



# RAY EDWARDS

LIVE WITH JOY. LEAD WITH PASSION. PROSPER WITH PURPOSE.

## DONALD MILLER ON SELLING WITH STORIES

### Episode #192

#### Feature Presentation

**Ray:** Yes indeed, welcome to the Ray Edwards Show, Sean has the week off so it's just me, Ray, flying solo this week. It's a very different episode. We're going to skip our usual segments because I want to give all the focus to my friend Donald Miller, as we interview and talk with him about telling the story of your customers in such a way that they want to do business with you.

As you know, if you've followed me for very long, this is a subject that I'm passionate about and recently I attended Donald's workshop in Franklin, Tennessee, called Story Brand, which was absolute genius and one of the best workshops I've attended in quite some time and we'll chat about that today.

Tell us about how Story Brand came to be.

**Don:** For years I've been studying stories in order to write a screen play and then because I've written so many books and was introduced to it and became obsessed with it, fascinated with the concept that stories come from formulas and these formulas have been tested over 2000 years to absolutely compel a human brain. In fact, neuro scientists have found out that when you're listening or engaged in a story the rational part of your brain turns off so then, as a writer, you're always trying to help people turn the page. That's the goal of a writer is to get them to read the next page and get through to the end and say those words every writer wants to hear... I wish it wasn't over.

That was my drive for studying story, however, I also ran a conference company on the side and I'd been in business before and had run two other companies, but I had this little company that wasn't growing like I wanted it to grow and people loved my product. They loved when they came to the conference. The surveys came back strong, so I couldn't figure out why it wouldn't grow when I discovered it was about my messaging. I wasn't telling people about the conference in my advertising, in my blog or my email blasts. I wasn't telling about the conference in such a way that people wanted to attend.

So I put the problem over to the side as I wasn't communicating very well and then I had the solution that worked in movies and books called story and I wondered where the two could meet. In other words, I wondered how I could use all this stuff I'd learned about compelling a human brain from story in my marketing and spent a year developing a process, because I got obsessed about it and filtered my communication about the conference through this process.

It ended up being a seven-part process based on story and we went from 350 people at our conference to 970, which was a sell out. Then went from 970 to a much bigger theater and 1700 and we sold that out. Now we're in a theater that seats 2400 and we have an eye on a theater that seats 7100 but we're not sure we want to go there, because success is oftentimes more problematic than failure.

Anyway, the process worked so I put word out that I had this process thinking a plumber may call and say please take me through it and Pantene called. Proctor and Gamble called with their shampoo division. We flew to Cincinnati, walked them through it informally and they loved it, Ray. I realized at that time that this isn't just how to write a good blog process, this could affect multi-million dollar commercial campaigns. Everything from that to an elevator pitch, this process will help somebody clarify.

We went from Pantene to Ford to Chick-fil-A and we even had an informal meeting at the White House, talking about the Presidents' My Brother's Keeper campaign. There are GOP candidates who are currently running for President, who are emailing and asking for feedback. It's blown up on us and for me, selfishly, it's this beautiful thing where I get to sit and think about my favorite things business and story and that's how Story Brand came into being and now we're rolling.

**Ray:** Now that you've told that story, is it just for these big corporate giants like Proctor and Gamble or the President of the United States?

**Don:** Yes. You have to either be President or...

**Ray:** Okay, then I've got some work to do so I'll see you later.

**Don:** No! We take about 50 companies through this process every month live, here in Nashville and most are sub-\$5 million dollar companies and I would say that at least 50% are sub-\$1 million dollar companies. We're talking about people who are wanting to recreate their website, give a better elevator pitch or they're speakers and are going around the country talking about their product or service and they want to improve that. It's mostly smaller to medium sized businesses. Also, at every workshop we also have the billion dollar brand in the room.

It's fun for a plumber to sit across from the CEO of a billion dollar company, and for them to find out they have the same problem is a great experience.

**Ray:** I've been through the experience myself and I had that experience myself. I was not the billion dollar company, just to go on record, but it's interesting to see that everybody has the same problem. Now, I've been helping people with their copy and marketing for a long time and when I first heard about it from, Michael Hyatt, and he gave me just a thumbnail sketch where he said we did this and it changed all of our marketing.

So I thought first, I don't know how that's possible and secondly, Michael doesn't say things like that lightly, so I went. I want you to please describe what you've seen happen for companies and/or individuals or private practices, who come in to the Story Brand workshop. What happens for someone who isn't at the billion dollar level but they have a small to medium sized business as you described?

**Don:** I identify a lot with those folks, because we were a quarter million dollar business three years ago and we'll probably surpass three this year. So I understand trying to get off the ground, just get the rocket ship out of the atmosphere and you need to do that without spending a lot of money, and marketing costs an enormous amount of money. Therefore, what we find is that most people are already blogging or have a website and email blasts, but they have these tools that are small company tools and what we're talking about is refining those existing tools to make them clear.

