

Business of Story Podcast with Ron Ploof – Pitch Perfect Storytelling

Park:

Welcome to Business of Story. I'm Park Howell and I'm so glad that you're here with us today as we continue to explore that intersection of creative storytelling with business leadership and communications.

As you know, if you've been an active listener of Business of Story, we've had a lot of story artists on, from authors to screenwriters to legendary screenwriting coaches to teachers of authors, to everything in between. And what I'm trying to do is connect the creative world with the communications world so that we can all learn how to become better and more impactful storytellers.

And today's no different. We have certainly a story artist with us, but a gentleman that comes from certainly the business side of things and the high-tech world, where you don't find a lot of terrific storytellers. But our guest today has been a natural storyteller since the beginning of his time and he realized and woke up to the fact that he needed to bring his voice and his method and his Story How PitchDeck to the world.

But let me tell you a little bit about Ron Ploof. First, I was introduced to Ron, we met online, I guess, through Jay Baer. So thank you for that, Jay. And I had a chance to go through his information, and on his bio on LinkedIn, I loved it when he said that he's just a really well-balanced geek. So that's, I think, that combination of storyteller and the technology world.

But he was doing podcasts way before the rest of us, back in 2005, and he had one on storytelling called "Griddlecakes Radio: Exploring the Lost Art of Audio Storytelling." So I need to learn a little bit more about Griddlecakes because I cut my teeth on writing and producing radio spots, and I produced hundreds of them as a young man and it was my absolute favorite medium because you can do so much with the theater of the mind and storytelling through radio. So I'm assuming Griddlecakes Radio is a little bit like that. We'll learn about that.

He's also written a book, "Read This First: The Executive's Guide to Social Media." And he also spent three years heading up social media storytelling at Epson till 2015, when he struck out on his own to take his

story and his approach to storytelling through his Story How PitchDeck and workshops to the greater market.

So please welcome Ron Ploof, the creator of Story How PitchDeck. Welcome, Ron.

Park: Now, before we get into the show, you've got to tell me about Griddlecakes. Exploring the lost art of audio storytelling. What was that about?

Ron: So Griddlecakes Radio is a labor of love. It had nothing to do with business or anything. I, like you, loved old time radio, the theater of the mind. And when I saw this new medium, I started in 2005, podcasting started in 2004. I said, "Wow, what's out there?" And there was a lot of tech conversation type podcasts that were couple casts, and things.

What I wanted to do was storytelling. And so I started a podcast. I've been doing it for 10 years. And it's storytelling. Like, little slice of life stories. I've done collaborative storytelling with 27 actors that all recorded their parts at different times, different time zones, and I assembled them together into this massive story. So it was exploring the lost art of audio storytelling, and it has been a blast.

Park: Well, on today's show, we're going to learn more about how Ron brings that talent and artistry of storytelling to the business world, and we're going to cover a number of different issues. One of them, I think, is very interesting, as you . . . I want you to listen for, is Ron tells us about how we go from campaign to campaign and we trip over a gold mine of stories that are available to us as brands and business to business or business to consumer storytellers. And so how to look for those stories, and how to make great hay with them. How to take advantage of them.

Now, the first thing I loved on his LinkedIn bio is he says he's a very well-adjusted, socially well-balanced geek. And I think what he means, and we'll learn from him here in a second, that he comes out of the technology sector, which, of course, is rife with horrible storytelling, led with data, data, data, data and he was able to escape the shackles of that industry and bring true storytelling to it in his work.

And he's been one of the leaders in this, as I understand. He started it off the first podcasts in storytelling called Griddlecakes Radio: Exploring the

Lost Art of Audio Storytelling. So I'm going to be very interested to learn more from Ron about that.

Ron has also written a book, "Read This First: The Executive Guides to Social Media." That came out in, what, 2009? And became a manager of social media for Epson America between 2012 and 2015. So you can tell that he honed his storytelling craft and then came back to the tech world.

