatest, there was just simply something about that structure that seemed to resonate with the subconscious of the audiences.

And when they were done, the audiences would come up and say, "Wow Brad or whomever, that's the presentation I've seen you make. That's fantastic." And I've heard those reports come back time and time again and I think it's just the basic structure story. Even a poorly told story just seems to connect and resonate with the mind and I'm wondering if you've seen that as well.

Paul: We have, I was talking to a filmmaker named Ted Frank a couple of weeks ago. He was filming, talking about storytelling and you know how this filming goes. On a break we were chatting and he said, "Our brains are built for stories." And I said, "Well, I've got to put my scientist hat on." Our brains in a very real neurologic sense are built for social behaviors. Human beings are extraordinarily social, much more social than any other mammal. And that means that we're very sensitive to social information and so I agree with you that when we present social information in the form of a story, our brains really engage.

They don't engage so much when the social information or any information is told as facts. So, because we're such social creatures, stories, particularly good stories will resonate with us. But again, these constraints, having enough tension, understanding that attention is a scarce resource and allowing that tension to resolve are also very important. But this goes back to 2,600 years ago with Aristotle. So, I should note Park, that as you know there's an animation of me talking about this that you can find online, a short video called Empathy, Neurochemistry and the Dramatic Arc.

And if you just Google that or YouTube it you'll find an overview of this in six minutes which also resolves hopefully the skeptical audience brain engaging right now, which is "Gosh, either it's trivial because I've heard all this before," or "How the heck can they know this?" So, again we've spent 10 years and about two and half million dollars doing funded research to identify neurologically what's happening in the brain during effective stories. And in particular again, correlating that brain activity to action.

And just to put a fine point on it, oxytocin is a chemical your brain makes, but we can also safely shoot synthetic oxytocin into the brain and we do that during effective stories, we find that people are more immersed in the stories, they care more about the characters and they're substantially more likely to, in this case, donate to a charity associated with a cause shown in that story. So, it tells us that that's the key action button that you need to get from story which is, you've got to turn on that oxytocin empathy emotional resonance connection.

And when that happens, then the floodgates open up and then you can actually influence people to do things that hopefully are good for them, good for the organization, good for society.

Park: So, how do you get your subjects to allow you to put a gigantic syringe in their head to shoot oxytocin into their brains?

Paul: Yeah, we use these really giant needles that we shoot . . . no we don't do that. So, actually we have shown that we can safely spray oxytocin into your science cavities and after about an hour enough of that leaks into your brain to affect your behavior. So, it's

not too [inaudible 00:27:18] but it's not a big needle either. So, it's very safe. All this has been approved by the ethics committee of my university.

So, we have a causal relationship via the oxytocin infusion that tells us that if I get attention and I can get the brain to make oxytocin, then I've really got you captured. And even when we do follow-ups a week later, in those cases people remember the story better. They understand that or they say that the experience of being the experiment or in corporate work we've done of being in this consumer experience like the shopping experience is better when there's a story. And they're again, happier. It drives things like customer loyalty. For business people that are outward facing, think about creating a customer experience around a story that's immersive, that flows like a story arc, that has a resolution. It has an opportunity to act within that. So, it's like creating a story for the consumer to find themselves in because we do love story.

Park: And by the way, you can find that animation that Paul was talking about, its about a five minute piece on the Future of Storytelling website. That's where I found it and I've used it. I put it into my blog as well and it's really quite fascinating what he's found in that. And when we come back after this message from our sponsor, I would like Paul to talk about the different studies that they've done that he just hasn't randomly connected these dots.

You've done a study of people giving away money to strangers and to see if those strangers would reciprocate and give money back. You studied a bride and groom, I guess a wedding party of complete strangers in South London with this. And then you traveled as far as Papua, New Guinea to try it on the tribesmen there. So, when we come back tell us a little bit more of what you found in your studies so that we can get the skeptics, talk to the skeptics about storytelling and explain to them, no, this is not a gimmick, that these professional persuaders use on you, but it's how our brains are truly hardwired for story. So, right after this.

