Business of Story Podcast with Lisa Cron – "Your Audience is Wired For Story"

Park: Welcome to the Business of Story. I'm Park Howell. I'm so happy to have you with us today. We have an amazing guest, and we'll get to her in just a minute, but I want to read to you a little bit of story soliloquy that she in her book, "Wired for Story," inspired in me.

It goes a little something like this. Our brain, like the amoeba, has one main goal: survival. We can go weeks without food, days without water, but only about 35 seconds without finding meaning in something. We constantly scan our environment probing for clues beneath the surface with an embedded app called curiosity. Curiosity is our primal search engine that captures stimuli, filters it through past experience, and helps us arrive at insights, all to help our mind predict the future in an endless battle to find clarity in the chaos around us. Nature helps in our hunt for meaning by equipping and enticing us with story to draw our rapt attention. We live vicariously through story, [crying on trouble 01:18] to see what we would do in case it happened to us. Powerful stories use urgency, novelty and surprise to deliver a truth. So what's your story?

Now again, that soliloquy was inspired in me by Lisa Cron in her book, "Wired for Story: The Writer's Guide to Using Brain Science to Hook Readers from the Very First Sentence." Lisa also shares a video tutorial called "Writing Fundamentals: The Craft of Story" which can be found at lynda.com. Her TEDx talk, "Wired for Story," opened Furman University's 2004 TEDx Conference. It's a marvelous presentation, and I really highly recommend you see it.

Without further ado, Lisa Cron, welcome to Business of Story.

Lisa: It's my pleasure to be here.

Park: Are you in the throes of just launching another book? Is it out yet?

Lisa: No, it's not out yet. I just turned it in to my publisher on the first of September, so for the past six months, I've kind of been penciling and breathing. It's nice to be able to breathe for a while.

Park: Why I liked your book so much – and correct me if I'm wrong here – "Wired for Story" is really written two authors, by an author, two authors that are writing fiction and I guess non-fiction as well.

Lisa: Oh, stories are stories, regardless of the format.

Park: As you know, the Business of Story is all about connecting business leaders, content marketers and brand strategists with what I call true story artists. We've had screenwriters and authors and educators on here, and this is why I love your book because it spoke to me as a business communicator, not necessarily as an author. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Lisa: Absolutely. The whole point is story is story regardless of the format, and when you talk about for authors, I mean, novels or any kind of written story or even written language or even spoken language, is a blip when you think about evolutionarily how long we've

been here. Story is really how we communicate. All stories are a call to action and always have been because we think in story; we think in narrative.

What I realized in working with writers and in kind of analyzing thousands and thousands and thousands of manuscripts and screenplays was that what was grabbing people had very little to do with what writers had been taught and what we tend to think of story in the way you just said, you know, story artists, and what it is that's actually grabbing people which has been grabbing them basically from the time in memorial. So when you talk about the artistry, it has a lot less to do with what we've been told, you know, beautiful language or being a "great writer."

The brain is far less picky about beautiful language than it is about really pulling us in and making us feel something because all story, as all life, is emotion-driven, which is of course the opposite of what we've been taught.

So yeah, I've found that once the book came out, my audience became as much the business world as it was writers, which was really exciting. By the time I finished the book, that was why I wanted to reach, which was basically everyone so that we both understand the power of story in terms of using it but also the power of story in terms of the way that stories are affecting us every minute of every day, whether we're consciously aware of it or not, and usually we're not.

Park: In your TEDx presentation, you talked about story being more important to our evolution than our opposable thumbs.

Lisa: Yeah, that's very true. Our opposable thumbs, all they do is let us hang on a story that told us what to hang on to. When you think about it, we think in story, we think in narrative; it's how we make sense of everything. I mean, just think of yourself, whoever you are, whether you're a business person or writer, you're the protagonist in your own life and you evaluate everything whether it's physical, emotional or conceptual based on one thing and one thing only, and that is, how is this going to help me in my own subjective reality given my agenda for the future?

