THOUGHTS ON STORYTELLING FOR MARKETING

THE NATURE OF STORIES

"Human beings are story telling creatures"

Neil Gaiman

THE NATURE OF STORIES

- **The origin of stories**

- **The architecture of stories**

- **The key elements of stories**

THE ORIGIN OF STORIES

- "Stories" precede people, language, culture, or marketing
  - They are based on the **logic of causality** and the **drama of conflict**,
  - … the story is kicked off when **an event** interrupts a **pattern**
  - … they are usually about the **consequences of decisions or actions or choices**
    - Describing what happened, is not a story!
  - Good stories entertain or teach, or both.
    - The more relevant they are to the lives of the listener, the more interesting they will get.
  - Peoples minds are at their highest attention when,
    - they can **learn to avoid a risk**,
    - or when they can **gain an advantage!**

  - How do you know you have "spell-binding story"?
    - The reader will ask: **"And then what happened?"**

*"Without a strong, clear intention and a **formidable** obstacle you don't have drama!"*

Aaron Sorkin

THE ORIGIN OF STORIES

- Stories are basically a sequence of events that are causally connected, e.g.
  - "An apple fell from a tree. A man had an idea."
    - This is not a story, but two disconnected events

  - "An apple fell from a tree, which gave a man an idea"
    - Now this a story, because it causally connects two events

    - But it leaves out many details
      - Where was the tree? Did the apple hit the man? Who was the man? Why was he there? What was the idea?
      - Without these details, the story is boring, not engaging.
      - It is neither entertaining, or educational, bringing neither joy or learning!
  - What is the "break in the pattern", the "*novel*" element?

- Note: People will always look to find the **"¡"** in your stories
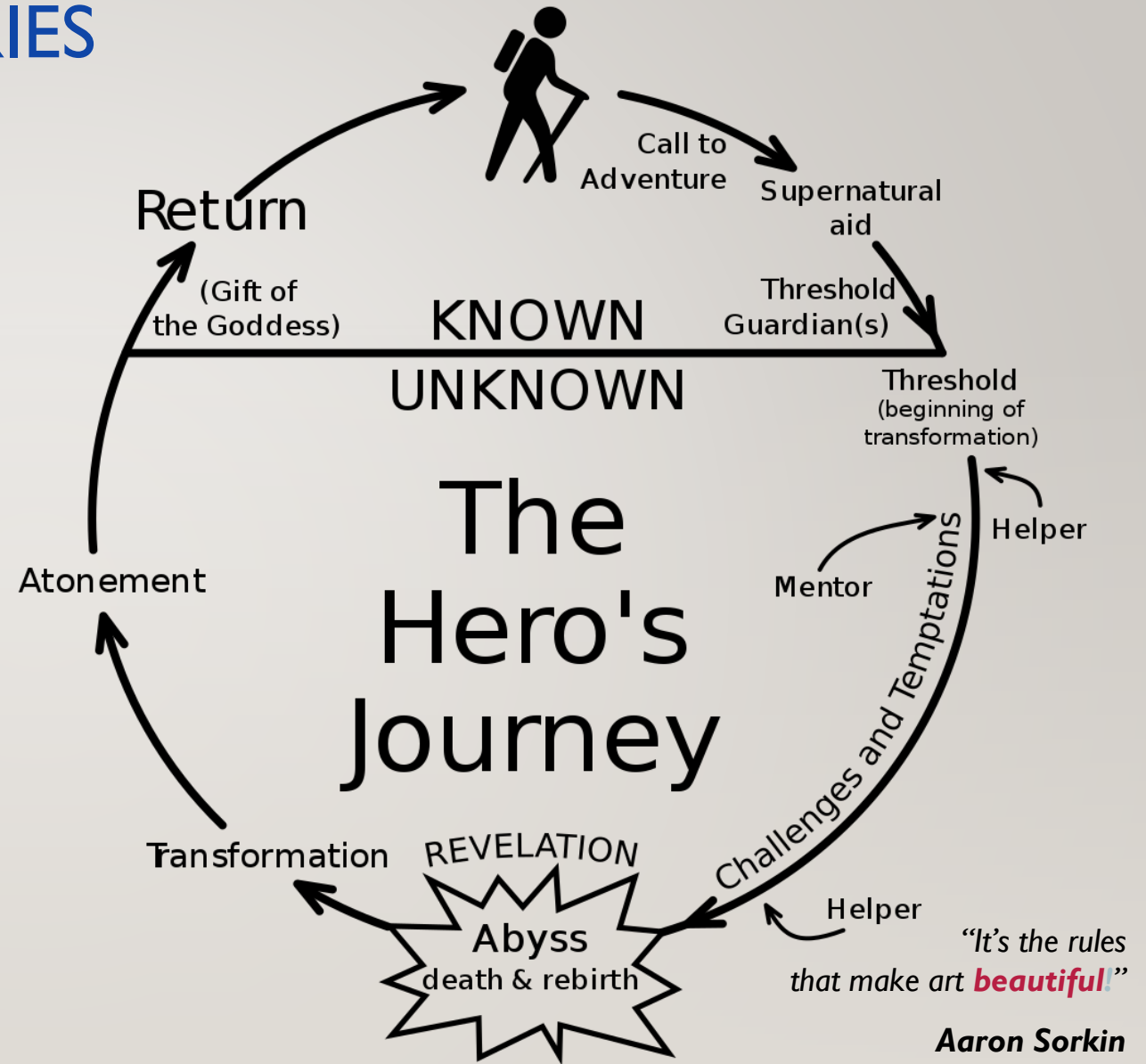
*"The worst crime you can commit is telling the audience something **they already know**!"*

