Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BUSINESS STORYTELLING BOOK HELPS COMPANIES PIVOT

With COVID-19 forcing organizations to get creative, Once Upon an Innovation *shows how storytelling leads to business breakthroughs*

GOLDEN VALLEY, Minnesota, July 2020—With the coronavirus pandemic, businesses are forced to pivot. For those searching for strategies, a new business book shows one way to deal with this plot twist . . . might just be with a plot.

"Storytelling is one of the basic cornerstones of human connection, so it's a natural extension for people-centered businesses," co-author Jean Storlie explained. "The most popular applications of business storytelling are seen in industries like advertising, marketing, and PR. The question our book poses is: what happens when we apply those principles to innovation?"

Innovation is essential for new product development, process improvements, and organization effectiveness, which are now more important than ever. *Once Upon an Innovation* is a timely guide for generating meaningful ideas and advancing them from idea to concept to prototype—even through a Zoom screen.

The hurdles in bringing an innovation to fruition can range in severity from technological difficulties to rallying a team or board around a vision. "Uncovering the creative insight is only half the battle in achieving innovation—implementing that new idea through the various hazards and challenges is equally critical," Peter Erickson said. And he knows—he was the vice president of Innovation, Quality, and Technology at General Mills. Erickson explains, "Jean and Mimi offer pragmatic ways to use stories to bring stakeholders on board."

With a combined 50+ years of experience facilitating organizational innovation, co-authors Jean Storlie and Mimi Sherlock help businesses avoid those roadblocks with story-based strategies and tools. And now that experience is available in book form, just in time for social distancing.

Once Upon an Innovation launched on June 23, 2020. In keeping with the book's message, the authors are also donating copies of the book to their favorite nonprofits to help these organizations pivot and innovate during these challenging times.

"Whether you're running a meeting or leading an organization, this guidebook can help you inspire others," co-author Mimi Sherlock explained. "We can't rewrite the pandemic. But we can actively craft the story of how we persevere."

For more information or to order a copy, visit www.onceuponinnovation.com.

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Once Upon an Innovation

Once Upon an Innovation explores how to use stories and story techniques to solve business problems and accelerate innovation.

By Jean Storlie and Mimi Sherlock
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"Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere."
—Albert Einstein

Since the early 2000s, business storytelling has become a widely accepted strategy for companies around the world. Stories are harnessed in advertising, marketing, PR, and even leadership and culture development. Now for the first time ever, *Once Upon an Innovation* builds upon these practices and applies story techniques to creative problem solving and innovation.

Stories light up the imagination, fostering the creative collaboration necessary to inspire, develop, and commercialize winning ideas. Stories also trigger the brain to release oxytocin, the trust and empathy hormone, making them a powerful tool for understanding and addressing users' needs. This also means that storytelling methods can be applied to the other half of the battle—getting others on board with new ideas as they move through the various checkpoints in an organization.

This easy-to-read, "how to" guidebook provides story-based strategies and tools to:

- generate rich and meaningful ideas.
- rally stakeholders and a team around a vision.
- gain empathy for user and insights into users.
- bring formative ideas to life for testing and prototyping.
- develop storytelling skills to persuade and inspire others.

With an engaging balance of anecdotes, theories, and tools, Jean Storlie and Mimi Sherlock take their combined 50+ years of experience to illustrate how storytelling can be applied to accelerate innovation and lead change.

Gather around the campfire—your story starts now.

Endorsements

"In addition to marketers, insight professionals, engineers/scientists, and product developers, others can apply the lessons and approaches highlighted in *Once Upon an Innovation*. I can see plant production managers, government leaders, schoolteachers, and social entrepreneurs benefiting from this book. Virtually anyone focused on advancing change or driving meaningful improvements can learn from this content."
—Peter Erickson, retired executive vice president of Innovation, Technology, and Quality at General Mills

"For many years I've understood the link between business storytelling and innovation. And for many years I wished someone would write that book. Finally, it's here. Storlie and Sherlock published *Once Upon an Innovation* and hear me applauding! My favorite chapters are "Storytelling for Ideation," "Develop, Test and Prototype with Stories," and "Strategic Framing for Stakeholders." I love the graphics guiding readers through the book, the tools included, and the specific practical ways to use storytelling to innovate new products, services, markets, and companies. Every business will benefit from this work."
—Karen Dietz, PhD, speaker, consultant, and co-author of *Business Storytelling for Dummies*

