

[It's all about story at Smith College Women's Leadership Conference](#)

from Elaine Bennett's blog

It was a full day of speechifying at the Smith College Women's Leadership Conference yesterday: I listened to five and gave one. Most of the presentations were good; a couple were downright excellent. Mine was standing room only, and punctuated by a sustained round of spontaneous applause. But I digress.

The theme of the conference is "Pushing Boundaries," but the through-line running through all of the talks I saw was storytelling. Regular readers will know this warms my heart.

Stories are the saline solution of the word world. They can transport any kind of information straight to our hearts. Okay, that's an icky metaphor. Sorry.

My point is, whether you're delivering inspirational advice, like 23-year-old marathon swimmer Paige Christie, who spoke at lunch, or helping people see how they can effect diversity and inclusion in their organizations, or dismantling the patriarchy with a laugh and a smile (you'll hear more about that speech once I've processed it a little longer)—the medium for all of these messages was storytelling.

Even introverts can tell stories, as the impressive [Tori Murden McClure](#) ably demonstrated. I blogged about her gripping memoir seven years ago. And look at what I called the post: [The Power of a Story](#).

As I said in that ancient blog post,

"Whether it's something that has happened to you or a story with a good moral that you've plucked from history or literature, the story has to have a tangible effect on you—the speaker—if it's going to have an impact on your audience."

I said pretty much the same thing today (it's nice to know I'm intellectually consistent). And all of the speakers whose presentations I most enjoyed put that advice into action.

When you speak, your audience gives you their attention. Well, okay, you have to *earn* it. But if you want to make a *good* speech—and why in the world are you up there talking if you don't?—you owe them something more than a bunch of words. You owe them a piece of yourself, a real connection, a window (however wide you care to open it) into what makes you tick and what might in fact make *them* tick.

Elaine Bennett 4/14/2017 9:27 AM

Comment [1]: False start. It's all about me. Delete!

Elaine Bennett 4/14/2017 9:19 AM

Comment [2]: Yes, that is an "icky metaphor"—I should have deleted it. Plus, "warms my heart" to end previous paragraph and "straight to our hearts" in this one: entirely too much about the anatomy.

Elaine Bennett 4/14/2017 9:15 AM

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Elaine Bennett 4/14/2017 9:15 AM

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Elaine Bennett 4/14/2017 9:23 AM

Comment [3]: She has a name! Why didn't I use it?

Elaine Bennett 4/14/2017 9:24 AM

Comment [4]: Why didn't I end with this perfectly fine concluding paragraph? SEO. I was 15 words short of the magic 300 words. SMDH

Elaine Bennett 4/14/2017 9:40 AM

Comment [5]: This is about authenticity—which is an ELEMENT of storytelling, but it's not about storytelling itself. Definitely needs to go to the "Outtakes" folder.