



Creating Signature Stories: Strategic Messaging That Persuades, Energizes and Inspires, by David Aaker, M&J, 2018

Reviewed by Susan Fader

- Fader & Associates
- Teaneck, NJ
- susanfader@faderfocus.com

If you are only going to read one book on storytelling, David Aaker's *Creating Signature Stories: Strategic Messaging That Persuades, Energizes and Inspires*, is the book. Aaker, a professor emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley's Haas School of Business, specializes in marketing with a focus on brand strategy. In his new book, Aaker, who has written many previous books on branding, uses a multitude of short, powerful, and interesting stories to share and clearly explain the many ways signature stories can be used and how they should be constructed.

He defines a signature story as one where the story's hero owns the story, i.e., this is not a story that can be told by another brand, company, person. Aaker also identifies how different audiences need different stories and how you can construct signature sto-

ries to fit specific situations, i.e., one story does not fit all purposes.

Aaker initially focuses on the use of signature stories as they relate to brands and corporate messaging, and his fast-paced style pulls you in. To begin, Aaker walks you through the major signature story archetypes and how they serve different purposes. Quick summaries below, of only a few of his examples, don't do justice to the well-crafted stories that Aaker tells. My summations focus on facts, while Aaker emphasizes stories that solely rely on facts weaken the power of the message because they dilute the power of well-crafted stories that inspire involvement, arouse interest, and create an emotional connection to the story's hero. Stories only based on facts tend not to be memorable. Read the book to see the difference between Aaker's well-crafted stories and my weaker summations below:

- Founder story—L.L. Bean's focus on quality products and excellent customer service conveyed through a defining decision that the founder made. Ninety out of the first 100 waterproof boots he made leaked, but he refunded customers' money even though it almost put him out of business.
- Brand story—When the Molson Hockey Rink was built in the Purcell Mountains of British Columbia, everything had to be helicoptered in. The extraordinary effort to build the rink conveyed the brand positioning "Anything for Hockey."
- Growth strategy story—Elon Musk used four stories to communicate his growth strategy to investors; they played a key role in getting his funding.

While the entire book was informative, I found his second to last chapter to be the most intriguing. Here he turned his focus to the why and how of creating a professional signature story for your-

self. Aaker shared helpful, accessible ways to better position and differentiate yourself. A memorable signature story can make you positively stand out when vying for a raise, a promotion, or a new job in the corporate world and help answer the question that many independent qualitative researchers are asked when meeting a potential client, "So why should I work with you?"

"IN THIS BOOK, THE FOCUS IS NOT JUST ON STORIES, BUT SIGNATURE STORIES, THOSE THAT COMMUNICATE A STRATEGIC MESSAGE THAT IS RELEVANT TO THE BRAND VISION, THE CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP, THE ORGANIZATION, AND ITS VALUES AND/OR THE BUSINESS STRATEGY... A TACTICAL STORY IS USED TO ACHIEVE A SHORT-TERM COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVE, PERHAPS IN AN ADVERTISEMENT OR ON A WEBSITE. THERE IS NO EXPECTATION THAT THE STORY WILL LIVE BEYOND ITS COMMUNICATION TASK."

I appreciated the inclusion of an epilogue that summarizes the book's 12 key takeaways. Should I want a quick reminder or clarification of the type of story I need to achieve a specific goal, this is where I'll turn.

Aaker also points out that the ability to create and tell a story is even more important in the increasingly digital world where stories are the main focus. So pick up and read this book and you will turbocharge your ability to create the correct signature stories for all your needs. 🐣