And we'll learn from Ron today, what did he learn in that transition, and how did he bring storytelling to the tech world so it actually made a difference?

And then, finally, in today's show, we're going to get a chance to review these. Listen carefully. I don't know if you can tell. It's kind of thumping. But that's my attempt at shuffling Ron's amazing story how PitchDeck. [recording skips] to be shuffling those, but I thought it'd be a fun way to get into the show. So without further ado, ladies and gentlemen, welcome, Ron Plooth. Ron? Welcome to the show.

Ron: You can use them . . . thank you. You can use them any way you want. So thank you for having me on. Yeah. Great. Park?

Park: Maybe I threw you with my shuffling, I don't know. But, Ron, you've got a really interesting background. You and I have really not had a chance to meet or chat, so I've been doing some research online and our good friend Jay Baer . . . excuse me, connected us. So tell us a little bit more about your . . . I would love to know how you came up through the ranks of technology communicator and found storytelling in your life.

Ron: Sure. You know, a lot of people ask me that and the real truth is I've been a storyteller my whole life. Now, I happen to have a lot of left-brain activity, and so I did choose the sciences and I got a degree in electrical engineering. However, storytelling has always been how I've communicated to people. And I think I've just done it unconsciously for all of these years.

And after a while, when I started seeing storytelling business and storytelling starting to bubble up, and the articles and podcasts such as yourself that are showing up, I started thinking, "Hmm, I'm wondering if

there is a way that I can combine two of my passions," and that would be technology and storytelling.

Park: And when did you discover that you were already a great storyteller and that you had to be more intentional in the business world?

Ron: That's a really good question because it's been an unconscious activity that I've done for such a while. But I would way very, very early on. Very, very early on. In my early 20s, I was an electrical engineer and we had to describe this thing, it was called a hemispherical resonator gyro. And I had to present it in front of this group, and I didn't know how to do it because there was no such thing as, like, animation and slides back then. I think we didn't have . . . we had foils. You had to put them on . . . print them out and put them on projectors. So we didn't have anything then.

But I actually walked into this meeting with chief scientists at a government contracting house with a hula hoop and showed them how the hemispherical resonating gyro worked, with a hula hoop. And so I've . . . I guess I've been a storyteller all my life.

Park: And sounds like a little bit of vaudeville added into it. I like it. So you got the visual storytelling going on.

Ron: Well, you get the visual storytelling, you have the entertainment portion of it. Because you're right on the technology side, we're so data, data, data. However, if there's a very easy way to explain something, why not use it?

Park: Yeah, without question. We had Lee Gutkin on the show a few weeks ago, and he's the founder of non-fiction storytelling, and how to tell true stories well. And a lot of that is coined to working with technology folks and experts that get so wrapped around the axle with data that they think the data's the storyline when it's really not.

And he talks about using scenes in the storytelling to set up and bring context to data in a presentation. Does that resonate with you, and could you describe to us, how have you used scenes in storytelling to get your point across?

Ron: Yeah, absolutely. All stories do have scenes. I mean, there are long stories and short stories, and a really, really short story, it could be just

one scene. And that it's the collection of scenes that will make a story. I try to explain to people that just the very act of business is a story with multiple players. And the way we organize our communications is we usually segment them out. They say, "Well, PR, you should be talking to journalists, and advertising and marketing you, should be talking to, say, end users.

And each of those are scenes in an entire collection or an entire story of your business. And so I try to think about . . . and try to explain that there is an entire overlapping story that you can be telling, but it is told in individual scenes. And some people need some scenes, and some people need others.

Park: So you worked at Epson for three years in social media realm. How did you use storytelling there? And was it hard to get some of that leadership on board?

Ron: Yes, and yes because it is a different way of looking at things. But in terms of storytelling, what we did . . . or the thing that I did over there that I'm proudest of is that we launched eight different blogs. And it was in trying to teach that we can use storytelling in our blogs. So it's not just about, our projector does this, our printer does that. The whole thing is a matter of collecting stories.

