Business of Story Intro Podcast with Randy Olson – "Why Storytelling is Essential to Science"

Park: Welcome to The Business of Story, where we explore the intersection of creative storytelling and commerce. By commerce, I mean everything from business leadership to brand strategy and activation to content marketing. Hi, I'm Park Howell and my job is to ignite your inner storyteller by introducing you to some of the most amazing story artists in the business. Today is absolutely no different.

Now, this guy I got to know through his second book, "Connection," and we'll talk about that. But what's amazing to me about him is he is a Harvard PhD oceanographer. He gave up a tenured position to then go out to USC Film School where he graduated, presumably with honors. Once you get to know this guy, you'll see what I mean.

He became a documentarian, made several documentaries. And he's just about ready to publish his third book. His whole goal is to [inaudible 00:04:31] become better storytellers so they can connect their brilliance with us average people.

So I would love to welcome to our show and a great honor of having here, Randy Olson. Randy, welcome.

Randy: Hey, great to be here. Great to talk to you once again, Park, because we've had lots of lengthy, incredibly productive conversations over the past few years.

Park: And again, God bless technology, I guess. We have never actually met in person. We were scheduled to do that about a year ago and then this back thingy took me over and I haven't been out there. So we've got to rectify that here in September, October. We'll be out there. But I first came across you when I was [inaudible 00:05:16] people that were at the intersection of storytelling and business.

Look, I think, actually, I read a precursor to your book before it came out called "Connection: Hollywood Storytelling Meets Critical Thinking." Out of that, I just pulled so many great nuggets on how to work with our students to help train them. Tell us a little bit how you went from oceanographer to documentarian to now author training scientists literally around the world, on how to communicate.

Randy: I will tell you that in one sentence using the be-all and end-all of communication that you and I are going to talk about in great depth known as the ABT. And my story is that I was a marine biologist and I received tenure at the University of New Hampshire. But then I realized I had a bigger, broader interest in the mass communication of information.

So I resigned from my tenured professorship, moved to LA, went to film school and ended up writing three books, in which the third one is coming out in September, titled, "Houston, We Have a Narrative: Why Science Needs Story," to be Published by University of Chicago Press.

Park: Right on. Right on. So what is it about you and scientists and their lack of ability to be able to communicate and connect with the rest of the world, why did that get in your craw and you wanted to do something about it?

Randy: We'd have to say here in this session that we will be discussing at the core of my book or the training that I do nowadays all comes down to this one singular template that we have labeled as the ABT, which stands for these three words — and, but and therefore. And I am arguing nowadays it is the be-all and end-all of communication. There is no alternative version to this for narrative.

Narrative is at the core of how we've communicated for at least 4,000 years and the time has come for everybody on the planet to learn this fundamental building block of how to communicate in ABT.

You won't see it so far in much of anything anybody else is teaching with the exception of the two brilliant guys who created the animated series "South Park," Trey Parker and Matt Stone. They are the two that I learned about it from. They talked about it in terms of a rule called their Rule of Replacing that they use in editing where they replaced ands with buts and therefores. I heard that three and a half years ago.

And now I've had this long journey of developing it, crafting it. You, sir, are the one who labeled it as, "The DNA of story," which I quote you on in my book. You're absolutely right. Nowadays, it is the magic bullet that we're using with everybody that I work with now, the ABT.

So that's at the core of it all. What the ABT is is the essence of narrative. The problem the science world has is that it has a very strong non-narrative tendency. They just don't have enough awareness of this problem that they have, the way in which they are drawn over and over again to be non-narrative.

And yet, part of the argument I make in the book is that 100 years ago it wasn't that way. Scientists a century ago were far more narrative than they are today, I believe. One of the reflections of that is that a century ago, they actually created a narrative template for all of their communications, their written communication, which persisted today. It's almost universally used today. And yet, they're completely oblivious of it.

So there's a name for this template, which is the IMRAD. I, in preparation for writing this book, began in my talks to hundreds, thousands of scientists, asking the audience, "How many people know what this acronym means, IMRAD?" Last fall, I did it with 1,000 or 800 agronomists, kind of plant biologists and not a single hand went up out of 800 of them. And then the next question is, "How many of you have read a scientific paper broken into four sections: introduction, methods, results and discussion?"

