THE CATALYST

Looking at a Common KT Method: Storytelling

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By: Caroline Ostrom | Posted: August 26, 2020

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Chances are that at some point in your life, you have told a story. Storytelling is a tool used in many different contexts, like when a teacher shares a story during a lesson at school or a grandfather shares a story about family traditions. Storytelling is one of the oldest forms of teaching and sharing, and it's no surprise that it is a popular method of Knowledge Translation.

So, what exactly is storytelling? Storytelling is an effective way of sharing a message, experience or lesson. It can be used in various formats, such as in person, through video, in an audiobook or podcast, or via text. The examples above highlight how storytelling may be used in everyday life. In the mental health and addictions field, we commonly see storytelling used when a person with lived experience shares their story.

Storytelling is popular for a reason; stories are impactful because they are personal and bring the information to life, which helps the listener find meaning in the information and apply it. Stories can also break down barriers and encourage attitude and behaviour change by increasing empathy and understanding in the listener. A story moves people beyond research findings and allows the listener to connect with and immerse themselves into it, triggering an empathic response. Stories also help with retaining information more easily, and they are easily accessible to a wide range of people. Finally, stories are likely to be retold and shared with others.

If you are planning to use storytelling as a method for your Knowledge Translation, keep in mind the following tips for safely and effectively telling your story:

- **Make sure you are ready to share your story**

Your story may lead to praise, criticism, questions, or further opportunities. Make sure that you are in a space to accept these various reactions and work with them.

- **Know your audience**

You do not need to share all the details of your story if it doesn't feel right for who you are presenting to. For example, the details that you share with a group of adults may differ from what you would share with a group of young adults.

- **Focus on educating others**

Determine what your purpose and intention is by sharing your story. What is it that you want them to learn? What is the message you want to give?

- **Look at eliciting hope, or focusing on the positive**

This doesn't mean that your story should not include hard times or negative experiences, but keep in mind that some details of your story may be triggering for others and may not need to be included. The focus of your story should be what has come from those negative experiences and what got you to here.

- **Respect the confidentiality of others in your story**

There is no doubt that your story will include other characters, but avoid using their real names or identifying factors, regardless if they had a positive or negative impact in your life. If you do think it would be beneficial to include information (i.e. the name of a doctor that really helped you), be sure to get their permission.

- **Consider stating that your story is yours**

Everyone's journey is unique. Your audience should know that it's okay if their experience is different from yours.

- **Be creative (if you want)**

There are no strict rules for how to tell your story. You may find it easiest to stick with a chronological story, or maybe you would rather focus on one theme at a time. Think about the message that you are trying to convey and how best to do that.

- **Be genuine – be yourself!**

Tell your story as you, using your voice and your personality (but remember to know your audience). This will help you connect with your audience. If you're sharing your story via text, it's okay to be informal. Easy language will draw people in and set you apart from academic or formal texts.

For a helpful tool, check out the MHCC resource below called "Telling Your Story", which was created for individuals involved in caregiving who are promoting caregiver guidelines and recommendations. While the chart used is specific to that project's purpose, it can easily be modified to your own story's purpose.

Link: https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/resource/appendix-8-telling-your-story/

References

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