Probably my favorite story that came out of that is we have a label printer and the label printer is one of the little hand-held label printers. Probably . . . it's, like, a \$39 part. Probably one of the most boring pieces of technology you could have, right?

What possible story could you get out of that? Well, we actually ended up talking with the teacher who worked for a school system and her class had developmentally challenged children. And she said that as soon as they got to the printer, the first thing the kids did was they started labeling everything. And they were using it to label things, but also to teach each other how to spell the things that they were labeling.

But that's not the most important part. The most important part was one of her children had functional mutism and he couldn't talk. And one of the things they found out is that this label maker could also print out symbols. And so what they did is they printed all the symbols out, and they put them into a notebook, and the little guy carried this notebook

around with him and if he wanted his shoes tied, he pointed to his shoes. If he needed food, he would point to the food.

And so what I loved about that is here is a real-life application. There's no way that the marketing manager for this product could have gone on a retreat and come up with this story that this little label maker had such an important effect on the little guy and his classmates.

Park: Well, I guess the challenge there, too, then, is unearthing those kinds of stories. How did you go about that? How did you go and how . . . and what would you recommend to our listeners, how can they get out there and find those wonderful jewels of stories that they can use to advance their causes?

Ron: What's really funny is that we are so focused on starting a campaign and ending it, and then continuing on and starting another campaign that we actually leave threads for stories all over the place that we never follow up on. And this is one of the things that I tried to do. Specifically, this was a campaign where Epson America was combined with DonorsChoose.org. And I don't know if you . . .

Park: Oh, yeah. Oh, they're great.

Ron: Okay. DonorsChoose.

Park: Yeah.

Ron: So essentially it was a matching program that if there was technology that, once they reach their halfway goal, we would match.

Well, at the end of that, we had over 300 places where money from Epson America went into classrooms. And they sent us a spreadsheet.

And so here, I'm looking at the final report. It was, like, my first couple weeks there. And I'm seeing, yeah, we helped 300 classrooms. We're done. Let's move on into the next thing in our campaign. And I said, well, wait, wait, wait, wait. There are 300 potential stories there, right?

There was another campaign where they wanted people to write in how they were using one of our [recording skips]. And it was a contest. And so we had over 1000 people telling not only how they would but how they

were using this particular piece of technology. It was like it was an interactive projector.

And so, again, they gave out the winners, they wrote a little case study, and they said, "This is great. Let's move on to the next campaign." I said, wait, wait, wait a minute.

Park: Yeah.

Ron: You have a spreadsheet with, like, 1000 pieces of . . . there's data that we can mine. There's a story in here. So one of the things that I'm always telling companies is, look, you don't have a hard time finding stories. They're all around you. But you tend to step over them. You ignore them. And that's one of the reasons that we need to take a step back and think about all the work you're putting into these campaigns to . . . it's not just one end goal. There are story starters sitting at the end of every single one.

Park: So why do you think we do that? Why do we step over this gold mine of stories because we move from one campaign to the next?

Ron: It's the only thing we know. It's what we're taught. If you went to [J school], you'd learn how to, you know, write something for the press, or if you're in PR, you're about events or marketing. It's all about campaign, we have a bunch of money for a campaign, we're going to execute on the campaign, and then when we come back, it's over. It's time to move on to the next campaign. I think we don't think of the long tail, if you will, right?

One of the things about being a publisher online is you have the whole long tail that you can write something and that the majority of the reads are going to happen well after you wrote it. You can kind of think of our stuff just like the blockb- [recording skips] first couple weekends the thing is out, and then we forget about it.

But no, in the long tail, we have to think about [recording skips] living out there for a long time, and getting that long tail mindset into what you're doing, I think is hard, but it's not impossible.