"In *Once Upon an Innovation*, Jean Storlie and Mimi Sherlock masterfully blend storytelling and deliberate creativity skills and tools to help teams surmount barriers to innovation. Smart and easy to read, *Once Upon an Innovation* makes science and scholarship accessible and applicable to a range of business situations, from work culture to product development. This insightful resource—born at a cafeteria table during the Creative Problem Solving Institute (CPSI)—is emblematic of collaborative innovation."
—Beth Miller, executive director of Creative Education Foundation and CPSI

"*Once Upon an Innovation* is the unique alchemy of storytelling and the creative problem solving process. The result is a highly engaging and effective method for bringing about positive change in organizations, systems, new products, and beyond. As both a facilitator and qualitative researcher, I view *Once Upon an Innovation* as a valuable resource to any team or individual in search of a clear roadmap to breakthrough innovation."
—Jean Bystedt, principal of J. Bystedt & Associates and co-author of *Moderating to The Max*

"Storlie and Sherlock have created a unique meld of innovation, creativity, and storytelling designed for those of us who want to use, not just read about, these skills. Their talents as communicators—combined with the book's skilled organization, attractive graphics, and relevant stories—make the book a delight to read as well as a valuable resource. As someone who has taught business storytelling and gathered stories from the workplace, I only wish the book had been available sooner! It's practical and inspiring, a book I could give to clients as well as use myself."
—Sally Fox, PhD, owner of Engaging Presence

"*Once Upon an Innovation* is a treasure trove of practical knowledge, tools, and techniques on how to be more persuasive in any corporate environment through the power of storytelling. A well-executed story helps people remember what you said and gives them permission to take the risks to seek out new and better solutions. Never have I seen such a complete accounting of the mechanical application of storytelling as a business skill. I wish I had this book when I started my advertising career thirty years ago!"
—Scott Buckley, founder and principal of Buckstarter Branding Studio"

Endorsements

"*Once Upon an Innovation* is a wonderful addition to the genre of business storytelling. Jean and Mimi's book brings inspiration and clarity to the field, melding right-brained creativity and left-brained cognition, both of which are essential to using business storytelling in organizational communication and problem-solving. Jean and Mimi have created an inspiring and useful guide for people who want to use business storytelling tools but aren't even sure where to begin. The book is delightfully easy to read with engaging visuals, inspiring stories, and practical tools."
—Claire Taylor, co-founder of The Story Mill and author of *The Tao of Storytelling*

"From the early days of the creativity movement, stories shared by the forefathers of deliberate creativity, Sid Parnes and Alex Osborn—even more than their models and processes—helped people truly grasp and internalize core concepts of deliberate creativity. So it is fitting that Mimi and Jean developed a process for storytelling (and do so by telling stories) that will spread the wisdom and knowledge of creative problem solving and innovation for generations to come. This is not a textbook that bores you with what Mimi and Jean know, but rather a book of compelling stories that you won't want to put down. And when you do put it down, you'll immediately want to use what you've learned."
—David Magellan Horth, director of Innovation Venturing and Partnership and senior fellow of the Center for Creative Leadership

"*Once Upon an Innovation* is an engaging and user-friendly resource that sheds new light on innovation and change management. The authors offer multiple examples on how storytelling can be used to capture the hearts and minds of your audience. It has tools and tips for identifying a strategic or consumer need, creating an aha moment, and launching a new strategy or successful product. The authors also provide leadership tips, including the fundamentals on how to engage a team with a story, build stakeholder support, and inspire action. This is the best book I have read on how storytelling can be used to see opportunities and drive change."
—Lydia Tooker Midness, president of Spring Brook Farm, LLC and retired vice president of Innovation, Technology, and Quality at General Mills

"In *Once Upon an Innovation*, Jean Storlie and Mimi Sherlock share a structured and relatable approach to storytelling as an essential means for progress. The book is a practical guide for developing your storytelling skills and a must-read for any change-making leader boldly seeking to productively transform ideas to reality."
—Emily Riley, director of Business Development and Strategy Planning at Mondelez

"Tell a story, the right story, and spur people to change, growth, and innovation. In *Once Upon an Innovation*, Jean Storlie and Mimi Sherlock show you how."
—Sarah Thurber, managing partner of FourSight and author of *The Secret of the Highly Creative Thinker*

Interview Questions

What advice from your book would you offer to business leaders in times of great change, like COVID-19?

