

Transform board meetings into vehicles of engagement.

Activate your once-passive board agenda! Use storytelling to engage your board throughout the meeting. Typical board meetings are exercises in governance, presentations of data, financial reports, governance, and risk management. All of that is important; the board, after all, is your governing body. However, don't miss the opportunity to inspire your board members. Strategic engagement through storytelling can breathe life into your board meetings and bring your mission and case for support to life.

We've all read a lot about storytelling in recent years, but did you know that storytelling actually produces a powerful chemical reaction in the brain? This reaction (oxytocin synthesis) leads to better understanding of key points and improved recall. More recently, researchers learned that (1) character-driven stories consistently cause oxytocin synthesis and (2) the amount of oxytocin released by the brain predicts how much people are willing to help others — *including funding a charitable organization associated with the narrative.*

Here are some simple ways to add passion to your board meetings — and help raise the fundraising bar — through storytelling:

Invite clients to share their stories. By sharing real stories from the people you help, you can strengthen philanthropic affinity — and equip board members with information they in turn can use to advocate to others on your behalf.

Allow staff to tell their story. Invite staff members to share stories about client successes and challenges. (*Important note:* Always include information about how your organization is working to address these challenges!) You may be surprised how effectively board members can rally around specific needs with a human face, versus “the funding gap.”

And remember, board members have stories too! If you have board members who have been touched by your organization's services (or by the issue you address), think about inviting them to share their stories, too. Ask them to talk about why they're passionate about your cause. Sharing a personal story can be a wonderful experience for the board member concerned. It can also help rekindle enthusiasm in others.

As you share stories, you'll have an opportunity to observe what moves and motivates individual board members. As you listen to the stories yourself, you'll likely be reenergized about fundraising for such a worthy cause — and you'll gather information that helps you strengthen your outreach.

Board meetings can be a prime opportunity to elevate board members' ability to serve as advocates for your organization. Don't miss your chance!