Okay, Paul this is great and I really appreciate it. I think our listeners are going to lap this up.

Paul: This is fun.

Park: When we come back, so talk a little bit more about the science and I love it when you were saying you skeptical. The thing that struck me too. Well, here let me just start and then we'll roll with it.

Okay, welcome back to the Business of Story and our guest today Dr. Paul Zak. Now, Paul we talked about your skepticism as a scientist and studying oxytocin. How does it really get released? Does story really release it? And you would run a test. This is at least what I took away from your TED Talk and then even doubt the findings and run the next tests to corroborate those findings. So, tell us about that.

I think it started with giving away money to strangers and with those strangers reciprocate and give money back and how did that release oxytocin? Then I think you told us about being a stranger in a very large wedding party in South London and how they opened themselves up to your studies. And then you finally ended up in Papua, New Guinea. Tell us about that please.

Paul: Right, so you can measure oxytocin even though its a fragile molecular by doing blood drops. So, all of our early studies involved taking blood and before and after people had some kind of social interaction. And we wanted to know, number one, if those random social interactions would cause oxytocin release. And number two, whether the oxytocin would affect your behavior. And as you said we began in the laboratory in really simple tasks where people could share money with others, denoting trust and then personally who got the money you could keep it all or share it back.

And indeed when we are trusted our brains make oxytocin and the more we're trusted with money, the more oxytocin released and actually the more we reciprocate. Even though you think in this classical models of economics if someone gives you money and you don't have to do anything, there's no contract isn't money the be-all and end-all of life? You should just keep it all. Almost no one does that and the type of people who do do that have many of the attributes of psychopaths and [inaudible 00:31:47] social skills because we know.

You have to go along to get along and so oxytocin again is that nice Golden Rule-like reciprocating chemical. Once we had a spent a couple of years in the lab and [inaudible 00:32:04] every different way including the oxytocin infusion to the brain, yeah, we go out in the field and taken blood before and after really in, what we call in science, ecologically valid settings. So, not the sterile laboratory setting where I can draw everything, but the messy real world in which all of us live. So, including taking blood from the wedding party before and after they say their vows, we were really concerned that the effects we were seeing were only driven by wealthy well-fed educated Westerners which is where our laboratory studies were mostly done.

So, I went to the rainforest of Papua, New Guinea for a week and took blood from indigenous people before and after they did a ritual or dance that their ancestors have done for thousands of years. And that dance itself even though they're not at war with anybody, is a great builder of community bonds via the release of oxytocin.

So, there are reasons that we have these rituals. I think from the work we're doing now, we're doing a lot more focused work on how to test ads. We can now make sure oxytocin using more around the sensors as well as the substantial responses. And we've developed a measure we call ZEST. How much ZEST does your story have and the story could be an ad or a consumer experience or a ritual? ZEST stands for Zak Engagement Statistics. So, we mathematically derive this measure and it strongly predicts how well an ad will do in market. So, a higher ZEST score tells me that this is more engaging for people's brains and it's more influential when it goes out on the marketplace.

So, I'll give you a concrete example because [inaudible 00:33:52]. This was just released a couple of weeks ago. We did a project with one of our partners, SalesBrain, for a little company you may have heard of called Facebook. So, Facebook gets about two-thirds of their ad revenue now from mobile devices and they were concerned that ads on mobile devices would be less engaging neurologically and therefore potentially less motivating towards action, than ads seen on the big screen. And so we ran a study which would put these [inaudible 00:34:28] on people and collect data 1,000 a second coming out of their brain, have them watch the same sort of ads on the small screen and the big screen. And we found that at least for the four ads we tested, three of the four were actually more engaging on the small screen than the big screen.

Park: How come?

