



**STORY**

**TELLERS**

**ERS**

**EVERY AIRMAN HAS A STORY. WHAT'S YOURS?**

**THE GUIDE**

# INTRODUCTION

It's true what they say: "Every Airman has a story." But when you stop to think about it, that only gets us so far. It's not about whether or not we have our stories. It's about whether or not we *share* our stories. If we share our stories, we make a difference, we change lives.

Storytellers was created to encourage Airmen to share stories, to get the stories out in the open and to watch them change lives.

We are bombarded with training and development opportunities every day. There are tons of online videos and slideshows, lunch time briefings, multiple day conferences and more. Each and every approach aims to develop our Airmen, increase their resilience and security, and strengthen the Air Force. However, each approach is often forgettable. We skip through slideshows, tune out under fluorescent lighting, or simply bore from the directive approach.

Storytellers takes a different approach. Our goal is to create an experience that sticks with people long after the final bell. Storytellers relies on an informal



coffee house vibe versus a formal classroom setup, a professionally-lit personal stage with no podium or fluorescent lighting in sight, and well crafted, cutting edge graphics and videos. Add what history has shown to be the best way to learn - through raw, personal stories from peers - and you have an experience that propels Airmen into a greater sense of resilience, motivation and pride.

Storytellers is also the application of analog leadership in a digital age. Our goal is to engage, and we invite you to share with us in this goal. This guide both reflects a bit on what has made past Storytellers events successful, and lays out a map for Airmen to create the same experience at Air Force bases around the world.

*- The Storytellers Team*

# THE STORIES

Storytellers is all about the stories. Ask around and you may be surprised to hear the stories out there. Most of these stories have a learning point, a moral if you will. One tip: Look for good stories, not necessarily great speakers. Here are a few more things to consider when looking for stories:

**STORY VARIETY** The stories can't all be the same. Many Airmen have stories from a deployment, or a story overcoming the loss of a friend or parent. Storytellers should include a variety of stories that touch individuals on different levels. If you're finding the same stories, keep looking.

**STORYTELLER VARIETY** One of the coolest things about Storytellers is the fact that the speakers are our peers, not simply our commanders. Look for a wide variety of ranks, and focus on enlisted and company grade officers - consider including a spouse.

**NUMBER** When you start to look for stories, you may find more than you expected. You simply can't use all the stories available, the day would drag on. Aim for somewhere between four to six stories. If you go more than six you risk losing the audience during a lengthy program.

**LENGTH** A long story, if not told right, can be quite boring. A good goal is no more than 10-15 minutes.

## LEARNING POINT

Try to ensure all the stories are not downers. This is surprisingly harder than it seems, since many sad stories have positive messages. At past Storytellers events we probably had too many downer stories. Make sure you have a good mix of positive uplifting stories, and serious or heartbreaking stories.

# THE STORIES

**MESSAGING** As with everything, the stories will communicate a message. The message may be direct (a story about losing a family member to a drunk driver that ends with “don’t drink and drive”) or indirect (a story about the struggles to start a family that indirectly encourages audience members). These messages are usually clear and intended, but be careful to ensure the story doesn’t have any *negative unintended* messages. For example, one Airman told a story about life as a female Airman in a male-dominated flying squadron. We purposefully allowed the Airman to include vulgar and graphic language in order to portray the reality of the situation. However, that came with an unintended, negative message: the Air Force can be sick and twisted. The Airman could have conveyed her intended message (speak up if you feel uncomfortable in these situations) without sacrificing the reality of the story, and without painting the Air Force in a *very* negative light. It was a learning experience for us. We have to put on our communicator’s hat as we help our storytellers shape their stories. Always keep in mind the storytellers are in uniform and representing the Air Force when they tell their stories. If you ever have any concerns, you can contact your local Public Affairs office for help.

**LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS** Make sure the storytellers know that anything they say may carry legal implications. For example, if a Storyteller talks about losing an Airman to a fatal accident which is still under investigation, or implies a sexual assault occurred that hasn’t been reported (or has but is still under investigation), the legal office will likely come calling. If there are any questions or concerns, contact the legal office.