We all have agendas, and that's a word that has picked up a kind of pejorative slant to it, and there's nothing pejorative about it at all. Our agenda is basically survival. So in businesses, when you're telling your own story, it's really not about why you think your product or your brand is great, but it's about the person listening, how is it going to help them achieve their agenda, and then it comes down to based on what their agenda actually is.

If I digress for one second, we always hear the golden rule, "Do unto others as you'd have others do unto you." That's actually kind of narcissistic when you think about it, because who's to say that what you want done to you is what someone else wants done to them? Very often, we find out how untrue that actually is.

So really, it's about finding out what their agenda is, and how what you've got is going to help them in a problem they're facing, and then crafting a story or a message or a brand that's going to put it in that particular context as opposed to just giving us facts.

Here's an interesting fact on that level. Studies have shown that we're 22 times as likely to remember something in story form than we are to remember a fact.

Park: Then why do you think business leaders default to facts, data, jargon instead of using that innate storyteller within them?

Lisa: I think for two reasons. One is because of what we've been taught, which is that we make every decision based on reason, looking at things objectively, in the cold light of objective reason, and we want to keep emotion at bay. The truth is, emotion is how we make every decision, and story comes down to grabbing us emotionally.

And so it feels emotion, and when we think of emotion, we think of emotional and we think of a particular gender, I hate to say, when we think of that. So it's something we kind of tend to dismiss because it's [audio gap 08:22 – 08:57] fact. And also, I think it's because we all have – and again, this sounds like a pejorative term, but it's not. I'm sure you guys in the business world have heard it a lot lately too, which is we have our confirmation bias. So when we believe something, we sort of tend to both hear things that support that and not hear things that don't, and we tend to think everybody else has the same bias as we do.

Again, I don't mean biased like some kind of, you know, anything that we're doing consciously or anything that's like racism or whatever, but just the things that we actually believe, and we tend to think that's objective reality. So if you give people facts, they're going to plug those facts into the same objective reality that the person who's stating the facts has.

The fact of the matter is there is no objective reality. If there is, how we would we ever know it since everything we know, we know through our five senses, you know, basically subjectively. So coming down to figuring out what your audience's subjective reality is, and then really trying to craft a message that's going to speak to them.

Park: Knowing your audience, how important is that?

Lisa: Everything.

Park: In your book *Wired for Story*, in fact, the first chapter is how to hook your audience; how to hook the reader. What recommendations would you give to our business listeners out there to hook their audiences if they're stuck with a boring PowerPoint?

Lisa: Don't do PowerPoint.

Park: That goes against evolution, doesn't it? It's setting us back.

Lisa: It really does. The other thing to think about is PowerPoint, especially if it's dry facts, that's going to engage the language part of your brain and you're going to have to think about it. When you ask someone to think about it, they can decide not to. That thinking part of your brain is really there to deal with – and this will answer your question in a sec – is really there to deal with things that we can't, that we don't automatically know the answer to. Most decisions we make are made by our cognitive subconscious, and that, I hate to say, is 90% of decisions.

The thinking part of your brain is for things that really matter to you. If you're giving me a PowerPoint and it's facts that matter to you and I have no context to fit them into,

why would I think about them? Why would I even care? I don't care. I'm going to think about things that matters to me, like, you know, how much longer to lunch? I mean, that's what matters.

So if you've got something and you want to grab someone, you need to take that fact and embed it in some sort of a story, something that's going to grab us with some kind of a surprise that's going to break some sort of expectation.

Again, it brings it down to how is that fact going to affect one person in one situation so that I am in that person's skin and I'm feeling them go through something difficult in order to make some kind of a difficult decision. That's what's going to grab us. So if we're not involved and we don't care about let's say one person or one penguin or one whatever it would be, and their difficulty, stories are about how someone changes internally as opposed to externally, so if they're not struggling with something, if there's not something difficult going on, it's really hard to grab our attention.

Our attention is grabbed by the breaking of a pattern, so when you're telling us something, either we have no context to fit it into or we kind of already know it, so we're not going to pay any attention.