Aaron Sorkin

THE ARCHITECTURE OF STORIES

- Joseph A. Campbell
  - Analyzed 100's of stories
  - Found common architecture
    - Departure
    - Initiation
    - Return

- Can even be applied to Marketing
  - Situation   **Challenge**
  - Known to Unknown   **KPI's, metrics**
  - Mentor and Helper   **Tools**
  - Transformation   **Success**
  - Return   **Benefits**

Return

Call to
Adventure

Supernatural
aid

(Gift of
the Goddess)

KNOWN

Threshold
Guardian(s)

UNKNOWN

Threshold
(beginning of
transformation)

The Hero's Journey

Atonement

Helper

Mentor

Challenges and Temptations

Transformation

REVELATION

Abyss
death & rebirth

Helper

*"It's the rules
that make art **beautiful**!"*

Aaron Sorkin

EXAMPLES

Protagonist	Device	Transformation	Arrival
Cinderella	Dress	Ballroom Dancer	Princess
Harry Potter	Wand	Magician	Leader
Bilbo Baggins	Ring	Thief	Treasure
Luke Skywalker	Sword	Knight	Fortress destroyed
Jake Sully	Avatar	Na'avi warrior	Pandora rescued
Bruce Wayne	Money / Butler	Batty-Capabilities	Superhero
Tony Stark	Money / IQ	Iron-Capabilities	… (x 100)
Ethan Hawke	Gadgets	Mission Impossible Guy	World Savior
Jason Bourne	CIA Program	Super Assassin Guy	World Savior
Anyone	Sporting Device	Professional (Air Jordan)	Star Performer
Anyone	Education	Degree (MBA, PhD, ..)	Top Job
Anyone	Branded Product	Brand Value (Apple)	Status perception
Anyone	Test	Driver, Pilot, Sailor, …	License, Freedom
Anyone	Tools	Performance, (Weber Grill)	Master of ..

THE KEY ELEMENTS OF STORIES

- **The Point of Departure (The Village)**

  - Where are we coming from? What does the village look like? Who lives there? What kind of village is it?

- **The Protagonist (The Hero(ine))**

  - Who is the center of the story? What does their day look like? What are their ambitions, their goals, their visions? This is important so the listener can identify or distance themselves!