## LEARNING POINT

The two points above are not meant to scare anybody or to dampen the Storytellers experience. The intent is always to have Airmen open up and tell honest stories that have the power to change lives. However, we must also remember the storytellers are in uniform and representing the Air Force when they are up on stage.

# THE STORYTELLERS

Below is an outline of the stories featured at the inaugural Storytellers event on Incirlik Air Base, Turkey. You can click on the image to watch the story on YouTube.



TSgt Cole Pasley is an EOD technician who has shifted his motivations after losing multiple friends in Afghanistan and Iraq. When he first joined the Air Force he was motivated by a desire to be a hero, now he is motivated by the desire to carry on the torch for his lost friends.

<http://youtu.be/5cRGDYuj36g>



Mrs. Karla Alexander had dealt with depression after gaining 85 pounds following the birth of her two children. Then she decided to make a change. Over the last two years, she has lost more than 70 pounds and has become an example and encouragement to others chasing their own fitness goals.

<http://youtu.be/PtjWWsRswjo>



After a rough deployment, SMSgt Michael Mujwid found himself in a very dark place. He battled PTSD, took up drinking and ruined many relationships. He was very close to suicide until two SNCO's pulled him aside and had a very tough conversation.

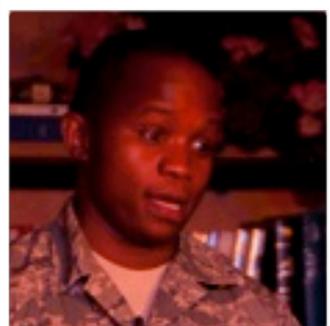
<http://youtu.be/iekLD7UYIck>



In March 2012, MSgt Gustavo Miranda lost an Airman to an accident on Incirlik. During the incident, he quickly realized he had to control his own anger issues and be there for his Airmen who were also dealing with the loss.

[http://youtu.be/2\\_2G-dETQHU](http://youtu.be/2_2G-dETQHU)

# THE STORYTELLERS



SrA Mohamed Bah grew up during the civil war in Sierra Leone. As a 14 year old boy he came home from school to find his entire family murdered by rebels. He escaped to a refugee camp and then made his way to America as a refugee. His goal since then has been to join the military and pay back the country that welcomed him.

<http://youtu.be/9jqaGyX5nIQ>



While LtCol Lawrence Hicks was in Korea, his pregnant wife lost their first child. A few years later he was TDY when he discovered his wife, now pregnant again, would give birth to their baby very prematurely. The baby proved to be resilient and is now grown up; his wife, too, proved to be resilient and has always been throughout his career.

Other Storytellers events have featured Airmen who have lost a sibling to suicide, overcome cancer, been emotionally harmed by a rough Air Force culture, and searched for and recovered remains of a soldier killed in Vietnam.

## LEARNING POINT

It's worth mentioning again, try not to get bogged down looking for great speakers. Storytellers is about the stories. A good practice would be to find one very good speaker as a keynote speaker, and simply work with the rest. Set up practice times with the speakers beforehand, both with and without the final stage setup. Provide tips and advice on how the presentations can be better. It would be beneficial to find a really good speaker who can help provide advice. The practices have really made a difference for everybody involved.

# THE SETUP

## THE STAGE

We really do believe it's very important to make Storytellers different than anything else Airmen have seen. This means the stage should stand out. For our first Storytellers, we were fortunate enough to find an Airman with experience in stage design. She built a stage using bookshelves, a fake fireplace, a couch, and a carpet. We also had a TV



displaying the Storytellers logo. The stage really made the event different and memorable. Every stage doesn't have to have a fireplace, but look for something cozy, comfortable, and most importantly, different.

**THE TIME** The very first Storytellers event was a two and a half hour event on a weekday morning. We thought it would be easier to get people there if it wasn't competing with their downtime. It worked on Incirlik and has worked elsewhere, but every base is different. Take the pulse of the base culture and make a wise judgement on when a Storytellers event would be most successful. As far as length, we found that two to three hours is about right. Aim for two or three stories, an intermission, and then two or three more.