Park: It goes back to where I opened the show, I think. It's one of the things that I consider quite a bit when I'm out there. The brain, like the amoeba, has one goal, and that's survival. Data does not help us understand survival. Data does one of three things. Data either records and reports on an event that has happened, data monitors an event currently happening, or data tries to predict an event that's going to happen in the future. But all our minds care about is the events, because the data itself won't kill us but that event sure could.

Lisa: Well, yeah, but you've got to put the data into a context. Think about it. Everything in life gets its meaning not intrinsically in and of itself but in the context in which it's expressed. Like, a rainy day is a horrible thing if you're having an outdoor wedding, and it's a great thing here in Los Angeles because we're in the midst of a drought. The context is going to give it its meaning.

So you need that context, but it also really needs to be affecting one person. In other words, when you're in a story, you are experiencing what that character is experiencing. That's not a metaphor, that's a fact. They've done those fMRI studies that show when you're lost in a story, the same areas of your brain light up that would light up if you were doing what that character is doing. In other words, again, you get a fact, the thinking part of your brain, the part that sees language is lighting up, and it can get bored and go to sleep and it doesn't really care. You tell me a story, and if there are colors, that part of my brain is lighting up. If there's taste, that's lighting up. If there's fear, if I'm identifying with a character, if I'm nervous about it, something bad is happening, cortisol is coursing through my body. Or if I'm feeling great, it's oxytocin.

I'll tell you something really interesting to say how seriously this is taken. The DoD, Department of Defense, contracted with Paul Zak – I'm not sure of the name of his company – to do research into why is it that narrative and stories seem to change peoples' minds and pull people into things whereas giving them facts doesn't? Now if the Department of Defense is hip to this, it really means there's way more here than just story as a way to dramatize the facts of research.

Park: We had Paul Zak on our show. He was on a couple weeks ago talking about his work and oxytocin and how story helps triggers that moral molecule, as he calls it, in our audiences to help build trust.

Lisa: Right, empathy.

Park: It goes back I think to something in your book that I absolutely love. I don't have this exactly down as a quote, but essentially you said we love stories because we live vicariously through the protagonists so that we can try on trouble just in case it happens to us. So we have no risk, but we get to try it on, and isn't it really just our sensory mechanism saying, "Okay, what does this look and feel like, and how can I avoid this; or how can I take advantage of this in my life?"

Lisa: Exactly. The key thing is it's not just an external, it's an internal. It's what would it feel like? Would it really feel like what I think it would feel like? That's really what we're looking for. They say that our brain had that kind of last big growth spurt about 200,000 years ago, and for a long time, it was thought that was to enable us to think rationally. And while part of that is so, the real reason why evolutionary biologists think it happened is because by that time, that we had kind of mastered the physical world – in a rudimentary way, of course; nothing right now – but our biology realized if we're going to do what we've since done, for better, for worse, which is take over the world, we needed to kind of learn to work well with others, the thing they've been telling us to do since kindergarten. And at that point, the need to belong to a group became biologically as important to us, not because we think it not in a soft science but literally as food, air and water.

So what stories often do is they tell us how to navigate that social world, and that's internal. So really when you think about it, when you use or try any new product or you're going to do something green let's hope, it really comes down to how is this going to make me my more authentic self? How is this going to help me within my tribe, my group, the people who matter to me the most? That's internal, so it's not merely just external trouble, like "Lion! Run!" but it's also internally in terms of how we see ourselves, because that's what matters most.

Park: Lisa, when we come back from the break, I would like to talk a little bit more about "Wired for Story" and what business people can get from a book that appears to me, anyways, as if you are coaching authors and writers how to write fiction and create that story. So let's cover that when we come back right after this.

Park: Welcome back to Business of Story, and our wonderful guest today, Lisa Cron, the author of "Wired for Story."

Lisa, I read your book a couple years ago, and I go back to it all the time in my own work. What I read in your book is you really wrote it for authors, did you not? Can you tell us a little bit the thinking behind it?