Those are the five letters of the A standing for and. By about the time I get to the letter R for results. They all start laughing like, "Oh yes." Because they've all read hundreds if

not thousands of papers with this structure. And yet they've all forgotten where it came from, which is that 100 years ago, scientists had deeper narrative instinct.

They understood the need to shape their information to conform with the narrative world with which we live. They created this template that now is used everywhere, but they've collected forgotten where it came from. The result is that you get scientists today who are kind of nurtured in these laboratories where they don't interact with the public much.

Very little priority is placed on communicating effectively. They get out there and they talk in a narrative form, which I've labeled as [inaudible 00:10:14]. Story, you're just out there, "And here's a graph of this, and here's a graph of this, and here's a point about this." And it's very common in science and yet it also happens in all sorts of other professions as well. People [inaudible 00:10:27] information.

Park: We see it in business all the time in [inaudible 00:10:32] are the MBAs, the engineers, the intellects, lawyers. You're right, it's just, "And, and, and." So tell us, what is the structure of the ABT and how does it work or why does it work?

Randy: Furthermore in your world, it's the quant jocks, as I learned a year ago when we did our workshop with the folks at Deloitte. About half of the people in that group were quant jocks, these guys, they're the accountants that lived their world in the numbers. You could see it with them. They're just like scientists and they're in that and, and, and world.

So what the ABT is, where this all began, as I say, was watching this documentary they did on Comedy Central, they did in the fall of 2011 about the making of "South Park." In there, they followed the creation of an episode from start to finish. Halfway through, they walk in on Trey Parker, one of the two co-creators, who said that he writes the first draft of every episode. He said, "When I get it done, it's about 40 pages long. Then I go back and I use what I call my Rule of Replacing. What I do is try and replace the word 'and' with either 'but' or 'therefore,' the storytelling gets more interesting."

I heard that... I've been through film school. I've been through at least five to seven different writing classes. I had never heard narrative structure expressed that simply. I wrote it down, began [inaudible 00:11:55]. They all said, "Wow, that's really simple." And it's correct. It's true. I've just never heard it put that simply.

It's not surprising that it would come from those two guys. By that point, they had 15 years of cranking out stories week after week that have to work, won all these awards. So they have the deep narrative instinct that most human beings lack. They know a story when they hear it.

So I began researching it and immediately found my way into what's known as the Dialectic, the Hegelian Triad that comes from Hegel, the philosopher and Kant in the 1700s and what they formalized is this three-part structure that they identify it as thesis, antithesis, synthesis. That is at the core of everything. It's at the core of

Storytelling, the core of the scientific method, the core of logic, of reason, of argumentation. You see it everywhere when you begin to get sensitized to it. Why it's not today used today? Maybe it's too old fashioned. But it also tracks back further than that, all the way back to Aristotle, who in the "Poetics," was the first one to formally talk about plays having these three parts, basically and it came to be known as three-act structure.

So it's universal. It is incredibly simple. What it means specifically with those three words is that every story, if it's a well-told story can be broken down into that. I can tell you a story of a little girl who lives on a farm in Kansas and her life is boring, but then one day a tornado sweeps her to the Land of Oz, therefore she has to take a journey to find her way home. Or in the science world I could tell you about my laboratory where we study biochemistry and physiology but we've come to realize the important questions are at the molecular level, therefore we're doing the following molecular projects.

You begin to realize it is applicable for every single thing. And anybody who tries to argue back and says, "My thing is too complicated to boil it down to an ABT," that's where they're making a mistake. They've failed to find the central narrative of what they're doing and it means they're caught up in the weeds of just a big mess.

So I began to formulate it like that and began presenting at these science meetings and it began taking off like wildfire. Everywhere we go, people put it to work and it solves all these communication problems. Isn't that what you've found with your courses there at Arizona State?

Park: Oh, the irony of all of this is it goes from, as you pointed out, Aristotle to Kant to Hegel and yet it took Cartman to bring it to your attention.

Randy: Exactly.

Park: That's how universal it is and I've found it. Absolutely, I've found after reading "Connection," I've started courses with the executive master's program teaching our folks the ABT. They look at me cross-eyed with it and they think that's too simple. It's really not because you get complete narrative story structure just by using those three words. I use it in my line of work.