MS: The health and economic havoc triggered by COVID-19 requires businesses of all sizes to pivot, problem solve, and quickly adapt. *Once Upon an Innovation* is grounded in tried-and-true methods for creative problem solving and innovation, which can help business leaders navigate change. We believe both creativity and analytical rigor are required to produce innovation and lead change.

JS: We also delve into the power of story listening to gain a 360-degree perspective on a problem. Eliciting stories from customers, employees, suppliers, business partners—even critics—will shed new light on problems and opportunities. Stories impart wisdom and empathy from different points of view that collectively reveal patterns and possibilities. They help to make sense of data and trigger viable solutions.

How will innovators and business leaders use your book?

JS: This book has broad applications beyond business and industry. Leaders from public, private, and nonprofit organizations can apply the tools and techniques in this book to lead change and inspire others. For marketers and insights professionals, storytelling methods turn insights into stories that inspire creativity in their teams. Technical experts can use stories to spark imaginative thinking and communicate with empathy and vision. Human resource professionals might use the techniques to manage the organizational changes that innovation often brings.

MS: The tools in this book apply to solving everyday problems that leaders encounter, as well as large-scale innovation projects. Regardless of individual styles and preferences, stories can help every member of an innovation team tap into empathy and imagination, which spurs their creative thinking. Storytelling can also help leaders mitigate challenging team dynamics.

How can leaders elicit the stories they need to drive meaningful innovation?

MS: Story listening is a critical skill for innovation leaders. Leaders will learn the power of taking time to listen—really listen—to the stories and story fragments that naturally surface during innovation activities. Organic storytelling provides rich insight to spur proactive solutions. Keeping a journal can foster this habit. *Once Upon an Innovation* also provides tools and templates to elicit stories through interviews, focus groups, ethnography, and team working sessions. It's also important that leaders build relaxation and playfulness into the office culture, and certainly into creative collaboration sessions. Positive energy and relaxing activities spur storytelling and creativity.

JS: I'd caution leaders not to limit storytelling to interactions with their teams and customers. *Once Upon an Innovation* has an entire section on using stories in stakeholder engagement, and another on pitches, presentations and elevator speeches. By considering the audience and the intended outcome, leaders can select effective story-based tools or approaches to persuade others to support—and get excited about—an innovation.

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Interview Questions

How did you hit upon the opportunity to combine stories with innovation?

JS: It started in a cafeteria. On a meal break during the 2014 Creative Problem Solving Institute (CPSI) conference, Mimi and I sat together in a booth nestled between the desserts and the tray return. We had a shared passion for storytelling and creative problem solving. I had just finished a deep dive into the business storytelling movement, and Mimi was incorporating story techniques into creative problem solving.

MS: The intersection of our skills and experience seemed like a very rich area for creative exploration. Over lunch, we hatched a variety of schemes for how we might work together. It took a few more years before our collaboration turned into writing this book. But our inspiration started amidst the clatter of trays and the chatter of conference attendees.

How do the approaches in your book promote inclusiveness?

JS: We advocate for a very inclusive approach to innovation. In fact, the framework for the book describes how stories advance innovation along two-tracks. One track involves use of stories to inspire creative collaboration within a development team. We also show how stories and storytelling can influence the stakeholders who sponsor, fund, and approve ideas as they advance through the innovation pipeline.

MS: Stories evoke empathy and understanding. By eliciting stories from a wide range of perspectives, teams gain empathy from all the stakeholders who can benefit from and be impacted by change. We encourage leaders to go beyond their own world view to gather a kaleidoscope of diverse viewpoints when leading innovation and change. These stories and insights foster meaningful innovation with consideration of how it impacts the organization, its business partners, and the communities it serves.

When should an organization bring in an external facilitator?

MS: I've lived both sides of this question: outside organizations as a hired facilitator and inside as a leader who hires facilitators. In my experience, external facilitators provide the most value when a team is stuck using only one approach to address all their challenges, also when the team dynamics prevent new ideas from moving forward. Even though I have 30 years of experience as a creative problem solving facilitator, I know I'm a better participant when I am not also trying to facilitate, and vice versa.