Lisa: The thinking behind writing it for authors, or the thinking behind...

Park: Yeah, the book itself. I mean, what were you trying to get across to authors? Then leading on the next question is what can us business folks, content marketers, grand strategists, learn from a book like yours?

Lisa: What lead me to write it – and again, it's kind of what I said there in the beginning. I've spent my entire career – I don't want to say how many decades; I absolutely won't go there, but let's say more than I'm willing to admit to – reading manuscripts. What I realized relatively early on and then saw more and more is that what was tanking them and making them not work had very little to do with what writers were taught mattered and had everything to do with something that nobody talked about, which was this inside story.

The interesting thing was that writers tended to make this same kind of mistake. They each did it in their own spectacular way, but the mistakes were really very much the same.

Park: What kind of mistakes?

Lisa: The mistake was that it was all external. It is all about what happened on the outside. It was all about the plot – it was about two things: the plot, which is external events, and then beautiful writing. As you hear in the trade, a story-less kind of plot-driven novel with beautiful writing is what's known as a beautifully written "Who cares?" What mattered wasn't the external things that were happening, what mattered was how they were affecting the character, the protagonist – we'll just stick with the protagonist as opposed to all the characters, because it really is one person's story. Everything needed to be filtered through that person's lens, because just as in life, when you look at things in your own life, you don't look at them and just – you're not just cataloging them; there's a yellow wall, there's a red chair. Why would you care?

You're looking at everything and you're trying to pull out strategic significance. What does that mean? Do I need to worry about it, and how can I use that to help me in terms of what I want to achieve? Again, your agenda, not in general achieve, but a very specific agenda. It's the same thing with businesses. It's a very specific agenda. Everybody's got a specific agenda because we don't ever do anything in general. I don't like concepts because they're conceptual, and so they're very vague and they're very fuzzy and we don't do anything in general. We don't go to the market in general, you don't get a job in general, you don't sell something in general, you do it specifically by moment. And that's really where story lies. How is this external thing affecting somebody internally given what their expectations are?

So that's what I really wanted to get across, how to get that onto the page. The exciting thing for me was that when I sat down to really start to write it, it just happened to coincide with all of these breakthroughs in neuroscience. So it kind of went to something that I've been working on in the back of my head for a very long time. It went from oh, this is metaphor, this is a theory, to no, wait, this is fact. This is actually biologically driven. This is actually how we're making sense of everything. Story is in the architecture of the brain, and that's what suddenly made the light go on for me and translate it into why for a story.

And the truth is, my agenda goes way beyond writers. I think if people really understood the power story has on them – and also the power of emotion. If we could

learn not to be as afraid of it as we are – again, when people say, "Oh, they're so emotional," it's like another calm. It's like, hey, guess what? Calm is an emotion. We think of emotion as these big box things, but think about it. There's nothing that you look at, as I said earlier, that doesn't bring with it some chemical reaction that lets you know how you feel about it which kind of leads you toward what you might do given your agenda. It's just our nervous system's way of keeping us alive.

So that was the goal for the book. And as much as possible, I was excited that other people, you know, the business world – I've been all over the place. I've been quoted on some dating site on like how to get girls to like you.

Park: That story is biological, after all.

Lisa: Yeah, there you go. But at the end of the day, it really does apply to everything, and the same thing is true obviously for the business world. On one level, the business world and advertisers often tended to know a lot of this way more than writers did. You guys were way ahead of the pack.

Park: Well, we wanted to persuade in 30 seconds or less, and now it's in six seconds or less, or 140 characters.

Lisa: Yeah, absolutely.

Park: We talked about that again, the brain is bent on survival. We are biologically hardwired. Evolution has been because of our ability to tell stories. Is there a basic structure that we could all work from, even if we're not world-renowned, award-winning writers? A basic structure to story that helps us connect with human beings?