- **The Challenge (The Dragon)**

  - What is the task at hand? What needs to be done? How does this relate to the protagonist? What will happen if the protagonist does not act?

- **The Mentor, Helper, the Tools (The Sword in the Stone)**

  - What "equipment" is the protagonist given to master the challenge? Who can help and how? What tools are available?

- **The Return (The Campfire)**

  - How does the protagonist describe his or her journey? What did they expect? What did they encounter? Who helped them? What obstacles did they overcome? What did they find most surprising? What do they want the others to learn? How did the journey make their lives, and that of the village, better?

Stories

The ultimate core of every story is the desire to avoid risk and loss, to move towards a "payback", for yourself and your "village".

This is deeply rooted in the mind, is lies at core of e-motions, it fuels our motivations!

It is what makes for a "moving" story!

POWER OF T.H.R.E.E.

Timing

- Be mindful of the time your viewers have. Can you deliver a payback to them very quickly? In their frame? Move the plot. What is the most important thing.
  What is the pay off?

Humor

- What was surprising? Which stereo type was subverted? What was amusing? What taboo was broken? H can also stand for "Human"

Repetition

- Show them the fish. Hit them with the fish. Hit them with the fish. Do not be afraid to repeat your main points! And move the plot! Relentlessly!

Examples

- Do not claim anything without showing an example or evidence. The best examples are from experts. The best experts are customers that solved the problem you are talking about! Examples are credible when they use the "language" your audience uses.
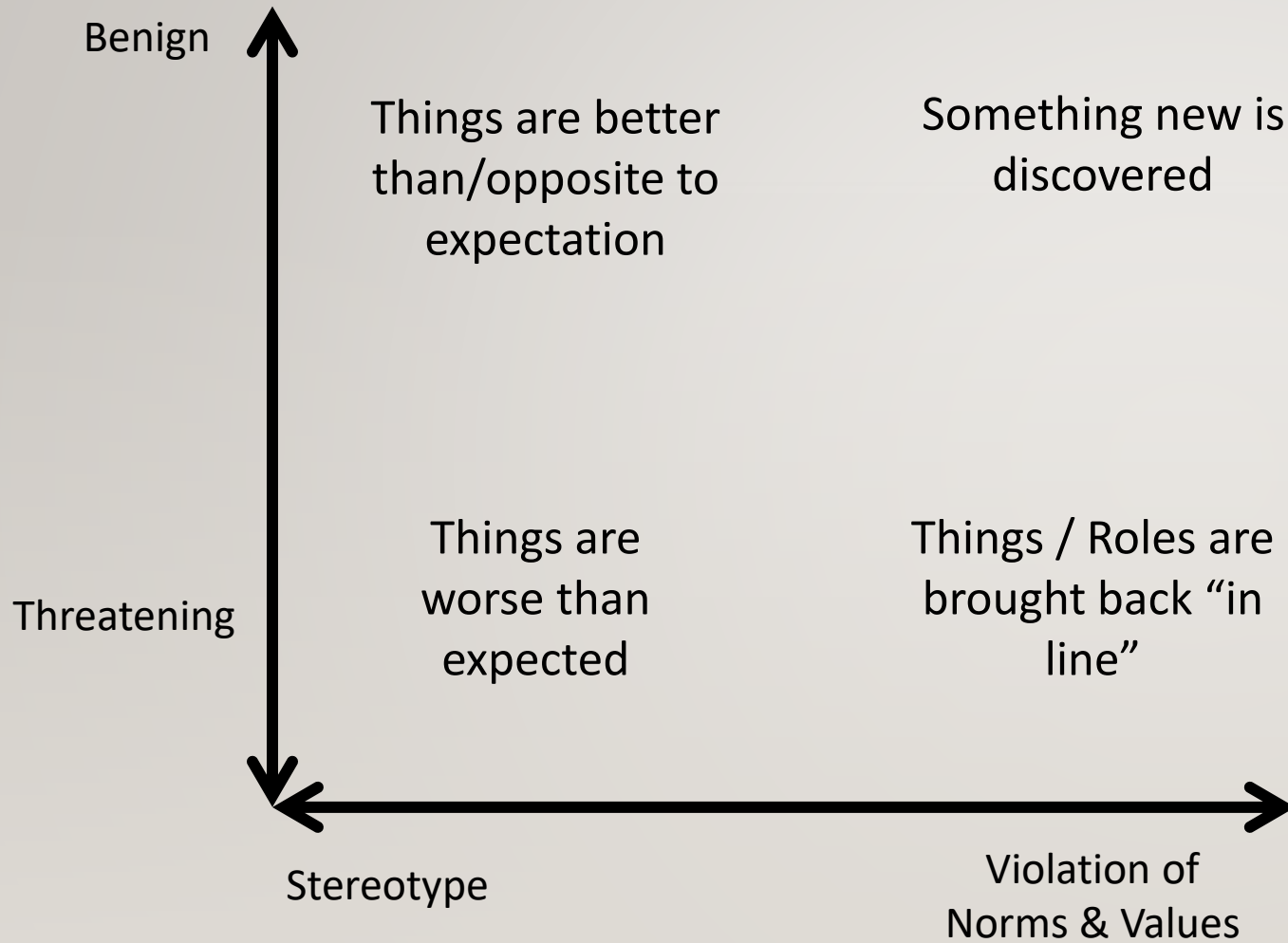
Emotion