Then they'll look at me and say, "How do you use it?" I can say, "Well, I've been in the advertising marketing business for 30 years and we've had our share of successes and some mediocre failures and we move on. But technology has changed, put the power in the consumer. Brands no longer have the influence of mass media because the masses are the media. Therefore, we have gone back to the ancient power of storytelling to bring structure and meaning to our narratives to help our brands connect on a very meaningful basal way with our customers."

That's how we use the and, but, therefore. [Inaudible 00:15:32] in the but, something happens, conflict arises and then you have resolution in the therefore moves the story

on. I'm sure you'll mention, talk about, Randy, how you use this over and over again. And, but, therefore, and, but, therefore. Every scene has an and, but, therefore in it. You can play it into PowerPoints. You can do it in brand strategy and user experience on websites.

It's really amazing how universal this is. That's when I had my aha moment and I sent you that note and I said, "Dude, this ABT is the absolute DNA of story. Everything starts from that ABT, I've found."

Randy: You're absolutely right about that. As I say, I've been on a three and a half year journey where I was skeptical in the beginning like, "Is this as powerful as it seems to be?" Month by month, I've gotten deeper into it. I did a TEDMED about it a while ago. I had a letter in Science Magazine in 2013.

And slowly spreading this thing, it's incredible how resistant the science world is to innovation. They're all trained to negate everything they get confronted with. So it's very hard to affect change there. I've actually had more success in the business world with some of the groups that I've worked with. They're more open to change and innovation. They're looking for new ways to do things. It's very exciting with the business folks who pick up on it.

But it is that fundamental. Furthermore, it's really not even an acronym. It bugs me a little bit when people call it an acronym because there's more to it than just three letters. They aren't just any three random terms. Most of these acronyms... when you start looking at all these people trying to teach story now, everybody has jumped on this bandwagon, "The powers of story, the secret of story, how story will change your life."

Not a goddamn one of them is using the ABT yet. Until I start seeing this popping up in their language, I'm just not really a fan of what they're teaching. They're overcomplicating things. Story is endlessly challenging and elusive. It takes entire lifetimes. Two months ago, I had a little chat with Eric Roth, who's the Oscar-winning screenwriter that wrote the screenplay for "Forrest Gump" and "Munich" and a bunch of other great movies.

He's 70. I asked him, "At age 70, do you feel like you've got it for narrative? You've figured out the principles and all you do is supply them nowadays?" He sort of said, "Are you kidding?" With every screenplay he's learning a new aspect of how story works. It's a moving target because our society is changing while you're figuring out how to learn narrative and people's attention spans are changing.

So it's not the same world of storytelling today than it was 30 or 40 years ago. It's infinitely changing, which is one of my things that I'm throwing at the science world now. I'm seeing people run these one-day workshops on, "The secrets of story you can learn in one day." You cannot learn anything in one day about story, absolutely nothing.

What I say is you can no more go to the gym and lift weights for a day and walk home buff than you can take a one-day storytelling workshop and become a master storyteller. You can get a start. It can pique your interest. You can learn some directions. But narrative is like a muscle that you must work out over time, which is why what we developed along with my book is something called Story Circles. It's the idea of ten weeks, one hour a week of sort of this one-hour training session we do.

Park: Hey, let's hold right there for a second.

Randy: You got it.

Park: Welcome back to The Business of Story and our guest today, Randy Olson. Randy, you were talking about Story Circles. Tell us about what you're doing with that.

Randy: Yeah. I kind of picked it up from the improv folks. I've, for the last 15 years, worked with improv actors from the Groundlings Improv Comedy Theater in Hollywood and they do workshops with me. In fact, my coauthor, Brian Palermo from my book "Connection," is a longtime Groundlings member. They talk about improve as being like a muscle. You have to work it out week after week.

Brian is in this weekly show on Wednesday nights called "The Uncle Joe Show," that he's done every Wednesday for 11 years. That's what the good improv actors have to do [inaudible 00:20:39], basically, just like physical fitness. Narrative is exactly the same thing. Narrative is not a few simple rules that you learn and suddenly you're gifted with it. It's an instinct.

Robert McKee, and the great screenwriting instructors in Hollywood talk about story sense. That's this instinct that some people have got where they can hear a story, they can figure out how to fix it. When they tell stories, their stories come together, really well structured.

