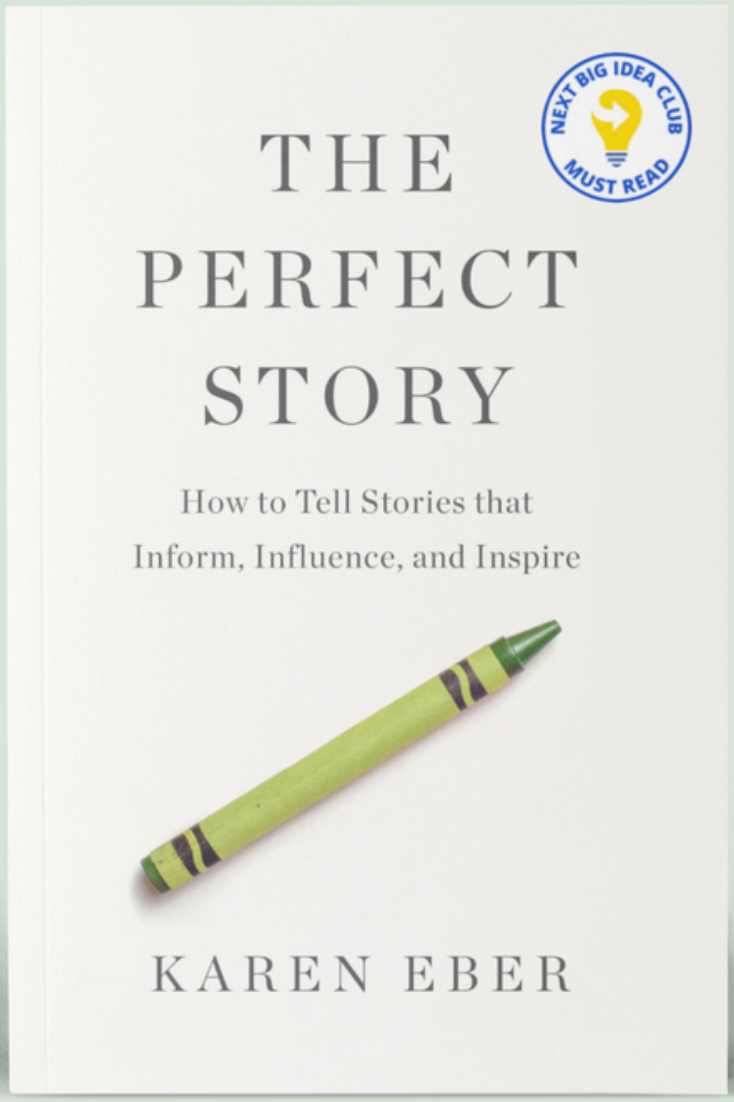
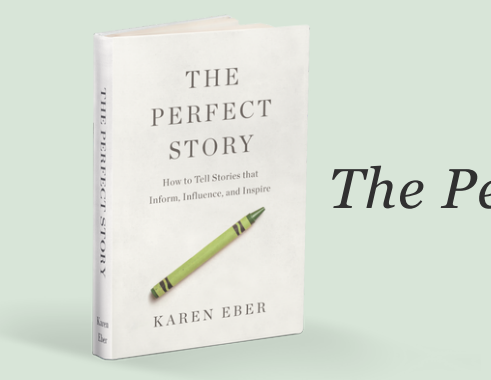


THE PERFECT STORY:
How to Tell Stories that Inform, Influence, and Inspire

Discussion Guide

EBER LEADERSHIP GROUP



Discussion Guide for: *The Perfect Story: How to Tell Stories that Inform, Influence, and Inspire*

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This discussion guide supports the reading of *The Perfect Story: How to Tell Stories that Inform, Influence, and Inspire*. Groups can leverage this guide to share reflections, insights, and learnings from the book. Questions are included about the book overall, and specific to each chapter. The last page includes a list of sample stories and interviews. Start with the overall questions or pick a chapter to dig into.