Park: You know, a great example of storytelling, of course, coming out of TV, is Don Draper's monolog when he was pitching the Kodak for the Kodak account and he talked about the carousel projector. I don't know if

you've seen that. It's online. You can look it up. It's just . . . Hollywood has done a wonderful job in this instance demonstrating to advertising executives how to use story through, as Don Draper did, to sell that particular product. And it's just . . . it's a wonderful little, what is it, three minute and 45 second case study on storytelling. And especially, in that case, in the technology business. So . . .

Ron: I haven't seen that, but I'd love to.

Park: Yeah. It's on YouTube. It's just really a wonderful pitch. I share it with some of our clients, too, when they're getting too much in the weeds relative to data, stats, and facts, that sort of thing and show them where the emotion of that particular pitch connected with those Kodak guys, and of course, celebrated what this new technology . . . and we kind of laugh at that being technology in this day and age, but back in the day, that was technology.

But how he overcame the data surrounding this carousel projector by calling it a carousel because it was in celebration of the stories that were caught on film in slides in there, and that life itself is a story, is a carousel, so shouldn't you have this carousel projector to share your stories with your friends and family? I mean, it's really, really brilliant writing, to begin with, but exceptional storytelling that all of us marketers can learn from, certainly. So . . .

Ron: Yeah. And also, if you go back in time, right? And again, I think we're old enough to remember this. That back then, everything was in a line. It used to be, like, a recto-linear thing that you would put your slides into, instead of something that continuously goes around, like a carousel. So, yeah, that sounds awesome.

Park: Yeah. It's very cool. Very cool.

Well, let's take a moment to recognize the wonderful sponsors of Business of Story and when we come back, Ron, I would love to hear your transition out of the tech world, and moving from Epson into what you're doing today, and what tools are you bringing to market to help all of us become better storytellers. So we'll be back right after this.

Welcome back to Business of Story, and our guest today, the creator of the Story How PitchDeck, Ron Ploof, Ron, thanks for being with us on the show. Enjoyed your stories around Epson.

So you've made this transition. You've been a business communicator for a long time. You've come up through the technology ranks. You've always used story. You are an innate storyteller. But at some point within your career, you found that when you become a more intentional storyteller, you . . . and the folks around you, everybody benefits. So can you tell us a little bit about, now, your transition out of that into what you're doing today?

Ron: Sure. So one of the things that I saw was that with storytelling and as storytelling really is gaining momentum out there and people are looking for help, what I noticed was a couple of things. Is that . . . how to tell a story.

A lot of times people get this advice. "Great! I've heard your presentation of what you're going to do. Now just tell a story." And they look at you with that deer in the headlights look, like, I don't know how to do that.

And then, if you start to go and look at some of the resources out there, a lot of them do come from the entertainment industry. And I was finding a problem with that and the problem is that if it comes from the entertainment industry, that they're using terms that make sense, but these terms are rarely used in business. You need a rising action. You need a falling action. You need a denouement. And I'd never heard the word "denouement" used in a marketing meeting before.

Park: I thought it was a Danish.

Ron: And it's a Danish, too.

And so I was trying to think, is there a way that you can take the language of business and translate it for story? Can we use and explain story using the language of business? Now, you had one of my idols on a couple weeks ago, Robert McKee.

Where Robert did that for screenwriters, and he broke story down for screenwriters. And I must have read that book a couple times. I love that

book. And I said we need this for business, but we need it in the language of business.

And so I took my 25 years in high tech and my lifetime of storytelling and I tried to see, how can I break this down so that we won't get that deer in the headlights look? Can we break it down into individual elements?

And I worked on it for about a year, talked with lots of people and eventually developed the Story How PitchDeck.

Park: And I've got that right in front of me. Tell us a little bit about the PitchDeck.

Ron: Sure. So the PitchDeck . . . I could have written a book, but I had this idea for cards. And people said, "Ron, do the cards. It's something, it's interactive. People can share it. They can use it. You can play solitaire with it on your own, or you can use it in a group."