**THE FOOD** If at all possible, provide free food. This adds to the overall vibe and is just one more way Storytellers sets itself apart. Private organizations will often donate money. Our advice? Don't skimp. We didn't just provide doughnuts and coffee. We had calzones, eggs, and more. At the most recent event, Starbucks provided free coffee. It was worth the extra money.

## THE LIGHTS

One seemingly small, but effective way we can make Storytellers stand out from other events is to turn off the fluorescent lights in the room and go for something a bit different, a bit bigger. On Incirlik Air Base, the Force Support Squadron donated their theater lights, which the event team used to light the club stage. They also



used dim chandeliers and had candles at different tables to light the room. The lighting adds to the vibe and ambience in the room, which is key.

## THE VIBE

The one thing that sets Storytellers apart from other military events is the vibe, or ambience in the room. Storytellers may be an event at an Air Force base, but it doesn't have to feel like an event at an Air Force base. We tossed theater seating and opted for small tables with four seats per table. We crammed the tables in the club ballroom. This, combined with the lights, the food, the stage, etc...all provided a nice coffee house vibe. The audience didn't feel as if they were at a military event, and that was key. In the end, people came out of curiosity, or they came for the stories...but they all left with an experience that could be traced back to the vibe.

## LEARNING POINT

We really can't stress the vibe thing enough. The setup had way more impact than we could have imagined. At the end of the event, many people commented that they didn't know what time or day it was - a testament to the impact the environment had on the Airmen.

# THE BRAND

Storytellers has its own brand, a look and feel that sets it apart from other events. The brand should be integrated into everything: social media, posters, videos, etc. If we break away from the brand and, for example, create different posters at different bases, we lose the power of Storytellers. The brand really comes across in the poster and video.

**THE POSTER** When we say poster, we really mean all graphics created to represent Storytellers. The poster is often used to hang around the base, post on Facebook, or share through email. We created the poster to set Storytellers apart from the other military events. We wanted it to stand out, to spike the curiosity of anybody who saw the poster on the wall. The poster has a grungy, cluttered look to represent the fact that our stories are grungy and cluttered. The stories are raw, and the poster had to represent that. The poster elements, including the fonts, colors and brushes are all spelled out on the following page.



**THE VIDEO** We produced a video to play on the screens at the beginning of the event. It carries the brand and spreads the vision of Storytellers. It also teases the audience, gives them an idea of what the stories are about, and creates excitement for what's to come. After the first Storytellers, one Airmen noted she was on the edge of her seat before the stories even began. This was exactly the effect we were going for. You can work with the videographers on base, or volunteers at an AFN or PA shop to do the same for an event on your base.



Click the picture to watch the video

<https://youtu.be/mAb0uyIQB3A>

# GRAPHIC ELEMENTS

The following information is everything you need to recreate the graphics and extend the brand. The photoshop files, fonts, and brushes are all included in a zip file located with this document at: [http://www.airman.af.mil/ExternalProducts\(Non-PACE\).aspx](http://www.airman.af.mil/ExternalProducts(Non-PACE).aspx)

## COLORS



#152870

R: 21

G: 40

B: 112

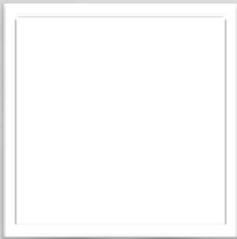


#b83b3b

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G: 59

B: 59



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R: 255

G: 255

B: 255



#373f53

R: 55

G: 63

B: 83

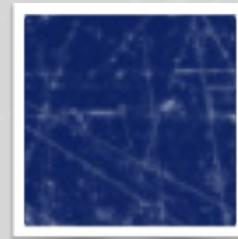
This last color was placed over the photos, and the opacity was dropped to 67%. This gave the photos an equal color tone.

## FONTS

**BASE 02**

DINMittelschrift LT

**PHOTOSHOP  
BRUSH**



The white scratches on the different graphic elements are from the “Heavy Scratch” Photoshop Brush, included in the .zip file linked above.

# THE ADVERTISING

So great, you're going to have a Storytellers event! Now what? How do you get people to show up? Here are a few different ways that have worked so far.