OVERALL QUESTIONS

- Karen opens the book with a personal story about her eyes. When was the first time you felt different? Do you have a version of her crayon story?
- What did you take away from the book? What stood out to you?
- Which parts of storytelling come easily to you?
- Which parts of storytelling feel challenging?
- What makes the story of Maria and Walt compelling?
- Which story(s) was your favorite in the book? Why?
- Which of the storyteller interview vignettes at the end of chapters were your favorites? Why?

CHAPTER ONE: STORYTELLING TO THE RESCUE

- The chapter includes a story about an awkward business dinner with Aaron sharing the story of a raccoon. When have you experienced a story shifting energy?
- When have you experienced a story leading to an increase in trust or empathy?
- The storytelling model includes different steps to guide you through creating a compelling story. Which one of these steps intrigues you most?

CHAPTER TWO: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU TELL STORIES?

- How does learning the science of storytelling and decision making impact the way you think about sharing stories?
- The Five Factory Settings of the Brain break down the science of storytelling. Which one created an "A-ha" moment for you?
- Which of the Five Factory Settings do you naturally do today? Which do you want to use more intentionally in your stories?

CHAPTER THREE: CREATING DESIRED OUTCOMES

- The story about the Clydesdale and the puppy demonstrates why the way a story is told impacts the experience of it. When you've experienced a great story, why do you think it resonated for you? What was included in it?
- Decision making happens through emotions. What is an example of a story that tapped into your emotions?
- Great stories have characters, conflict, and connection. What are some examples of how you can make a character relatable in a story?

CHAPTER FOUR: CREATE AN ENDLESS TOOLKIT OF POTENTIAL STORIES

- What sound or smell reminds you of home? How many different stories ideas does that generate for you?
- Which prompt triggered a bunch of different storytelling ideas for you?
- Where will you capture your ideas?

CHAPTER FIVE: START WITH YOUR AUDIENCE, NOT THE STORY

- Karen says stories begin with the audience and not the idea. What did you think of that concept?
- Who are you personas for your stories?
- How can you see yourself using the questions to define the audience outcomes (know, think, feel, do, current mindset and potential obstacles?)

CHAPTER SIX: SELECT AN IDEA FOR YOUR STORY

- Describe the feeling you experienced when you connect with an idea to share.
- What do you think about the idea that stories are an exchange of energy?
- The story of Tennant, the industrial cleaner company, describes how there is no such thing as a boring topic. Based on what you read, how would you dig into topics you feel are less interesting to find the stories?

CHAPTER SEVEN: DO I HAVE TO TELL A PERSONAL STORY?

- Personal doesn't mean private - what is your comfort level in what you will tell stories about?
- Have you ever feared that sharing a story will make you feel weak?
- What did you think about the suggestions for how to incorporate stories into job interviews to build understanding in the interviewer's mind?

CHAPTER EIGHT: OUTLINE YOUR STORY STRUCTURE

- Have you used other storytelling models? How do they compare to the four-part one described here?
- The takeaway is meant to connect the overall idea to the desired outcome for the audience. How do you think that will help your story?
- What was your experience using the four-part model to outline your story?

CHAPTER NINE: ADDING DETAILS THAT MATTER

- Can you remember going out for ice cream? What made it vivid?
- Making characters relatable is one of the steps. What are some ways you can make us understand the reasons why a character does something even if we don't agree with them?
- Anchor to what is known is another technique to create understanding. What is an example of how to do that?

CHAPTER TEN: MAKE US FEEL SOMETHING

- What is an example of showing the experience of a sense?
- There are many vivid examples for engaging the senses and emotions. Which one stood out to you and why?
- What stood out to you in the story about Emma zip lining?

CHAPTER ELEVEN: SEQUENCE YOUR STORY

- The opening story describes how Goodwill Hunting uses creative sequencing. What is another example of a story that doesn't use a linear sequence?
- What types of stories do you tell: plot or character-driven ones?
- What are examples of how someone started a story that caught your attention?