And the true genius of it... the show "Breaking Bad" was like the ultimate manifestation of how powerful and important narrative structure is. That's a show that was created by just a small group of writers, like three or four with a very clear vision and they wrote episodes two years in advance. So they were planting things that were going to come up a couple of years down the line, very sophisticated.

But that's how challenging story can be. To hear people talk as though they took a one-day workshop and they've got it all done and down. This is what I get from a lot of these science folks now. It's just kind of shocking to me. No, you need to do it over time.

So what Story Circles is then is the idea of if you've only got ten hours to allocate to learning narrative, rather than doing a one-day, ten-hour workshop where you walk home with your brain full of all of this great stuff that you learned, I advocate spreading those ten hours over ten weeks doing one hour a week and not doing much, just working with this ABT tool. The ABT is the be-all and end-all.

Another way I like to refer to it is always be telling stories. That's what you want to do. Always be arching. Always addressing problems and searching for solutions for them. That becomes a piece of instinct, intuition you have to develop so that you know, you can feel that you're droning off and on.

You can feel you're off in and, and, and land and like, "Oh I've said too many ands. I better get to a point here." Or you can feel that you've got five different narrative threads going, the other place that goes wrong I've labeled as DHY, stands for despite, however, yet, and that's over-narrative, where despite this, however this, yet this, but this."

And you hear that a lot from academics. They're [inaudible 00:22:47] when they get together, they can end up, two colleagues working on the same topic with five different narrative threads at once and they can follow everything. But beyond their tiny circle, nobody has any idea what they're talking about. So these are the challenges they face.

Park: Randy, what can a business communicator do every day just to sharpen that storytelling muscle?

Randy: That's the whole idea of our Story Circles workshop. Two or three things. First off, the fundamental tool is the ABT. The more you get to know it, the more you get to spot it all around you. That's when you're starting to develop some narrative sense, when you begin to realize somebody who's stuck in and, and, and mode. Or something is so crystal clear and you realize, "Wow, they just landed on the but and they got right to the therefore." You begin to see it and feel it. That's the number one.

The number two thing that is a core principle is that story development has to be a social function. You cannot [inaudible 00:23:45] in your room developing your great story and expect it to work when you take it out there. Story circles is built around the idea of five individuals coming together for one hour a week and working. The first half hour, they analyze five abstracts for narrative structure for which three of them are synopses of movies, of fiction movies.

They begin to realize... my catchphrase in the book is, "Dude, it's all the same story." That came from my colleague Dorie Barton, who always [inaudible 00:24:13] the truth. It's all the same story. The same structure that underlies the scientific communication, also underlies movies. And then the second half hour, they take turns each week. They tell one story and then they use the tools that I've developed in the workshop to analyze their story.

So that's what they can do, begin to organize yourselves. Begin by reading my book. I hate to be pimping by book, but I conclude by describing what Story Circles. They'll be better if you hire me to come and do it, but if you don't have the bucks or just want to get to it, just read the book and see what it says and start doing it yourself. The ABT is the be-all and end-all.

Park: Okay. When we come [inaudible 00:24:59], I'm going to introduce this. It's something you just sent me. I want you to hear this. You can guess what that is. But when we come

back, Randy is going to share with us this fun little game tool he's put together to help us all become better storytellers right after this message.

Welcome back to The Business of Story and my guest today, Randy Olson, and the brand new tool he's created. Here it is. Listen. Do you know what that is? Randy, what is it? Tell our listeners here.

Randy: Those are the ABT dice.

Park: And so you know what I'm looking at, he's created these dice. There are three of them. There's a green one. On it, it has words that say, "Vector, spore, infection, rot." And then there are two white ones. One white one has, "Your shoe, sports, weather, platypus, your car..." The other one, ah, this is the where the story structure comes in. He's got AAA, which presumably is and, and, and, the ABT, the DHY, which he mentions and so forth. So you've got three options there. How do you play this crazy game?

Randy: So this is all built around the core tool in the book and that we use for the Story Circles workshop, which I've labeled as the narrative spectrum. This is the idea that the ABT is at the center of the spectrum. It is perfect, optimal narrative structure. It's setting up one narrative and directing it off in a narrative pathway.

To the left is the first way that things go wrong, which is the and, and, and. That means that's non-narrative. You never even started a story. You never got to the but. You're just like, "And we did this, and we did this, and we did this," and finally the audience is like, "Okay, but did anything ever happen?"