**WORD OF MOUTH** It's simple: Tell your friends. Then have them tell their friends. Word of mouth is powerful. Share the vision of Storytellers and why it's different, and create excitement around the event.

**FACEBOOK** Facebook really is powerful. We can create your own Storytellers event page from the Storytellers Facebook Page and you can use that to advertise the event to the base community on Facebook.

**ORGANIZATIONS** Consider reaching out to the different professional organizations on base: The Top III, 5/6 Club, First Sergeant's Association, Airman's group, etc. Most of the enlisted Airmen are a part of these clubs. We spoke at their meetings (if given a chance) and also sent emails out to all club members.

**WING SUPPORT** A **HUGE** win for the inaugural Storytellers was support from the 39th ABW, including the commander Col Christopher Craige. He didn't make the event mandatory (very important), but he cancelled his staff meeting, made the event an alternate duty location, and encouraged the group and squadron commanders to attend (and to encourage their Airmen to do the same). *You should start by getting the buy in from base leadership.*

**POSTER** Once you have the poster, pass it around on Facebook, and print it out - in big and small forms - and leave it at different places. We've hung the posters in our squadrons and put them wherever we could.

## LEARNING POINT

Every base is different, so some things that work at one base might not work at another. The key is to find what works where you're at. And most importantly, get your commander's support!

# PLANNING

**ROLES** Any Storytellers event is truly going to have to be a team effort. You'll need people who can focus on the stage and lights, somebody to focus on the multimedia, another person to focus on overall coordination, and the other on emcee duties and just bringing the stories together on that day. Our suggestion is to keep the team fairly small (4 to 5 people), and focus on individual strengths.



**PRACTICE** As they say, practice really does make perfect. Once you identify the storytellers, make sure you encourage them to practice. Challenge them to practice at home by themselves or with family. Then schedule a few dates for all the storytellers to practice together. We suggest practicing at least one week in advance of the event, and then another the night before as a dress rehearsal. Take notes as they share their stories. What doesn't work? What makes you say WOW!?! Give those notes to the storytellers and encourage them to sharpen their story before the main event.

**TEAM BUILDING** As mentioned above, Storytellers truly is a team effort. The team includes everybody involved in planning the event, as well as your storytellers. We encourage you to focus on the team dynamic. Invite everybody out to dinner at a local restaurant or at somebody's home. Share the vision and have everybody share why they are involved. As the team members get to know each other they will start to truly support each other and focus on the goal: to change lives through stories.

# FEEDBACK

The Feedback from Storytellers has been overwhelmingly positive. After the events, people hang around to talk to the storytellers - some cry, some share their own stories. Then they post stuff on Facebook. Here's a taste of what they say:

 **J Cameron Otto** shared a link.  
5 minutes ago

As you probably know, I'm not really one to beat around the bush. I'm quick to compliment when a compliment is due and just as quick to criticize when something is blatantly illogical or substandard. With that said, this was by far the most raw, moving, and inspirational thing I've seen thus far in my military career. I want to go Bad-Ass up a storm. Here's a little taste of my morning.

 **Brian Rule**  
December 21, 2012

story tellers was awesome today. lot of good stories an good people thanks for coming out those who did. thank you Eva Glinka Henry

Like · Comment · Share 👍 13 💬 5

 **Natasja Theriot**  
January 19 near Incirlik Air Base

Storytellers tonight was amazing and heart-wrenching. It has definitely taught me a thing or two about not taking life for granted. Thank you, Lee, for this event; I'm excited for the next one!

 **Penny Craig** At Incirlik 2 hours ago

Great event today!!! What a fabulous idea. Thanks for all your hard work on it. It's one of the best events I have attended all year! Penny

 **Melody Jackson** This was a great way to start the day! I was so impressed with the courage that each of these storytellers had, sharing their stories to strangers. I can't wait to see the next one! Great job Lee Hoover and team....great job!!  
12 hours ago · Unlike · 👍 2

 **Jacinta Puryear**  
Storytellers was a major success. It was a roller coaster of emotions, but well worth the ride. Thank to everyone who participated and a HUGE thank you for our supporters. — with Kitsana Dounglomchan and 2 others.  
Like · Comment · 38 minutes ago via mobile

 **Nicole McGaugh**  
December 21, 2012 near Aviano-Castello, Friuli-Venezia Giulia

Story Tellers was AMAZING to say the least! Some truly amazing speakers talked about overcoming seemingly impossible times! General Welsh says every Airman has a story, that applies to every person!! Share your story and listen to other peoples! Every situation you can overcome with a little help!! — with Eva Glinka Henry.