Paul: Yeah, how come is right. They attract more attention, your brain is less distracted. The emotional responses are stronger and the actions after the ads are more likely to occur. And we don't really know why. It looks like that screen, personally you're holding it. So, it's an active task. You're moving it around a little bit which forced you to pay more attention to it, where the monitor on the wall or your desktop is just sitting there and it's easier to be distracted. And so we'll continue to study why that has occurred.

But it's a really good question right, and the next thing about using neuroscience to answer that question is you don't depend on self report or how much I like my phone or whatever. We can actually just go and test not only if it's more compelling, but how much more. Right, the ZEST measure is a linear measure of the brain's engagement in this story. And so once we have that measure, we need to say, well this specific ad on mobile device was 70% more engaging with the 60 people we tested than this same ad on a 17-inch monitor.

So, I think we're really into a world where we can blend the arc and the science of storytelling. My group, we can't make stories. I can certainly guide you on how to make a good story, but when you have a story we can tell you what it should contain to make it good and we can test it and we can test the real versions of it. So, get from this first you don't have to do this using neuroscience, but Park I'm sure you'll agree with me, you've got to practice and practice and practice in a workshop and refine.

Storytelling is like any other skill. The more you do it, the better you'll get at it and if you know the basic outlines that you're trying to hit, try it in a couple of different audiences. Try it in small scale before you release it everywhere. Steve Jobs was famous for being an excessive practicer of his big announcements for Apple because he wanted them to look seamless. And so I think for all of us, given the advice of your work and what we've talked about today, knowing the content but delivering it in a really excellent way really makes a big difference again when you try to move people to action.

Park: Paul, with the work you've done in ZEST, are you coming to the conclusion or at least maybe I'm making this up in my mind, that the fact that you've got a mobile device and you're more, it's literally attached to you where other devices are not. You're staring at it from afar. It's attached to your hand, you're looking at it, it causes you to focus on it. So, you have a bit of a captive audience in and of yourself. Does that mean that stories don't have to be quite as good on a mobile device because you are physically focused on it or what do you think about that?

Paul: That's a great question. I don't think we fully know the answer. We're still studying this. But at least [inaudible 00:37:44] it looks like from the brain's perspective, a good story is a good story is a good story. So, if it's a good story through whatever medium I am transmitting it to you, your brain will engage. And if it's a bad story, it's a bad story and your brain will disengage. So, the one story when we looked at it for Facebook, that was better on the big monitor than on the small screen obviously was a very poor story. Structurally it was a very poor story. It was too long, it had too many jumps in it. This was a video. Actually advertisement for the movie Entourage. It was just very poorly done.

So, for any of us who know about story structure, you would look at it and then go, "Who made that little clip? This is awful." We tested actually almost all, as for upcoming

movies, and the other movie clips had a little dramatic arc there. So, it introduced the characters, there were some conflicts, something happened, you want to find out. So, storytelling can be done even in a very short form.

So, we've actually tested commercials, the shortest 15 seconds, and found them to be very engaging if they're well thought out, well structured and well produced. So, again, that's the preparation. If you think about story as a way to influence others, then you've got to think about having a really tight story. Even if you're just using this to open up your presentation with lots of data, it's got to be compelling and I'll on target. I should also say that we've seen some wonderful apps that we've tested.

We did a project for [inaudible 00:39:23] Advertising Agency BBDO a couple of months ago and they made some extraordinarily good ads. And they have very high ZEST scores. But some of those ads to do not fit the products very well. So, in market they don't do as well as they could because there's a lack of congruence between the communication, the story and the product. So, think about your audience for the people listening. If the audience is full of business people and I'm telling a story about, I don't know, the homeless guy I saw last week, it may not appeal to that mix. It may not be relevant to the story you're telling.

So one of the great sayings about writing is, "Don't write what you need to say, write what the reader needs to learn or hear." And so I think the same thing is for storytelling. Tell the story that's going to be engaging for the audience that you want to reach. Not a story that you like because it amuses you or you find compelling. And so again that's the preparation and it takes some work.