Lisa: I think that there is. I think first of all, don't worry about being "talented." Don't worry about writing beautifully. Don't worry about the art of it. I don't even like the word art on that level, because again, it's one of the big, vague generalities that's basically used to scare people. I think the same thing is true with talent.

I think that there's a very basic – and when I'm talking about structure, I do not mean story structure like the hero's journey, I mean an internal structure. Stories are basically about somebody who's changing. Somebody who's going from – characters enter a story which is the external things that happen – this really goes well in terms of branding and convincing someone – with something they really want, and a misbelief. A misbelief, it's not a fatal flaw, it's not something that's wrong with them and now they're going to overcome it, but it's just they're not looking at things in a way that's perhaps accurate. Stories are about how the external world forces somebody to really question that misbelief and learn something that's going to allow them to solve this external problem, which means you need to let yourself be vulnerable in a story.

In other words, stories about how someone changes and how someone learns something and has an 'aha' moment at the end, if they're not making some kind of a fundamental error or mistake in the beginning, then we've got nowhere to go.

The thing about advertising I think is that if you – and this is what's wrong with so much party line advertising is if you go in as if you've never made a mistake and everything has always been perfect, not only is that boring, but we don't believe you. Out here in

the real world, we know everybody's vulnerable; everybody makes mistakes. That's what humanizes us. That's what makes us who we are. We're constantly learning. We're constantly going, "No, it's not just that the external world was against us and now because we're so virtuous, we've made it before us.

If you are making some sort of mistake, let me feel that you're human. Let me feel that now you've made this, or your character, or it could even be something much shorter, but if we're talking about the classic story sense, yeah, you need to have something you need to learn in the beginning. As T.S. Eliot said, "The true voyage of discovery isn't in seeking new landscapes but having new eyes" which means that you can be right there, but at the end of the day, you're going to see things very differently.

So those eyes, from before they were opened, are probably seeing something not quite right, something that they want to fix, something that they're learning as well. So it's not simply, "I'm perfect all the way through, and now I've made the world an even better place." That's the sort of thing that just turns us off.

In other words, if you're showing – sometimes I've heard, and again, I never can give examples of this, but people who start with their origin stories, and it's just, "I decided I was going to go save the world, and I did this and I did that, and look, I'm so successful now." It's like, "Okay, you've already turned me off in the beginning because you're so perfect that I don't like you."

Think about that person who you know who seems perfect. They've got the great job, they've got the great family. Do you like that person? Like, even on the surface, you're like, "Sure I do." But really, inside, you kind of don't like them and you're wondering what they've got going on.

Park: Right. I was interviewing a venture capitalist the other day. A really bright guy, very funny, interesting guy, and he told me – I guess he was in his 50s maybe – one success after another after another after another all around the country, and we went through that for about 10 minutes. I said, "Okay, that's cool. Tell me about your biggest failure and what you learned from it?" There was this noticeable gap. He was like clearing his throat and whatever, and I'm like, "No, dude, it's cool. It's between you and I. Just tell me your biggest failure."

He laughed and said, "Yeah, I've got to tell you about this one gig and I lost lots and lots of money and I learned – I got hooked up with a bad group and a bad business partner and wrong timing" and went on and on and on. That was a fascinating 10 minutes. I was just like, "Yeah, that's so cool because I can live vicariously through you, trying on your trouble, and then learn from it."

Lisa: You learn from it because you learn when somebody is in there and they've made some mistake, and again, it's not pejorative. It's not because they're stupid or they were an idiot, it's just they didn't have the experience, or very often, experience taught them something else was true.

Park: Well, it's evolution. That's how we evolve.

Lisa: Exactly. But also seeing the logic behind – I mean, every story has its logical framework, and watching the internal logic of the story and what happened that made him realize it

was a mistake and it made him realize, "This is what I need to do in order to find success," that's the moment we come for. Not just that it happened, but why it happened.

