

Story Success Starts with the Personal Anecdotes Pave Way, says Lipkin

By Jeannie Kever

You might not think a story about the time you were cruising down a California freeway, chewing gum with the windows open—and somehow got the gum stuck in your hair—would be a good opener for a conference call with potential investors. But maybe you'd be wrong.

“When you're trying to think about you're your company's story is, or what story is going to resonate you're your investors, it's the story that sticks with you.” New York based storyteller Lisa Lipkin told her audience the other night. So start with the personal.

Lipkin was in town last week for a leadership training program for women sponsored by the Center for Self at the Houstonian. The evening was a mix of dinner party and self-improvement session, and almost 30 women paid \$125 each to network and maybe, learn a few new tricks to use on the job.

“Even when you're up for review and you have to talk about your achievements, it really pays to show it through anecdotes,” Lipkin said.

Lipkin spent several years as storyteller in residence at the Museum of the City of New York before moving into the corporate world, where she has written and performed stories aimed at convincing children to recycle aluminum cans and stories designed to enhance the marketability of a condominium project.

She's also focused on the personal, performing a show about life as the child of a Holocaust survivor and writing a book, *Bringing the Story Home: The Complete Guide to Storytelling for Parents* (Norton, \$13.95).

Those roles aren't really so different,” she said. “Americans don't get that's storytelling can be part of your life. I want people to be able to see the story in everything, to see the story behind everything.”

Exactly how that would translate to the work world for these women, who hold jobs in the fashion industry, in public relations and advertising, in finance and other fields, remained open-ended.

Gloria Pearson, serving a term as president of the fashion-industry charitable foundation said she hoped to become better at communicating with others, “to set the hook to get the interest of people.”

Leisa Holland-Nelson launched the Center for Self after moving back to Houston last year after almost 25 years in New York, working in the fashion industry and as a management consultant.

She considered opening a day spa, only to discover that Houston already had plenty. She shifted gears and focused on leadership programs for women.

This spring, Nelson, a single mother with a 14 year-old daughter, began a stint as “the 30 second coach” on KPRC-TV’s morning show, appearing every other week with advice on changing one’s professional or personal life. Lipkin’s appearance was the second event at the Center for Self, an offbeat departure from the usual business seminar.

But really, the message wasn’t so different: Think about what you want to say and how you want to say it. Finding the story to illustrate your point is always more compelling than “just the facts presentation” said Lipkin.

“Just talking to somebody about the story behind their name is a fantastic icebreaker,” she said. “My name is Lisa, which about as American a name as you can get. It was a baby boomer name.” Other children of Holocaust survivors she knew growing up were named for their relatives who had died. Lipkin’s mother wanted only to forget. “My name was Lisa, which was both a relief and a sadness to me.”

With that, other women in the audience began to talk about their own names. There was Judi with an “i”, given the only girls’ name her parents could agree upon but without the customary “y” spelling because her father’s former girlfriend had been named Judy. And Sarah, officially known as “Saharah” because of a mistake on her birth certificate that her parents never corrected.

Natalie Nathan, who works for a real estate appraisal firm, said family lore has it that her grandfather, emigrating from Russia, replaced his own name Nathanowitz-with Nathan, after spotting a sign at Ellis Island for Nathan’s hot dogs.

Nathan had come for the evening with her mother, Ann., who like Nathan, was looking for a change of pace as much as an edge in the business world. It turned out that Ann had a few stories of her own to share, as Lipkin tossed out random words in order to spark an idea.

Including “chewing gum.”

“I never liked the rules, and one of the rules in school was no chewing gum,” Ann told the group.

"Gum" she added, "has gotten me into a lot of trouble.

Whether that story will help to move people up the career ladder remains to be seen. But it and others accomplished another goal. "Just fun," said Lynn Mathre, an investment advisor who joined the group. "You never know what you're going to leave a session with. With women's groups, I always learn something because women will share what they know."