And then the other way you go wrong, the other end of the spectrum is what I've labeled as DHY. The word but is a contradiction word. So each time you introduce a contradiction word, you've started a new narrative direction and people get caught up with too many narrative directions. So DHY stands for despite, however, yet. This means, "Despite this happening, however this happened, yet some people think this, but..." and that's where you get just confusing. Where are we going with this thing? We're off in five different directions.

Both of these problems you hear all the time, boring and confusing. The goal of all of this stuff is to make people interesting, no longer boring or confusing. This dice ends up being a tool that you can use to practice this to try and rid yourself of it. So this just came to me a couple months ago. Before we even ran our prototypes with Story Circles, we're kicking ourselves now wishing we had this at the beginning. It's such a simple tool.

So you use two of the dice, the structure die, we call it, with the three different forms of the sentence and then either of these two content die. So the two white ones you've got [inaudible 00:28:14] and actually do it for us Park.

Park: I'm going to roll just the white ones. I feel like I need a beer in my hands or something. Is this a drinking game?

Randy: It's a party game.

Park: Here we go. So I got a DHY and my favorite movie.

Randy: So start with the name of the movie and take it from there.

Park: And I've got add the DHY. I've got to add the despite, however, yet, is that right?

Randy: That's right.

Park: So by far my favorite movie, despite watching lots of other movies and "Jaws" and "Star Wars" and all that, however, I do really like comedies. It's not particularly a comedy, yet the background in music brings me back to watching "Amadeus." Therefore, it has become one of my favorite movies.

Randy: Where in the world are you going with this? That's what you get with the DHY, your audience thinking, "Where are we going?"

Park: Exactly.

Randy: [Inaudible 00:29:09] three steps ago and also, it drains your brain a little bit to even come up with that sort of nonsense of DHY. Okay. Roll them again.

Park: Roll them again. Okay. Here we go. This is awesome. I got the weather and I got another dang DHY.

Randy: All right. Roll that one again, give us a different structure.

Park: All right. I got an AAA.

Randy: There you go.

Park: Weather. Man, I'm in Phoenix, Arizona and it's summer and it's hot as hell. It's 103 out and we've got a swimming pool, like so many other people do. So I spend a lot of time at night in the swimming pool trying to cool off and I—

Randy: Wait, wait, wait, you just broke the rules by saying "so." So is a consequence word, just like therefore. So you've suddenly jumped out of that mode. But so long as you're going with the ands, you can see how easy it is, "And it's hot and people are complaining and people are sweating." And is our default mode for all the stuff. This is what happens with academics, particularly. You ask them what do you work on. They jump right into and mode, "Well, I work on this and this and this and this." And you're like, "Why do you even bother?"

Now go ahead and just roll the content die and do an ABT on what you get for that.

Park: All right. So my content... well, let's jump in here. Sports. Sports. Growing up, I used to love to play baseball and I was a pretty good centerfielder, but then everybody grew up and my puberty didn't hit until like four years later and I was slow and plodding. Therefore, I never played anymore baseball and moved on to skiing and other things.

Randy: And that's a perfectly clear narrative thought, nice and clean and simple. We followed you all the way along. The more you work with these dice, you begin to develop the instinct, like, "And, and, and is just boring. DHY is a confusing mess and ABTs are so clear." And that's what you want. So they're a very good starting point for just getting this down.

Now, the crazy thing that we're doing this Friday, actually, I sent you one of the sample kits, on Friday, I will be working with 100 plant pathologists from the US Department of Agriculture at their convention in Pasadena. I'll start the morning with them. We're handing out 100 of these kits to them so they get their own little set of dice. And then they've come up with their own separate content die from their world, which is the green one you see there. They pick six different diseases and six different terms from their world in plant pathology.

So after they've used the white die and get used to the general topics, then they'll move on to the green one and they'll start coming up with ABTs and and, and, ands for rot, smut, what is an infection vector, all these different things from their world. That's

the sort of stuff we'll start doing now with groups, where you have the individual group pull out their terminology, their world. What are the kinds of stories that they tell?

And this is actually, you know, we're just making this up as we go along. I'm beginning to think this could also be an effective tool for somebody getting ready to give a talk where they're going to have to have a Q&A at the end of it and like a press conference. Put your six topics on a die and practice this to make sure you've got your ABTs ready to answer questions you're going to get hit with so you don't go off into and, and, and mode or to DHY.