In other words – [and it kills me because they got so famous on this 29:50] [indiscernible 29:51] why. Writers have been saying that forever. It's not the what, it's the why. It's not what you're doing, it's why you're doing it. It's what it means to you. That's where it really comes in, because the whole world, the surface world is the world of what? We look around and we can see the surface world perfectly fine. We understand the surface world is sort of the cliché world that's there. We don't need anybody to tell us how the surface world works. We want to know what's going on beneath the surface.

I think of story as the difference between what you're saying out loud and what you're thinking when you're saying it. Imagine even that kind of a story. Someone's talking about, "Yeah, I was sitting in the office, I was being interviewed and I knew I came off, blah, blah, blah, but inside I was dying and I was afraid." That's the part you want to know.

Park: Right. It comes back to that old concept of the flawed protagonist. That flawed protagonist that we believe in because we're pulling for them. We're pulling for the underdog to overcome. Who is not an underdog when they're standing in front of a corporate board room trying to present their PowerPoint presentation? Everybody is an underdog. What are they really up to?

Lisa: It's terrifying. And again, I just would stay away from the word "flaw" because it sounds like there's a perfect way to be. I tend to think of it really honestly as a misbelief. They've got some sort of misbelief, some sort of fear that's eating away. It's not like a flaw. Flaw is such a pejorative term. It's really just I thought it would be this one way, and now it's something else, and what do I do? How do I overcome this in one way or another?

So, yeah. And [we're all like that 31:28]. My favorite anecdote is I once had a student at UCLA who said, "I know on the surface, I look really put together." And she did. She looked so put together. She was so nice, she didn't think what a snot to say that, but she said, "I know on the surface I look really put together. But inside, I'm a raging mess and I'm trying to keep all of you from seeing it." And stories about the raging mess, that we're all trying to keep other people from seeing it, because guess what? We all feel that same way. We've all got that. And so...

Park: So we help just create that meaning of the chaos happening around us.

Lisa: Exactly. It makes us so brave. The most terrifying thing is to admit it, and then instead of people going, "Oh, what's wrong with you? It's just you" they're all saying, "Oh, me too. Oh, you're so brave," and now they're all telling you similar stories.

Park: Right.

Lisa: Business is the same thing. It's all about community, and then they trust you.

Park: Lisa, when we come back from this break, I'd like to talk to you a little bit about the superpower of storytelling. So let's come back. Let's throw it to some great stories from our sponsors right now, and we'll be right back with the Business of Story.

Park: Welcome back to Business of Story and our guest today, Author, Educator, Lisa Cron, and one of my favorite books, the writer of "Wired for Story." I highly recommend it. Although it's written for authors out there, us business communicators can use it too. There's just a wealth of information in there.

Lisa, I was, again, talking about your TEDx presentation, and you mentioned in there the superpower of storytelling. I thought to myself after I heard that that is truly – storytelling is the one and only superpower that we all have. We are born with it. In fact, you might lay claim to the fact that we lost that power, or at least it was silenced in us, in kindergarten. We were in the top of our game in kindergarten, but our educational system and society and businesses, in particular, have silenced that storyteller within us.

One point we try to do with Business of Story is give people permission and show them pragmatic ways to go about collecting and telling their stories. So after I heard you say that, I thought, "You know, you're right. If we are trying to move people to action and get the people to do the right things and help us along in our own missions, the one and only superpower we have is to persuade them and move them to action. They do that through emotion. They don't do it through reason. The only way that we can make that happen are through the stories that we share with them.

So I think you're dead-on. I think storytelling is our one and only superpower that we can actually harness and wield every single day.

Lisa: I think that's absolutely true, because the stories mainline meaning. They mainline meaning by putting us through the skin of somebody going through something difficult and having that epiphany. The really interesting thing about it is when that happens, we don't think about it, we feel it. We have experienced it ourselves, so nobody has to tell us what to do.

That call to action often is simply within the story itself. Nobody said, "Hey, I want you to go out and do X." We think it's our own idea. We want to go out and do it ourselves. Not only that, we want to tell everybody else about it. That's how stories go viral, word-of-mouth, because we've been moved, because we've made up our own minds.