Park: Um-hum.

Ron: So we decided, okay, we're going to go forward with the deck. The deck has 60 cards, and it's broken into four suits. There are three elements of story. There are roles, there are events, and there are influences. And then the fourth suit is technique. So techniques for, essentially, moving those elements around.

And the goal of the deck is that you come to it with a message, an idea, or even a presentation and it will help you develop your story.

Park: And do you literally . . . so you come with an idea that you need to communicate. Do you pull these cards at random, like you do with a regular deck? Or how do you use it so you make sure that that card lines up with what you're trying to do within your story?

Ron: It really depends on the person. When I was beta testing these things, I pretty much found that I have left brains and right brains. The right brains, they dove right in, and they just . . . they used it in whatever order they wanted. They said . . . I think it was maybe the right brains, the creatives, they just wanted starting points, and so they dove in.

But then I had the left brains, and, like, "Uh, what do you want me to do with these things?" And so during the testing, I said, okay, what we're going to do is we're going to take the first two cards of each suit, and I'll call them the starter hand. And so what I recommend is if someone doesn't know where to start, take your ideas or your method, your presentation, and go through the eight cards of the starter hand and that will basically frame out your story. And then if you want to get in more depth or do different things like that then you'd start to dive into the other cards.

Park: And the starter hand is that hand with all the white backing, where the others have more of a grayish, dark backing.

Ron: Yeah.

Park: Is that correct? Yeah.

Ron: So we changed the backs of the cards so that it'd be really easy for you to flip through the cards and just pull out the ones with the white back so that is your starter deck.

Park: So who uses these? Who are they intended for?

Ron: When I created this deck, in the back of my mind, they were for B2B marketers. So, anyone who's selling B2B, those were the people. So you want to come up with stories for your B2B marketplace. That's who I intended it for. Now, I'm finding that all kinds of different people are using it. I mean . . .

Park: Yeah.

Ron: But I'd say people who communicate for B2B was the original intent.

Park: Well, and Ron, do you find . . . I mean, I have in my decades of this work, that when people call it B2B marketing, they think they're selling to a business. Our business is selling to that business. And they forget they're actually selling to a human being . . .

Ron: They are.

Park: . . . that happens to be sitting in that business. And B2B marketing has come a long way in humanizing the communication, but it feels like it has a long way to go yet. So how can these cards help people do that?

Ron: Well, you know that the best way to communicate is to have empathy for your audience. It's kind of hard to have empathy for a logo. You . . .

Park: Yeah.

Ron: So these cards force you to think. The cards, one of them is audience. It's going to make you think about who is your audience.

One of the starter hands is the meaning. So what? What does it mean to them? If you're going to come up with a list of benefits, remember, a benefit can only be a benefit if it comes from your customer's mouth, not your mouth. You can't tell them what a benefit is. They need to tell you. And so by thinking about your audience and your customers from a point of empathy totally changes the way you talk to them.

Park: How do these cards help you get there, then?

Ron: Going through the exercises. Each card has a definition, some examples, and then a little call to action. And so they're going to prompt you along to give you this information that you need to . . . oh, and one of them is thinking empathically about your audience.

Park: That's a thing that we've found. We have our 10-step story cycle process, which is similar. Well, it's very different than what you do, but I took this in a very similar path in that Robert McKee asked . . . as I mentioned, I spent four days at his screenwriting course. My son and I went. It was kind of a fun father-son thing to do. My son went as a screenwriter.

Ron: I'm jealous, by the way. So jealous.

Park: It was amazing. That guy is a force of nature and it was a lot of fun. I especially liked Day 4, when we sat and he dissected "Casablanca" from scene to scene. And although people might think, "Wow, that's a long time to sit and dissect a movie," it was really amazing to see it done, a surgeon of his caliber doing it, you know? In story.

And then . . . but I was very much like you, that I was really impressed with how Hollywood had this all pulled together, and reading through Joseph Campbell and the hero's journey, and how he called out the 17 steps of that.

