

CHAPTER 9

THAT HELPS THEM AVOID FAILURE

StoryBrand Principle Six: Every human being is trying to avoid a tragic ending.



A story lives and dies based on the question: Will the hero succeed or will they fail? Throughout a story, storytellers foreshadow a potential successful ending and a potential tragic ending. The audience remains in suspense as long as the storyteller keeps the hero teetering on the precipice of success and failure.

The only two motivations a hero has in a story are to escape something bad or experience something good. Such is life. Our desire to avoid pain motivates us to seek a resolution to our problems.

If a storyteller doesn't clearly let an audience know what no-good, terrible, awful thing might befall their hero unless she overcomes her challenge, the story will have no stakes, and a story without stakes is boring.

As a rule, each scene in a movie must answer the question: What's at stake for the hero? Every conversation, every chase scene, every reflective montage should serve the movie in the same way: it must either move the character closer to, or further from, the tragic result that might befall them.

We kept turning the pages of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* to find out the dark secret Edward Rochester had been hiding.

We sat on the edge of our seats in *Jaws* because we knew the citizens of Amity Island might be killed by the shark if Chief Martin Brody didn't do something.

Imagine a story in which nothing bad could befall the hero. Imagine a love story in which everything went well for the couple straight through to the beautiful and tension-free wedding. Imagine an action movie in which the bomb the hero had to destroy was actually a dud and nobody was in danger. Would an audience care?

Brands that don't warn their customers about what could happen if they don't buy their products fail to answer the "so what" question every customer is secretly asking.

WHERE'S THE MAYHEM?

Allstate Insurance's long-running Mayhem campaign features actor Dean Cain humorously portraying everything from raccoons in the attic to a raging fire started by a barbecue grill at a tailgating party. The idea was to humorously remind people why they needed insurance. Mayhem is always contrasted against the peaceful stability of Allstate, which asks the question, "Are you in good hands?"

In 2015, Allstate, along with the advertising agency Leo Burnett, took the campaign to a higher level. During the Sugar Bowl on New Year's Day, Allstate launched a campaign called Project Share Aware. The idea was to make people aware that sharing their whereabouts on social media might tip off criminals about when to burglarize their homes.

To announce the project, Allstate found a real couple and led them to believe they'd won a prize. They visited the couple in their home, secretly taking pictures of their household items. Later, they recreated their home on a soundstage, complete with duplicates of their belongings. The couple was then invited to attend the Sugar Bowl and given their own private box. During the game, Mayhem began auctioning off the couple's belongings on national television. People were directed to Mayhemsale.com for bargain-basement prices on everything from the couple's used car to an

old tuba. As the couple watched their possessions being sold on the big screens at the game, they panicked. Hidden cameras caught their reactions and broadcast them on live television.

Of course, the couple's actual possessions were safe. Nevertheless, the campaign agitated a fear in many Americans. In fact, news outlets all over the country, including ABC News, *Wall Street Journal*, and the *New York Times*, covered the story. Suddenly, the threat of criminals walking into our homes as we announce our distant whereabouts on social media became a national fear.

The result? Mayhemsale.com received 6,000 to 10,000 hits per second immediately following each commercial. The site received more than 18 million hits during the game. Also, #Mayhemsale trended in the top ten hashtags during the game, and immediately after the commercials aired, surged to number one worldwide. Mayhem's Twitter followers increased by 24,000 during the game, and the first commercial of the campaign resulted in more than 20 million impressions on Facebook and almost 70,000 likes.¹ Allstate had, in the course of one football game, foreshadowed a potential failure for their customers and sold an insurance protecting them, both opening a story loop and offering to close it in a single campaign.

Of course, we don't all have access to the millions it takes to create a campaign like this, but the benefits of featuring the potential pitfalls of not doing business with us are much easier to include than we may think. Blog subjects, e-mail content, and bullet points on our website can all include elements of potential failure to give our customers a sense of urgency when it comes to our products and services.

WHAT'S THERE TO LOSE?

As it relates to our marketing, the obvious question is: What will the customer lose if they don't buy our products?

Some of you just cringed. I understand. I used to cringe when I thought about "warning" my customers about imminent doom too. Why wouldn't I? The last thing I want to be is a fearmonger, because it's true that fearmongers don't do well in the marketplace. But fearmongering is not

the problem 99.9 percent of business leaders struggle with. Most of us struggle with the opposite. We don't bring up the negative stakes enough and so the story we're telling falls flat. Remember, if there are no stakes, there is no story.