- Emotions are actions trapped by thought. What is the action you recommend? What are you passionate about? People are looking for advice and guidance, and learning to avoid risk and gain benefits. Use the language your audience would use.

Stories

**Above all,
find your voice,
be authentic,
share your personal learning,
and "move" the audience!**

THE ANATOMY OF "FUNNY"

Benign

Things are better than/opposite to expectation

Something new is discovered

Threatening

Things are worse than expected

Things / Roles are brought back "in line"

Stereotype

Violation of Norms & Values

Common Elements
- Has Surprise / Twist / Subversion, a break in the pattern
- Expresses what others are only thinking, breaks taboos in a safe way, exposes flaws
- Rewards correct predictions as well as new discovery (best when combined)
- Based on someone's error / flaw / pain
- Releases tension
- Lowers distance in status to someone (Loss of Authority) or gives a sense of superiority
- Depends on individual Stereotypes, Norms, Values, Morals, Culture, Background, …
- Must be "distant" (somebody else's tragedy, past, remote, absurd, unlikely, better him than me)

Laughter is the closest distance between two people (Victor Borge)

PRACTICAL ADVICE

Before you start "writing" your story, "tick" these boxes

1
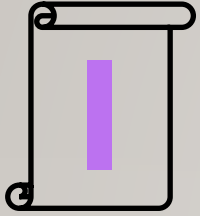
The Protagonist

- You have detailed knowledge of "a day in the life" of the protagonist you are addressing.
- What is the language they use? How would they know that you are an expert?
- What is their "strong, clear intention", their most important ambition, their goals and KPI?
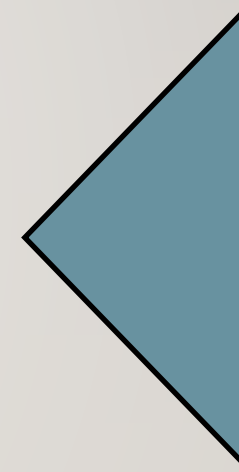
2

The Obstacle Course

- What specific challenges are they facing along the road to their goals?
- What strategies can the use to overcome the obstacles? Who can help?
- What is the "Sword in the Stone" you can offer?

Leading to a single, simple, specific next step to take?

3

The Transformation

- What advice would the protagonist from travelers that have completed the journey before?
- What specific "Payoff" are you describing? How would they know they have achieved that?
- What are the personal benefits the protagonist can obtain? How does it help their team / organization?