Park: Paul, where can we find out more about ZEST?

Paul: You can go to our ZESTxLabs website. It's zestxlabs.com or you can just Google me Paul Zak and you'll find links to everything I'm doing. And all these articles by the way for hopefully our good skeptical listeners, online they have all our scientific papers as well as lots of amazing articles and media that I've done, talking about this. So, lots of resources for people who want to build better stories and I'm happy to help people who have questions. Reach out.

Park: So, in a quick recap and I appreciate that Paul, a story, you've got to open hot. You have to have a ball in play, you have to get the attention of your listener or the viewer or the people you're in front of and you've got about 15 seconds to do that or maybe even shorter. I read something the other day that now the goldfish has a longer attention span than the average human thinks to the attention economy. So, we're weighing in about eight seconds.

Then the story has to create real conflict and build conflict and take your audience somewhere. And I think that is true and every guest we've had is talking about adding conflict. You have to have it. It's the marrow of every story. And in business we're nervous about talking about conflict which leads to the next point. As a storyteller you need to be able to be vulnerable and empower yourself to show the emotion. I think you said, to be the vessel to transport the emotion of the hero in your story so that you can connect with your audiences, release that oxytocin and have them appreciate, trust what you're telling them and have them start living vicariously through the protagonist within your story.

And then finally it's about resolution. So, really even though I covered four points here, it's a three act structure of open hot in your exposition and act two, take them through conflict, put them through hell and bring them back again which again releases cortisol, dopamine and oxytocin, that all important loyal molecule. And then finally bring them to resolution so that every story has meaning to it for the brain.

So, my final question to you Paul, with the skeptics out there, if you were me standing in front of all those cross-armed sustainability executives and engineers and PhDs who somewhat scoffed and dismissed the approach of communications being the soft skill. What should I have said or what would you have said to that audience to get them to go, "Oh, I get it now"?

Paul: That's a deep question, but I think the short answer is, the soft skills are the hardest to obtain. And the reason you're here is because even though we all think we write well and speak well, we all can get better at that. And if you want to influence the humans around you, these are the hard skills that you've got to acquire. Physics is easy. I can run experiments in physics over and over and over and get those little molecules to do whatever in a vacuum. But human behavior is really complicated.

So, one example I gave very briefly is, since I know you so well Park, I know that you like chocolate ice cream better than vanilla and if I ask you why, you're going to give me some round about answer because it's complicated. So, humans are complicated. We don't know what we like. We can't always articulate our inner world, what we're feeling, why we do things. And because we're complicated we don't have a clear runway to access where I want you to go. So, I've got to think about more effective ways to influence people to motivate them, to engage them and storytelling is something that our brains just love. So, if we get good at that skill it becomes a really valuable skill to have in your tool belt.

Park: Well, thank you Paul and I would so encourage all of you, if you want to learn more about the science behind story, just do a Google on Dr. Paul Zak. He is more than generous with his information. He has very compelling and interesting presentations. And I have learned so much from you and your work that I've been able to share with our students and with our clients here at Park&Co and thank you again for taking the time to visit us on Business of Story.

Paul: Thank you so much Park, it was a pleasure.

Park: All right. Now, if you like what you're hearing here please rate the show, review the show, subscribe, share it with your world, throw a story around why you like it because we are all about building that trustworthiness and bringing value to your life as a business leader, brand communicator, content marketer, sustainability executive. Whatever you need to do in your life to help propel your mission and your quests, further faster, I have not found anything more powerful than storytelling to help you connect and build trustworthiness with your audiences and make it happen.

So, thank you for visiting us and one last place I'll send you is to the BusinessofStory.com. We have a number of tools that you can download right there to start building your repertoire around storytelling. So, join us again in two weeks when we will be back with another compelling guest on the Business of Story. Thank you. All right, well thanks Paul.