

# Foreword

*Mel Silberman*

**H**e ran up to me at the end of a conference session, grabbed my hand, and shook it vigorously. “That was a stellar presentation, Mr. Silberman. You are an extraordinary storyteller; thank you for sharing your gift with us this afternoon.” He pressed a business card into my hand and walked away before I even had to chance thank him for his comments. Later that night I emptied the contents of my pocket and found his card. Hm . . . I thought to myself, “Terrence L. Gargiulo, president of MAKINGSTORIES.net.” That’s interesting. I wonder what he does. That was over seven years ago. Since then I have learned quite a bit about this extraordinary facilitator.

As Terrence was preparing to write this book, he asked me whether I would be interested in working with him on the project. The link between my passions for experiential and active learning was clear, but I was at a loss as to how I could help him. He was quick to remind me, “Mel, you do this stuff all the time. You’re brilliant at it, and it’s so easy for you.”

“Alright, Terrence, that’s all well and good and thanks for the flattery, but I’m not sure if I can teach people how to do this – that’s your bailiwick,” I responded. “Besides, if I am an effective communicator with stories, I am completely unconscious of what I am doing and how I am doing it. Give me an example of what I do so well that you appreciate.”

Never one to turn down a challenge, Terrence replied, “Okay. Do you remember the discussion you were leading last week on how to understand people during your PeopleSmart workshop?”

“Yes. . . . What about it?”

“When people were struggling with the techniques and tools you were presenting, you began to elicit people’s experiences. In ten minutes you amassed this rich collection of people’s stories. Without judging any of them, you probed the group with reflective questions. People started working with each other’s stories and within moments connections, lessons, parallels, insights, and advice started pouring out of everyone’s mouths. The energy was contagious, and the excitement in the room was unbelievable. Then you masterfully helped the group distill and organize the flood of information. The link between the workshop’s material and people’s day-to-day struggles with understanding other people jumped alive. You used stories to tickle their imaginations.”

I was still a little puzzled by Terrence’s passionate display of enthusiasm. I pressed him further, “That’s an interesting observation. Tell me more.”

“Look, Mel, I know this way of communicating is second-nature to you. You see stories are pervasive – they are all around us. Stories are how we communicate, learn, and think, but knowing how to leverage their power is a latent capacity that remains dormant in most of us. In order for people to experience breakthrough communication skills, this potential needs to be unleashed. That’s our job. That’s why I get up in the morning.”

“Right now, Terrence, you are tiring me out. I think this is a project you should tackle on your own. You have my blessing, and I even promise to write a foreword for this prodigious undertaking. I can’t wait to see how you craft this book.” So here I am writing the foreword.

*Once Upon a Time: Using Story-Based Activities to Develop Breakthrough Communication Skills* serves a dual purpose: it will show you how to develop exceptional communication skills and it will serve as an invaluable resource for helping others do the same. I can’t say enough about this book or the unique facilitation talents of Terrence. In my humble opinion, this book is destined to become a classic.