The problem is that most of us are so close to our company that one of our clients said they felt they were inside the bottle trying to read the label. We call it the **curse of knowledge**, which is, we know so much about what we do that we project that knowledge onto potential customers and we talk over their heads.

So one of the great things that Story Brand does, is we get rid of all the clutter and confusion from your marketing and help you say only the stuff that will get a response from your clients. It's hard to do that unless you have a process or filter that lets you step away from your own organization to say this is what we're about. This is what our customers are looking for, and we have filled our marketing space with clutter that's not making sense.

It's a seven-part process that helps you tell a better story, tell a clearer story as an organization and the process itself has a number of terrific paradigm shifts. The biggest shift is that most companies are interested in telling their story. I've heard it a million times, the CEO of an organization or small business owner say, we just have to figure out how to tell our story. I used to try to step in and correct them when they did that, but now I say come see us and we'll help you.

I can help you tell your story on a napkin at lunch, I'll do it for free it's very easy. However, it's not going to help your organization grow. The big paradigm shift at Story Brand isn't to tell your story, but to understand the story of your customer and then position yourself as a character in their story. So the big idea is this... every human being wakes up every morning and self-identifies as the lead protagonist in the narrative. What that means is, I feel like I'm a hero in a story trying to accomplish something, things are against me, there's conflict in my story but I do have this climactic scene in mind in many different stories in my life be it my professional and love story with my wife, my story of starting a family and my story of building a new home. All those stories are about a hero, me, trying to accomplish something and overcoming conflict in order to get it.

In most stories there's this character that enters the movie usually 27-28 minutes in and we call them the guide. This is Gandolf, Yoda, the guide, who steps into the story to help the hero overcome the conflict and win the day. So what we do at Story Brand is to help you understand what the mental triggers of your customer are that allow them to see you as the guide. So they are Luke Skywalker and you are Yoda. There are specific things that we help you understand about customers that are universal and there are very specific mental triggers that a guide has to do to be seen or understood as the guide in your customer's story.

What we've found is when you switch you begin to position yourself. The paradigm shift that Michael Hyatt went through and the process that he goes through before creating any product is that he tries to understand the story of his customer as it relates to the product and how can we position ourselves as a guide to help our customer get what they want? For most of our clients that is not only a groundbreaking paradigm shift, but it's very relieving, because it's much easier to play the guide than it is to play the hero. It's easier to understand the story of your customer than it is to go out and tell your own story. That is one of the seven step process we take people through.

**Ray:** I love the discussion we had while we were there about how you've studied the structure of story, movies and I've been watching for things you talked about. You were so precise about when the guide comes in and I watch for things like that now. You have to be careful with who you're with because you can annoy them.

**Don:** Well, my wife doesn't like for me to watch movies with her anymore.

**Ray:** Yeah, because you say that guy is going to die...

**Don:** Yeah, in exactly 31 minutes.

**Ray:** Help me understand going from, I get this big picture of, I'm going to be the guide for my customer and I'm looking at their story and telling their story in a way that's meaningful to them, because nobody wakes up and says hey, it's a great day to be an extra in someone else's movie. How does that translate into real marketing? Do we come away with a slogan? I think that's what people wonder is, on a practical level what does it do for me so my marketing works better and I get more customers, so I can go from a quarter of a million dollar company like you said you were, to a \$3 million dollar company?

**Don:** Once we teach you the process we actually look at marketing collateral from around the world and showing you how this process has been executed successfully. Then, for our clients who come to the live workshop we actually put their website up on an 80" television and analyze it in front of the entire group. They hate that part because they've already gone through two days of figuring out what they did wrong and then we throw the website up and talk about how we can do it differently.

It becomes a very intuitive process, once you understand the framework, but essentially, most of our clients are saying way too much. I'll walk you through the seven parts so your listeners understand. A story is a hero that wants something and runs into trouble and then meets a guide, who gives them a plan and calls them to action. That action then either ends in success or failure. That is the formula for almost every movie you can think of. Because it's the formula for every movie you can think of, that proves that it's a language that human brains understand cross-culturally. It doesn't matter what language you actually speak, the universal language of humanity is story.

Therefore, when we begin to speak through the elements of story in our marketing we begin to speak a universal human language. That's the first thing.

Then understand that a story starts with a character that wants something and what this means for our branding is, our customer is a character and they want something. So as it relates to our brand, we need to define what it is that our customer wants. Let's say you're looking for a used car. Of course you want a used car, but it goes even deeper than they so we have to define what our customer's internal struggle is. If I 'm looking for a used car, what is my internal struggle? It is that I don't want to deal with a used car dealer.

They're slimy and trying to rip me off, so through the process you would learn that if you attack at your marketing that internal frustration your customer is feeling, that fear of dealing with a used car dealer, and you promise to resolve, not only their external problem of needing a car, but their internal problem of not wanting to deal with a used car dealer. You're going to stand out from the competition and succeed. This has been proven in a brand called Car Max, which I think last year did \$8.7 billion dollars as a used car dealer and they don't even market their cars.