Another resource, I don't know if you read Blake Snyder and "Save the Cats," but Blake wrote for Disney primarily and he took the hero's journey and wove it down to 15 steps that he uses. And he describes those in "Save the Cat."

But I found the same thing you did, that the jargon of Hollywood didn't play over into what we were doing in business, and it was even a little bit more nuanced than I felt like we needed, and our clients were demonstrating to us.

So we boiled it down to the 10 steps, and very much like yours, we start with the backstory. "Okay. So how'd you get here? What's the point?" is kind of the position of the company. And then you get into the hero. And the hero, I have to warn the brand, is you're not the center of the story. Your hero is the customer.

So using the story cycle process to do customer personas and understand what journeys are they on, what stories are they leading, and what stories are they telling themselves about your brand so that you can connect with them on their terms, not the brand's terms.

Anyways, you get into, then, what's at stake. The goals and objectives of both the brand and the protagonist, the customer in the story. And then I was using . . . and you've got, I think, in your deck, too, I was calling the inciting incident. What has happened in the marketplace, within the business, that is propelling you and the brand forward that is causing you to either react to a change, or you are causing a change that is great for the community out there and you can grow your brand upon.

But I found when I was using McKee's inciting incident, which was drilled in my mind through those four days in reading his material, that people weren't quite getting that. So we just simply changed that to that call to adventure. Why are you turning your ordinary world upside down into this extraordinary world and be it B2B or B2C, it really doesn't matter because we're all talking in human terms.

Anyway, I guess what I'm leaning to, my question is, why did you arrive at the terms . . . so can you go through the terms that you arrived at within the Story How deck? I think they're really brilliant, how you managed that. And how does that take your audience through learning the Story How process?

Ron: Sure. Well, you just used one, right? That in Hollywood, we say . . . they do talk about the inciting incident, right? And to me, that just didn't work too well, right? That the word "insight" is a really strong term, right?

I wrote a post where they said, "You need a crisis." No, you don't need a crisis, right? I mean, a crisis is a really big thing if you're just thinking about the word. But you need something. I called it the initial impulse, right? Just, there's something. Something that caused a change.

And if you think about change . . . and this is really, really simple. That change is measured in one of two ways. Something increases, something decreases. As a matter of fact, that's the business that we're all in. Every business is affecting change. And you get to talk to your customer and tell them that you're going to help them increase something or you're going to help them decrease something. That's it. It's as simple as that.

So if you start to think about just what is increasing, what is decreasing, and what essentially kicked that off, you do have that initial impulse, that every day things were fine until something happened. What happened? Something increased or decreased. Is that good or bad for you and what do you have to do to rectify it?

Park: And do you get that your audience really understands that, when you get into it? I mean, do you have to spell it out for them? Or do they start seeing this natural story structure play out before them, almost, like, subconsciously in some ways?

Ron: They do. They absolutely see it breaking down right in front of them. I was doing a workshop last week and just when you start explaining these stories, it's really fun to see people just sitting there and maybe their arms are crossed and they're just not getting it. And all the sudden you say, "Oh, wait a minute. I get this. It makes sense."

And then when I break them off into their exercises and you hear the din of the room as they're starting to really think about the story that

they're really trying to tell. Yeah, I see it, and it's the reason I do this, is when I see the excitement in the audience and the workshop attendees, and how they're actually working it. And to see them take it in places that I never anticipated that they would go.

Park: Um-hum. Very cool. Ron, we're going to take another break here, but when we come back, I want you to be thinking about this during the break. What are the three storytelling tips that you would share with our audience that they can use immediately to start or continue to hone their storytelling skills?

Ron: Okay.

Park: You got that? Are you up for that challenge?

Ron: Sure.

Park: Awesome. We'll be back right after this.