When people talk about it, it's really interesting. When people talk about mindless entertainment sort of just mindless entertainment, it couldn't be less. Study after study has shown that stories and being able to empathize with the people in the story have changed our behavior.

Look, for instance, in this country the way that the biggest social turnaround that I've ever seen, and they say that's ever happened, is this turnaround in terms of gay marriage which now legal. It's now in the Constitution. They say that one of the reasons that it had such fast turnaround – social scientists have a name for it. They call it the Will & Grace Effect. People saw that show and they could then empathize and go, "Oh, yeah. I feel that from the inside out."

I was just reading a paper – it was in The New York Times and then it went to the paper. It was written about – I'm sure you've heard a lot about the anti-vaccination and how all the science says vaccinations do not cause autism. But trying to break that through and giving scientific facts to people who believe that does no good. If anything, it pulls up that confirmation bias, and now they're kind of doubling down on what they already believe.

The thing that turned them around was telling them individual stories about individual children who had gotten measles, mumps, rubella and who had gotten ill and showing them pictures. That turned them around because it comes down to a specific story. How is that big thing out there affecting one person? That allows us to try it on for size.

The truth is, when you think about mindless entertainment, I'd like to redefine that because there's no such thing as mindless entertainment in the sense that – what's meant by that is it doesn't affect us, right? Mindless doesn't affect me. I'm just the same person afterwards than before.

It's mindless in this sense: it enters through your gut because you feel it, and then it changes how you see the world, so now you're looking at the world differently. You are different. You're seeing other people differently. You're acting differently. But it never actually goes through your conscious mind in the way that it would if you were really analyzing it. So that's mindless entertainment.

Park: It's funny, a number of years ago, I was over at my youngest brother's home. He's an equine veterinarian, so he works on horses, and so am I. He knows a little bit – something about biology and whatnot. He was kind of laughing when I showed up at his house and he said, "You know, I've decided when it comes to kids, there's no more powerful drug or sedative than that" and he pointed over to the TV set and there were his two young children absolutely mesmerized by whatever was going on TV.

We would say, "Oh, that's just kind of mindless entertainment." But you're right. It's not. It just completely – the brain yields helplessly to the suction of story as Jonathan Gottschall, author of "The Storytelling Animal," said. So it's really quite a powerful phenomenon.

Lisa: He talks about going to watch a horror movie and you see people watching on the screen, and they're like bent over hiding their vital organs. They're not stupid. They know that that's not going to come at them, but their nervous system doesn't know that so it's reacting as if the monster on the screen really, truly is a threat.

It's literally, it is a superpower. What happens is when you watch, not just little kids, watch when you're in the board room and you say to people, "Let me tell you a story." Their body language changes. People lean in. What happens is the dopamine – it's a spur of dopamine. Dopamine is the brain's reward system and it rewards you for following your curiosity, which is why stories are always about something at risk.

If I was going to give the things to think about if you were going to create a story, it would be first, think about what your point is. You can only make one point. Then personify it with one problem. Have one person going through that problem, and have there be something absolutely at stake that they need at the end, but that what's holding them back from it isn't necessarily some external thing, like, I want to climb a

mountain, so I have to go to the gym for 12 years to be able to do it, but some internal belief that they're going to have to overcome in order to solve that problem. At the end of the day, that's what's going to pull us in.

You want to be sure that in the beginning, you've got something at risk and we need to care enough. You want to break some sort of pattern. Something is happening. I've heard it said, stories are always about all is not as it seems, but that is as true externally as it is internally.

Park: Great advice. It goes down to having one point. You have to have something at stake, risk in the story, because if something's not changing, it's not of interest to us or our mind. So you have to have one point that you're trying to make. You have one person having to overcome one problem.

Lisa: Right, one problem that escalates. Think about it. What pulls us through is curiosity. If there's not something somebody has to solve and they're not quite sure how to do it, what do we have to be curious about?