Like · Comment 👍 6 💬 6

“When I first got word of the program, I wasn't sure what to expect. I knew a solid group of Airmen was behind the event and I firmly believe in the power of stories, yet I wasn't sure how the Storytellers concept would translate in front of an audience. By the end of the first story that uncertainty was gone.

Storytellers takes the honest statement, "every Airman has a story" and translates it into a tangible, impactful event that both touches and encourages those in attendance. The organization, preparation, and execution were top-notch and a true testament to our dedicated and innovative Airmen. As we continue to encourage face-to-face, human interaction across our wings, programs like Storytellers will have a huge impact on our Airmen and families!”

- Col Christopher Craige, 39th ABW/CC

# JOIN US

Our goal is to watch Storytellers spread throughout the Air Force. We know we can't do that on our own. It's going to take motivated Airmen who truly want to make a difference. Our vision is to change lives through stories. Do you want to change lives? Then join us! This is all we ask. *If you can't agree to the following, we ask that you do not use the Storytellers brand or name.*

**CARRY THE BRAND** The Storytellers brand can be the catalyst to spread the idea around the Air Force. If each base creates different graphics and changes the core ideas behind the event, Storytellers will limp across the Air Force. However, if we all use the same brand, the same posters, and the same key themes outlined in this guide, we can shoot through the heart of the Air Force and truly make a difference.

**CONNECT ON FACEBOOK** Storytellers has a [Facebook page](#) to spread the Storytellers concept, create excitement around upcoming events, and encourage Airmen to share stories themselves. We can use this page to create excitement for *your* event. We will create a Facebook Event from the Storytellers page that is specific to your event. You can use that event to invite your Facebook community. After your event, we can use the page to share articles, photos and videos from your event. You can find a link to the Facebook page on the Contact Page.

**KEEP IN TOUCH** Contact us through the email addresses on last page as soon as you decide to host a Storytellers event. We want to keep in touch, share ideas, and most importantly help you with anything you need - graphics, contacts, answers to any questions. We also want to help promote your event, and get you connected to the Storytellers community.

**HAVE FUN** Hosting a Storytellers event is a lot of work. It can be stressful and overwhelming, but we're positive it can be one of the most rewarding experiences in your Air Force career. Embrace the challenge. And take the wise advice of Ferris Bueller: It all moves pretty fast, "if you don't stop and look around once in a while, you may miss it."

# CONCLUSION

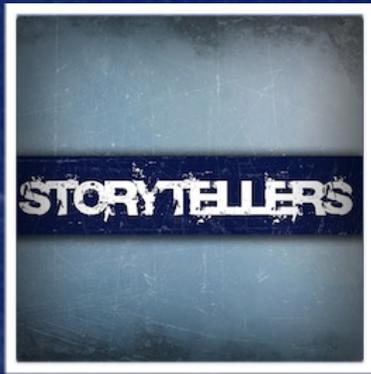
The birth of Storytellers was very much a spur of the moment thing. A few people got together and started talking and the idea blossomed. We weren't sure if we could pull it off, we weren't sure if Airmen would show up, but we were confident it could make a difference, and we believe it has.

As Airmen arrive at Storytellers events there are rumblings of *wow*, *this is cool*, and, *this is different*. At the very first event, the very first story received a standing ovation, as did two others throughout the morning. At the close of the event, all six storytellers received one last standing ovation that lasted more than two minutes.

The overwhelmingly positive feedback proved to us that we were on the right track. We could create a storytelling experience, different from a formal Air Force training environment, which would impact Airmen at every level. It's what we set out to do, it's what we accomplished, and it's what we will continue to pursue in the future.

Here's hoping you will join us.





Storytellers Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/afstorytellers>