Park: Welcome back to Business of Story, and our guest today, Ron Ploof, the creator of the Story How PitchDeck. Ron, it's great to have you here, and so that loaded question, man. What are the three things that you can share with our audience to help them hone their storytelling abilities?

Ron: Absolutely. So the first one, we've already gone over. Empathy. That's the one thing that is missing. If there's one thing of the three you're going to take, you really need to think about having empathy for your audience.

Then the next thing is meaning. If you're going to tell a story, it has to mean something, you know?

Aesop did it a long time ago, right? It wasn't about tortoises and hares. It was about slow steady wins the race. So what is the meaning? What do you want people to internalize? Not your message. How do you want them to internalize it themselves, the meaning?

And last but not least is the ending. A lot of people think of the story. Most stories, not all, but most stories are told from the beginning to the end. They're developed the other way around. They're developed with

the end. And just like Habit #2 from Stephen Covey's "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People," they begin with the end in mind.

And so as you're coming up with a story, you need to have an ending and then you're going to plot an intentional course toward it.

Park: It's like my golf game.

Ron: Exactly.

Park: I'm trying to get that thing in that hole down there, but you know what? Sometimes I can do it in three strokes and sometimes 13.

Ron: Well, see, then you have too many scenes in your golf game.

Park: Oh, yeah. I've had a lot of conflict and a little bit of crisis, I might add, too, to that.

Ron: Now, I'm sure there's crisis there.

Park: I want to go back for just a second to that point you made about meaning because I think it's so interesting, and I love the way you described that about Aesop. It's not a tortoise and a hare, but it's about the moral of the story. And that's actually Step #9 in our story cycle process, that we ask people, once that story is told, what is the moral of it.

And what I have found in my teaching at ASU on the story process, as well as with our clients, that two morals actually come out. And I'm curious if you've seen this. When a person's on stage, in presentation mode, or literally in the board room with a PowerPoint, when they are finishing up their presentation, there is a universal truth that we all learn about that individual, whether they know it or not.

And a lot of times, they don't take that into account and so they'll just give their presentation, and we all arrive at kind of a truth about this individual. They may have been very good. They may not have been so good. Maybe articulate. Maybe not really the content subject matter we thought they were, or maybe they were exceptional. But there's a truth that comes out.

And then, secondarily, there's this moral of the story that has this bigger, universal truth that they're trying to communicate. And I have found when they are thinking about that end at the beginning, where they're trying to go, that that end automatically has a moral attached to it, whether they like it or not, so that they'd better be very focused on what the moral of the story is because if they don't intentionally set the stage for that moral, then their audience is going to create their own moral. And it may be the moral that they didn't want them to take away. Have you seen that in your work and can you comment on that?

Ron: Well, sure. And I think it's . . . because I don't think a lot of people really . . . yet. It's folks like you and me in the Story How PitchDeck, we're trying to teach them how to do it. But they don't understand that there is going to be that moment of truth at the end.

It's sort of like . . . I think most people that I see in the business world is they sort of get to the end and they wipe their brow and say, "Whew, it's over." Right?

Park: Yeah.

Ron: And what you mentioned there, there's a magical moment there. There's a magical moment where . . . I love how you said there's going to be kind of a truth about them and there's going to be the overall truth of the presentation.

If you begin with the end in mind and then you plot that intentional course toward it, you will be able to leave little bread crumbs for them to make that summation at the end. But if you don't think about that end, you're not going to leave the appropriate bread crumbs and you're going to be left with a pile of PowerPoint slides and someone sitting there wiping their brow.

Park: And your audience trying to make up a story about what you meant.

Ron: The one thing is we are storytellers and we are always trying to make a story of what's in front of us. And you're right, if you don't tell your story, they are going to put the story together in their own way, and in all likelihood, it's not going to be what you intended for to happen.