Park: Well, great, Randy. I've got one more throw to another terrific sponsor story. When we come back, we'll wrap up to talk a little bit more about the ABT and the Gettysburg Address. Be right back.

You know, Randy, you and I have been laughing, when I first heard about the ABT in your book, then I started digging through things and sure enough, came across the Gettysburg Address. The way I came across it, actually, our creative director was making a presentation and he was talking about story and he said, "You know what makes the Gettysburg Address so powerful is how it begins, 'Four score and seven years ago,' which is just another way of saying once upon a time." So story was huge.

I went and I looked at that and I started reading through it and seeing what else was in this two-minute speech. Literally, your ABT form just jumped out at me and that was

my aha moment. I typed over to you and said, "Dude," I guess I can call you dude, "Do you realize the Gettysburg Address is an ABT?" And what I encourage our listeners to do is to go and read it and see if you can't find within it the and, but and therefore. It is just universal, natural story structure. So you're really onto something with this ABT.

Now, tell us about your book, your new book.

Randy: Well, let me say one more word about the Gettysburg Address. I think it was just last year Ken Burns did an entire documentary special on the Gettysburg Address. He didn't come anywhere close to landing on it. The reason that speech has persisted is because it has perfect narrative structure as exemplified by the ABT.

And why these scholars have never looked at it from that perspective, I'll tell you why. This narrative theory has been developed here in Hollywood in the incubator of our society for narrative. Hollywood has not meshed that well with the rest of society. Academia looks down on them like they're a bunch of morons, but they know so much more about how narrative works. These books, you can track the pathway, starting with Joseph Campbell. You had Jonah Sachs on, who did a nice job talking about the implementation of Joseph Campbell into movies and storytelling.

From Joseph Campbell then to George Lucas with "Star Wars," where he implemented Campbell's principles of the hero's journey into that and then Christopher Vogler and his book "The Writer's Journey," which was basically explaining to the writing audience, "This is how it works. This is how George Lucas used Campbell," and then all the way to Blake Snyder with "Save the Cat," which is a dangerously simplistic version of these templates of the hero's journey. But you can see the pathway there. That's the way in which Hollywood is way out ahead of the rest of our society on these narrative principles.

What I am doing with my book here is drawing on that knowledge, trying to bring it to the science world and saying, "Look, you guys, I know you despise these lunatics in Hollywood. I've been living here for 20 years. Trust me, you're right. They are a bunch of lunatics. But in all their lunacy, they've pulled out basically the science of narrative." They have distilled it down to that. They know these templates and formulas, the ABT being the ultimate one.

By the way, the reason the ABT is so powerful is one key thing, which is simplicity. That is the essence of effective teaching and learning and all this stuff. The problems of all these people out there trying to teach story right now is they're all over-complicating it and they're all jumping all the way into the complexity of the hero's journey and all this stuff, for which, beginning students can't take much from that.

But the ABT is transformative that they can put it to work within the one day of the workshop and get a start on it. It's just that they then to need set themselves on a journey of using it week after week to begin to develop the instincts on how it applies to everything.

Park: What I learned from your work in "Connection," applying the ABT with our executive master's program, that's the first thing I focused on the very first week is as they start writing their own personal narrative as to why they're in this program and what sort of sustainability initiative do they want to do, they have to start with that declarative ABT sentence. It can only be one or two sentences long. It can't be going on and on. I get them to really boil it down.

But once they see it, there's something about the subconscious that just wraps its mind around the ABT and it's a natural structure that it's looking for because our brain has really one purpose in the world and that's to make meaning out of everything that's going on around us. There's something about this ABT that's so biologically connected to our subconscious so that our brain automatically recognizes it.

Randy: I would broaden out what you just said there. Beyond making meaning, our brains are molded to one simple process, which is problem/solution. From the very beginning, the first cave people walking out of the caves, they had a problem finding food and they had to solve it. That's what our brains are molded around.

One of the cool pieces of evidence that I bring up in the book is what's going on with neurophysiologists now. I've gotten to be buddies with a guy named Uri Hasson at Princeton. In February, I spent two hours hanging out with him in his lab. He has been using functional MRI to look at brain activity of people who are being told a story that has narrative structure versus people hearing a story that doesn't have narrative structure. You see very clear differences. First off, you see way more brain activity when people are engaged in the story. So they can actually show you the science of that.