Park: Right. And business is filled with challenges and things to overcome. They go into the board room and they talk to folks and they roll out all the numbers, and all the numbers do is try to make them look like experts which just puts their audience on defense, because the audience already believes they're the expert. So the dukes go up and you get nowhere. But if you then enrapture them with story, bring context to that data, you really can move people to action

Lisa: And we have no defense against it. You've probably heard that old saying, "To get lost in story is a willing suspension of disbelief." That's completely wrong because it implies you have a choice, and you just don't. It just literally pulls you in.

That's what evolutionary scientists have been looking at; why can we get lost in a story, considering that when stories first began thousands of years ago, to go offline even for a minute put you at risk? If you were going to live to see the dawn was always questionable. But the reason is because it allows us to vicariously experience something difficult. So if there's nothing difficult going on in a story, then we're really not going to care.

Park: Right. Well, Lisa, where can people learn more about you and your work?

Lisa: My website, wiredforstory.com.

Park: You mentioned at the top of the show the new book you're working on. Can you quickly tell us about that? When is it going to be out? What's the premise of that piece?

Lisa: Sure. It really is for writers, and it's called "Story Genius: How to Use Brain Science to Crack the Code of Your Novel Before You Spend Three Years Writing 279 Pages That Go Nowhere." That's due out I think next August. The one after that is the one for business people. It's going to be called "Story or Die." I'm very excited about that one, but that's a couple years down the pike.

Park: "Story or Die." There you go. Then you've got conflict built right into it, you've got evolution built. You've got everything built into it. That's fantastic.

Lisa: This is the last thing for them to think of. The story isn't a way to communicate, the story is the way to communicate.

Park: Right. It's at the base of everything we do.

Lisa: Right. Just watch it in your own life. It's all narrative. You see it everywhere. People talk about it, but they talk about it as if it's a choice as opposed to this is how we see everything. If you just shift that and look at it through that lens, you'll see how everybody is talking about it, but not focusing in on it clearly enough to use it in the way that really would – it's kind of scary. It definitely has immense power that is not quite being tapped as successfully as it could be.

Park: My last question for you, Lisa, is what is your favorite TED talk, other than yours, that our listeners could learn from relative to story and storytelling?

Lisa: This is one everybody knows, but I just think it's so brilliant because it goes to all this. It's Brené Brown's TED talk on vulnerability. It really talks about going in and allowing yourself to be seen. It gives you something personally for your own life, but I think also for business people, it really goes deeply into the need, and being vulnerable is what makes us human. It is where true bravery lies and is where all that stuff that we're trying to protect. It's kind of funny, but the more we protect it and pretend it isn't there, the bigger cowards we are.

Park: Right. We've got to [regal 44:35] with our stuff. That's what I hear.

Lisa: Yeah, I know. And also Jonathan Gottschall. Jonathan Gottschall did one. I can't remember what he called it, but it was at the firm and we both – I opened the conference and he ended it, and he said...

Park: "The Storytelling Animal."

Lisa: Yeah, "The Storytelling Animal." He's a great guy, too.

Park: He was one of our first guests, so we've been very, very fortunate to surround ourselves with brilliant minds like yours and Jonathan's and Paul Zak's. I just want to thank you for coming on Business of Story today and sharing your insights as an author and educator to help us business leaders and content marketers and brand strategists connect on a more visceral human level so that we can actually do good in this world, not just sell stuff.

Lisa: Yeah. Make us feel. That's going to change us not just in terms of buying your product, but it's going to change us in terms of everything we do.

Park: Absolutely. Well, thank you very much, Lisa, and thank you all for listening to this edition of Business of Story. If you like what you hear, and I really hope you do, please go to iTunes. Give us a ranking on there, if you would, and drop your notes in. If there's anything that you would like to hear, send me a note over at businessofstory.com.

While you're at businessofstory.com, we have many free downloadable tools there for you that can help you start crafting and collecting your thoughts around story and

gives you a very pragmatic way to start bringing more story into your life as a business leader communicator.

Again, thank you for listening to Business of Story, and we will be back with you in another week or so with another amazing guest. Take care.