People Are Motivated by Loss Aversion

Emphasizing potential loss is more than just good storytelling; it's good behavioral economics. In 1979, Nobel Memorial Prize winner Daniel Kahneman published a theory about why people make certain buying decisions. Prospect Theory, as it was called, espoused that people are more likely to be dissatisfied with a loss than they are satisfied with a gain. In other words, people hate losing \$100 more than they like winning \$100. This, of course, means loss aversion is a greater motivator of buying decisions than potential gains. In fact, according to Kahneman, in certain situations, people are two to three times more motivated to make a change to avoid a loss than they are to achieve a gain.²

When Lyndon Baines Johnson worked to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964, he faced undying pressure from conservative political leaders across the South. One of the principal leaders who refused to endorse the legislation was George Wallace, then governor of Alabama. Wallace had no vote on the bill, but his influence threatened its passage all the same. At a crucial moment in the negotiations, Johnson sat Wallace down and explained he'd better get on the right side of history. Johnson said that Wallace's legacy hung in the balance, that they'd either build a statue in his honor or he'd be remembered for instigating hate. The choice was his. Johnson spelled out the narrative and emphasized the stakes, including the potential of the governor's tarnished legacy. The Civil Rights bill, of course, was passed.

So how do we use messages from the failure category in our marketing? In Dominic Infante, Andrew Rancer, and Deanna Womack's book *Building Communication Theory*, they propose a four-step process called a "fear appeal."

First, we must make a reader (or listener) know they are vulnerable to a threat. For example:

“Nearly 30 percent of all homes have evidence of termite infestation.”

Second, we should let the reader know that since they’re vulnerable, they should take action to reduce their vulnerability.

“Since nobody wants termites, you should do something about it to protect your home.”

Third, we should let them know about a *specific* call to action that protects them from the risk.

“We offer a complete home treatment that will insure your house is free of termites.”

Fourth, we should challenge people to take this specific action.

“Call us today and schedule your home treatment.”³

Essentially, Infante, Rancer, and Womack present a soft way of agitating a fear and then highlight a path that would return readers or listeners to peace and stability.

Fear Is Salt in the Recipe

We do not need to use a great deal of fear in the story we’re telling our customers. Just a pinch of salt in the recipe will do. While we do need to communicate something from the failure category in order to complete our BrandScript, too many warnings about imminent doom will turn customers off.

Infante, Rancer, and Womack explain why:

When receivers are either very fearful or very unafraid, little attitude or behavior change results. High levels of fear are so strong that individuals block them out; low levels are too weak to produce the desired effect. Messages containing moderate amounts of fear-rousing content are most effective in producing attitudinal and/or behavior change.⁴

WHAT ARE YOU HELPING YOUR CUSTOMER AVOID?

What negative consequences are you helping customers avoid? Could customers lose money? Are there health risks if they avoid your services? What about opportunity costs? Could they make or save more money with you than they can with a competitor? Could their quality of life decline if they pass you by? What's the cost of not doing business with you?

If you're a financial advisor, for example, the list of what you're helping customers avoid might look like this:

- Confusion about how your money is being invested
- Not being ready for retirement
- A lack of transparency from your financial advisor
- A lack of one-on-one interaction with your advisor
- Hidden fees

We can even imagine a tragic scene that might befall our customers if they don't engage. Our financial advisor might write something like this:

"Don't postpone your retirement. You've worked too hard for too long to not enjoy time with your grandchildren."

Here are a few examples of what StoryBrand clients are helping their customers avoid:

PERKINS MOTORPLEX (USED CARS)

Getting ripped off by a used-car salesman

Being stuck with a lemon

Feeling taken advantage of

RELY TECHNOLOGY (AUDIO AND VIDEO FOR THE HOME)

Living in a boring home

Nobody will want to watch the game at your house.

You need a PhD to turn on the TV.

AEROSPACE MARKET ENTRY (MANUFACTURER OF AEROSPACE EQUIPMENT)

Product failure, damaging your reputation

Inefficient production
Being passed by the competition

WIN SHAPE CAMPS (SUMMER CAMP FOR KIDS)

A long, boring summer
A bunch of restless kids in your house
Regret about having wasted the summer

You can see how including these ideas in each client's marketing material will give their overall story a sense of completeness and urgency.

In this module of your StoryBrand BrandScript, you're only given a few bullet points. You'll notice you're given a great deal more in the success module. This, of course, is on purpose. You'll only need a few terrible, dastardly, awful things to warn your customers about to get the point across. Too much and your customers will resist you, too little and they won't know why your products even matter.

Once we've defined the stakes, your customers will be motivated to resist failure. Next we'll dramatically increase their motivation by helping them imagine what life can look like when they buy your products or services. After they see what you offer and how it can make their lives better, you'll have included stakes in the narrative and customer engagement will grow. First, though, let's warn customers about the consequences of not doing business with you.

CLARIFY YOUR MESSAGE SO CUSTOMERS LISTEN

- Go to mystorybrand.com and either create a StoryBrand BrandScript or log in to your existing BrandScript.
- Brainstorm the negative consequences you are helping your customers avoid.
- Write down at least three of those consequences on your StoryBrand BrandScript.



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