Park: Yeah. I mean, we're absolute meaning-making machines. You think about it biologically. We can go weeks without eating. We can go days without drinking. But we can only go about 35 seconds without making meaning out of something going on around us. So absolute meaning-making machines. And if we don't spell out what that meaning is through the stories we tell, then we leave it up to our audiences to draw their own conclusions and I think they're probably wrong 92% of the time in that, wrong in that they are not getting the point we're trying to make unless we become very intentional storytellers.

Ron: Absolutely.

Park: Well, last question for you, Ron, and I see this a lot. You take someone through the pitch, your Story How PitchDeck. Very, very cool, by the way. I love it.

Ron: Thank you.

Park: And we'll talk in a minute where people can track these down. Do you find . . . and I've experienced this at my course, again, over at ASU and with some of our own clients, that people are reluctant to have a call to action at the end of their story? They like to tell the story. They go, "Whew, it's done. Thank you very much."

How do you coach your Story How participants into . . . be bold and ask for that next action? Because we have to get our audiences engaged in our stories, not just listening to them.

Ron: That's the purpose card. So it's one of the very first cards I want people . . . because you need to understand your purpose for telling the story. And so what do you want people to get at the end? What do you want them to do?

Now, I think there are very creative ways to ask for the order. Some might be bold. Some might be more subtle. Some might be baked into the overall story that just becomes sort of like the proof is left to the student. Okay, I get it. I'm supposed to go do something.

But if you don't identify that at the very, very beginning . . . so if you don't have . . . if you don't understand your audience, you don't have empathy for them, if you haven't come up with the ending, and you don't

have a purpose, well, those, just those three cards alone, you're kind of stepping into the abyss.

Park: You're absolutely right. And how many presentations, PowerPoint or otherwise, have we sat like we were sitting in the abyss, as someone going through that?

Ron: Absolutely. I always tell people, bullets kill people.

Park: Oh, gosh, they do. They sure do. So tell us, where can we find these? I know you've got storyhow.com, but where can people track down your Story How deck? And tell us a little bit more about the workshops that you do.

Ron: Sure. So if you want to learn about me and what I'm doing, and I try to write a blog post every week, and I have a newsletter for storytelling, visit me at storyhow.com. And the Story How PitchDeck is available on amazon.com and so please feel free to go to Amazon and look for Ron Ploof's Story How PitchDeck.

And then the workshops. I do teach workshops. I come in and I love to do internal workshops, where I come into the company and will walk through the Story How PitchDeck. Everybody gets a PitchDeck. I like to say that they can take this PitchDeck back with them, and it can stay in their backpacks, or their purses, or their desk drawer, and really, it can guide them through the rest of their career. Now, I wanted them to be using this as a tool and getting better at storytelling. So that's me.

Park: Wow. Well, thank you. I love it. I love what you've done with it. It doesn't appear like you're going to go back into the business sector anytime soon, that you've got really a nice thing working here through Story How and being that promoter and that consultant on story, storytelling, especially in the business world. So congratulations on all that. I love the tool. Terrific tool.

Ron: Thank you so much, Park.

Park: All right, Ronald. Thank you for being with us, and thank you all for listening in to another episode of Business of Story. Love to have you go to iTunes and give us a rating, how'd you like the show? Put those five stars up there, if you're so inclined, and give us a note. If there's anything

that you would like to hear, or other subjects that you would like for me to cover, please go to businessofstory.com, where you can get my email address and shoot me a note, or, what the heck, shoot me a note at park@parkandco.com. Would love to hear what you think of the story, the story podcast, and what else we can bring for you.

And, of course, if you like what you're hearing, please share it with the world. One last thing, when you're at Business of Story, we have free downloadable tools there that you can use for your own personal storytelling. And then we have a very interesting tool that's going to be coming online very soon that will take you through our 10-step story cycle process that you can use for yourself. You can apply it to your brand. You can apply it to your employees, your customers, and across the board.

So stay tuned for that. I'll let you know when that goes live here in the next week or two. But thank you again for listening, and until next time, this is Park Howell with Business of Story.