But secondly, you see much greater similarity of activity patterns between individuals when they're caught into a narrative than when there's no narrative going on. What that means is if you're up there presenting stuff and you don't have narrative structure, people's brains are wandering all over the place and they're picking up on different things. So that's sort of the leadership narrative. It brings the whole audience together. He is developing the science to show you that.

One of the really cool things that he showed me, he wasn't aware of the ABT and I was explaining that to him. At one point, he began showing me some work they're doing where they're having people listen to stories from NPR's radio lab and they look at the brain activity and low and behold, you can see a story being setup in the and, and mode, the exposition. And is an agreement word. There's no conflict going on yet. The brain is not doing much.

On the word but, parts of the brain light up. That's the contradiction word. The center of a good story is a source of tension or conflict. So as soon as you hit that point of conflict, you jump into that narrative world. That's when everybody comes together and begins to focus. And this is how simple it really is at the core. That's where everybody needs to start learning about the power of narrative.

Park: And, but, therefore. Final question for you Randy. How is your new book, "Houston, We Have a Narrative," different than connection?

Randy: The new book is putting the tools I've developed. My three books can actually be broken into the whole thing. The first one "Don't Be Such a Scientist" was a statement of the problems with scientists communicating. The second one was the workshops. So it was the journey... I ended the first book by saying, "I think the solutions to these communications problems lie in the world of narrative. I don't know enough yet to give you the specific tools to do it."

Five years later we ran this workshop and that's where we developed these tools, the word, the sentence, the paragraph, how to distill your story down. And now with this book, because I know the science world best, I have applied it now to the science world with the argument that this is the source of the communication problem is narrative structure.

But the thing is, what's in the book there is really applicable to anything, as with all this stuff. Communication is universal. There is no science of communication. I try and tell these people that. It's all the same. Dude, it's all the same story. It all tracks back to Joseph Campbell. He's the guy that pinpointed the monomyth, the idea that all around the world everybody's telling stories with the same basic structure.

The last thing I want to say is I did not intend to become an ABT zealot. You are partly responsible for it. You're the guy that pointed to the Gettysburg Address, called it to the DNA of story. With each one of those little developments, you made me more rabid about it and now you have to deal with this lunatic out there that you're a part of the driving force of it. So I just want to make sure you're aware of that.

Park: That's good. As you were elevating this discussion, I am devolving it into what would a caveman say about the and, but and therefore. We've got it down to three utterances.

Randy: That's right. Tell us about that.

Park: Uh-huh, uh-oh, aha. There you have it, the ABT, uh-huh, uh-oh, aha.

Randy: That's more than just silly. That is absolutely true. Go through those three again.

Park: Uh-huh, uh-oh, aha.

Randy: So the ABT, the three words, and is a word of agreement, but is a word of contradiction, therefore is a consequence word. So those three utterances, are, what's the first one?

Park: Uh-huh.

Randy: That's an utterance of agreement. Second one, uh-oh? We have a problem here. And the third one is what?

Park: Aha.

Randy: Aha, therefore.

Park: Exactly.

Randy: And you came up with that too. It's amazing. You have pushed this whole agenda further with your input.

Park: I've been having fun with it, man. I really want to thank you for joining us today on Business of Story. Randy, it's been a pleasure having you here. I can't wait to read the new book. It's out, I guess, as we speak. It just launched.

Randy: That sounds cool. Hopefully our little two-minute animated piece on the ABT is posted as well. So watch for that.

Park: Right on. Will do. Thank you all for listening to this edition of Business of Story. If you like what you hear, certainly go to iTunes. We would love a rating. We would love a review.

If there are more types of topics or things I can cover, please send me an email over at BusinessOfStory.com. You can listen to this episode and you can listen to all of the episodes of Business of Story there. Plus we have some free downloadable storytelling tools on the site. So help yourself. Start with your ABT right after we hang up with you here and become that powerful storyteller that's within. Thank you very much.

Randy: And I just want to tell your listeners that Park Howell is a guy who gets it when it comes to story far more than anybody else I've run into in the business world. So there you go.

Park: Thank you, Randy, I appreciate that. Have a great day.