CHAPTER TWELVE: MAKE EVERYTHING COUNT

- Which of the Five Factory Settings comes naturally to you? Which do you want to invest more time in?
- What did you think of editing your story to make everything earn its place?
- What is your approach to editing? What do you want to try going forward?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: STORYTELLING WITH DATA

- When do you tell stories with data today? After reading this, what shifts do you want to make?
- What did you think about defining the problem statement before collecting data?
- Karen says that using a story with a different context that reinforces the takeaway can often lower defensiveness and yield better discussions. Have you tried this?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: TELLING YOUR STORIES

- What did you think about pause being a character in your stories?
- What gestures would be in your library for your stories? What topics should you develop gestures for?
- Do you announce, "Let me tell you a story?" What did you think of Karen's suggestion to start without announcing it?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: HOW DO I KNOW IF MY STORY RESONATES?

- When have you told a story that resonated? How did you know it resonated?
- What question can you when someone gives a compliment like "I like your story?"
- How might you map the energy of your stories?

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: WHERE DO STORIES GO WRONG?

- Have you told a story for you and not the audience before? What happened?
- Do you tend to include too many details or not enough in your stories?
- Have you experienced a story without a structure before? What was that like? What would have improved it?

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: WHEN DOES A STORY BECOME MANIPULATIVE?

- When have you experienced a story that felt manipulative?
- How do you ensure your story isn't experienced as manipulative?
- Karen says that you shouldn't use stories to communicate policies, mandates or requirements. What do you think?

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: VULNERABILITY AND STORYTELLING

- What does the vulnerability of telling stories feel like for you?
- What do you think of the question, "Who are you ok disappointing?"
- Karen says not to focus on outliers in a story. What are your thoughts on that?

Sample Stories

Each chapter includes multiple stories to provide context and demonstrate points. Below are a few notable stories that may be interesting to ask about in an interview.

Don't Eat the Crayons: (Introduction): A personal story Karen told about how she got two different-colored eyes after eating crayons.

Walt and Maria: (Introduction): The opening story from Karen's TED Talk: A leadership story about Maria dropping her phone down an elevator shaft and Walt failing an exam.

The Awkward Business Dinner (Chapter One): a story that broke the ice at an awkward business dinner: Aaron's surprise encounter with a raccoon while building a deck.

Budweiser's Puppy Love (Chapter Three): A Budweiser Commercial from the 2014 Super Bowl that won hearts but was a commercial failure.

My Topic is Boring (Chapter Six): How Tennant, an industrial cleaning company, learned to tell interesting stories about their products.

Zip lining (Chapter Ten): Emma was forced to confront her fear of heights during a zip lining adventure on a bachelorette weekend.

The Floating Construction Site (Chapter Thirteen): What starts off as a dream vacation ends up being a cruise ship under repair and causing illness for the passengers.

Miguel and employee goals (Chapter Fifteen): How a story about a CEO's experience running track in high school and college helped him recognize his need to coach his team.

The Fearless Girl (Chapter Sixteen): The Fearless Girl Statue was almost The Wallstreet Cow.

Blanking on the TED Stage (Chapter Eighteen): How blanking on the TED stage ended up being a gift.

Bangers and Mash (Chapter Eighteen): Not everyone will like your story, and that is ok. Focus on your audience and figure out who you are ok disappointing.

The Surfer (The Takeaway): How a surfer applied what he learned to develop his own style.

Interview Vignettes

Interview vignettes are included at the end of chapters sharing the experiences of vastly different storytellers:

- Chapter 1: Sarah Austin Jenness at *The Moth*
- Chapter 2: Michelle Satter of *Sundance Institute*
- Chapter 3: Dr. Paul Zak, Neuroscientist
- Chapter 4: Gary Ware, Improv Comedian
- Chapter 5: Bofta Yimam, TV Correspondant
- Chapter 6: Stephanie Stuckey, Stuckey's Corporation
- Chapter 7: Drew Dudley, Leadership Consultant
- Chapter 8: Manoush Zomorodi, TED Radio Hour Podcast Host
- Chapter 9: Will Csaklos, Former Pixar Creative Director
- Chapter 10: Colby Webb, Advertising Executive
- Chapter 11: Evan Skolnick, Video Game Writer
- Chapter 12: Peggy Fogelman, Director of Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum
- Chapter 13: Serena Huang, Head of Data Analytics
- Chapter 14: John Cushing, Former Head of News Operations, Global
- Chapter 15: Dr. Anthony Williams, Physician, University of Minnesota Medical School