JS: For many of my clients, I'm able to connect dots and see patterns and possibilities that are not apparent to those close to the problem. In some ways, I serve a mirror that allows them to see the problem in new way that leads to solutions. By coming in without attachment to internal politics or project's minutiae, I can offer clarity and simplicity where an internal team tends to bog down in unnecessary complexity.

Where can people buy your book?

The book can be purchased on Amazon, Itasca Books, and IndieBound.org. Visit onceuponinnovation.com for a sneak peek and more information. Contact jean@storlietelling.com for bulk discounts and customized programs.

Authors' Story

We rarely get to choose where inspiration hits. Turns out, sometimes it strikes in a cafeteria.

On a meal break during the 2014 Creative Problem Solving Institute (CPSI) conference, we sat in a secluded booth nestled between the dessert selection and tray return. We'd just shared a lightbulb moment: as a duo we're uniquely suited to address the intersection where storytelling meets creative problem solving. With cafeteria trays clattering in the background, we dreamed of ways to merge our talents. Within twenty minutes we'd hatched a plethora of schemes and possibilities for how we might collaborate. When we parted ways, our brains swirled with ideas.

Soon after, we bid on a couple of consulting proposals together. During those collaborations, we experienced a mind meld that was intensely creative and productive. We learned that our skills, talents, and approaches are complementary and synergistic. And working together was seamless—it felt almost magical. Mimi would produce an initial brain dump of ideas and possibilities. Jean would build, refine, and pull all the pieces together into a clear and coherent communication. It felt easy and energizing. But after that professional nirvana our lives went in slightly different directions.

After nine successful years with Sherlock Creative Thinking, Mimi was finding the life of an independent consultant a bit lonely. As an extrovert, she missed the energy of working as part of a team. She decided to return to the corporate world to take a dream job.

Coming off a corporate layoff and a "sabbatical" year of severance, Jean was gaining traction with her new consultancy, Storlietelling LLC. The proposals she developed with Mimi fired her passion to explore how storytelling could be merged with innovation and creative problem solving facilitation. The experience helped her cement a new focus. She started to develop a book concept to explore this new direction. Just as Mimi reentered corporate life, Jean began to research and conceptualize what became *Once Upon an Innovation*.

Then in 2017 we revisited our collaboration to co-create a training workshop, "Storytelling in Innovation," for that year's CPSI conference. By that time Jean had started writing her book, and the workshop became a valuable test lab. In late 2018 Mimi brought fresh energy to the book project just when Jean was hitting a wall in her writing marathon. Mimi provided thought leadership, ideas, resources, and support. We began another intense sprint of collaboration that culminated in *Once Upon an Innovation*.

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As President/Owner of Storlietelling LLC, Jean Storlie uses story-based techniques to design and facilitate highly engaging strategic planning, innovation, and team-building sessions. She also runs training programs in business storytelling skills for clients that span boutique consulting firms to Fortune 500 companies across a range of industries. Jean has facilitated innovation in consumer-packaged goods, supplier, and direct marketing companies, focusing on building their innovation pipelines. She worked at General Mills for over a decade, where her knack for distilling complex content into compelling communications helped business teams drive business growth for consumer brands like Cheerios and Yoplait. As a child, she loved reading books, playing dress-up, and solving puzzles, foreshadowing the work she does now—solving problems with stories.

Mimi Sherlock is the Director of Global Strategic Insights for IFF Taste. She is responsible for inspiring and motivating creative teams by bringing actionable insights to life and facilitating end to-end innovation. Prior to this, Mimi was the Principal and Owner of Sherlock Creative Thinking, a creativity and innovation consultancy that served a variety of clients and industries across the globe. Through her highly engaging and experiential approach, Mimi helped business teams in companies like Visa, L'Oreal, and Nestlé crack the code on gnarly problems . . . and enjoy the process. She has been a leader and facilitation trainer for the Creative Problem Solving Institute for close to thirty years. As a natural ideator, if you give Mimi a challenge she's likely to spew out twenty-five ideas in under five minutes.

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Media Assets

Book Cover

Book Stack

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Jean Storlie

Mimi Sherlock

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