All they market is that you won't have to deal with a used car dealer, and they built an \$8.7 billion dollar brand just based on that paradigm shift alone of dealing with your customer's internal fear, rather than their external fears. So it's those kinds of things you learn when you study story, the human brain and then you analyze through a rigorous

filter your own marketing collateral so you're speaking a language that people will respond to.

**Ray:** That sounds super simple when you explain it for Car Max and it makes total sense, but my guess is that most of us have trouble reading the label from inside the bottle where we can't see that for our own businesses, so how do we get passed that problem?

**Don:** That's where the process comes in. you have to listen to me lecturing about it, look at the examples that I show you from around the world and then actually spend time stepping away from your company and understanding how it is that your customers are seeing you rather than you are seeing you. It's all about simplification.

I wrote a screen play and financially the movie didn't do well. The critics loved and hated it, but USA Today said everybody should see it, so that's my claim to fame, but it took two years to write that screenplay, where many of us will sit and write email blasts and websites, when we haven't even given a day to thinking about who we are, what our customers want or what we can provide for them. So the great thing about this course is you can go through it with your staff in a day and a half, if you go through the online course you have it for life so you can go through it a million times.

However, sitting down and having each of those seven parts stimulated, help you understand them through examples and then take the time to make clear messaging and once you start using that messaging to clarify it even more, I think is unbelievably beneficial. We've had products, Ray, that have sold decently well, but when I went back and created a brand script for the products, then created marketing collateral and sent it to the exact same people that we just sent it to a few months earlier but using different language, in one case we sold 168 units. Then when I took it through a strategy using a brand script, which was part of the strategy not all of it, we went an automated email campaign to that exact same list that bought 168 units and we sold 4000+ units to the same list.

That's the power of just saying it right and it's also the power of not saying too much. Human beings are drawn to clarity and away from confusion. Apple doesn't make the best phone or computer. They make the phone and computer that you can understand the fastest and probably, the phone and computer that's the easiest and most intuitive to use, I would think; and they sell the most.

The three P's of business have always been... people, product and processes. We have to hire the right people to have the right team, create a great product and then create processes where we can duplicate the creation and marketing of our products. We want to add this fourth P of positioning, where you can have a really great product and not sell it if you haven't positioned yourself in the market correctly and I think positioning comes from understanding your customer's story.

**Ray:** It really is walking through that process. It's funny, before I knew about the Story Brand process, I'm pretty sure I was one of those 4000 people, because I saw the first campaign and remember thinking, it looks kind of interesting, but when I received the second round of emails I was compelled and ended up buying the product.

**Don:** I created that campaign and of course, put myself on the email list because I wanted to get it when my customers did. I started reading the emails and I almost bought it. I thought, this is fantastic.

**Ray:** Yeah, good stuff.

**Don:** Sometimes I go back and read my own books and go man, that is really good advice I should do that.

**Ray:** I'm going to now be the raving endorser of your process because I've spent most of my adult life studying how to communicate persuasively and motivate people to buy stuff. I was in radio before I became a copywriter and marketing consulting and when I came to the workshop in Tennessee, I actually thought, I don't know how valuable this is going to be I'm probably going to pick up a few things, but I was really blown away by the fruitfulness of the process and what things it drew out of me about the story of my customers.

I saw it happen for everyone in the room and there were people with so many different kinds of businesses. I wonder if you would talk for a moment or two about how this translates to all the different levels of communication in your business and not just your website.

**Don:** Story is a universal language and sometimes the way I explain it is, story is the difference between music and noise. Noise is airwaves moving through the air that vibrate your inner eardrum. That's what noise is. So people listening to the sound of my voice aren't really hearing my voice nor are they hearing the speakers on their computers or cars. All of that is invisible, what they're hearing is their inner eardrum vibrate. Isn't that cool? However, if I play for you a recording of a dump truck backing up, birds chirping and children laughing, you would process that as noise.

Now, let's take noise which again, is airwaves moving through the air and vibrating your inner eardrum and let's submit that noise to rules. Rules like harmonics and all these things that make music, chords, versus, choruses and all these things and we submit noise to those rules. Your brain would process that noise differently and you would recognize it as music.

Story is like in the sense that story is a series of events that is organized and decluttered and placed in such an order that it makes sense to the human brain. What we often see when we look at the marketing clutter of our clients, whether it's a billion dollar corporation or a \$100k small company, what we often see is noise. They're literally throwing everything at their customers. You know, our grandfather started the company. Here are our core values. We're having a sale this weekend. All of that is just noise to your customers.

However, if you declutter it and pull it all out and say hey, we know that you want this, but you have a problem and that is that you haven't been able to overcome this and it's making you feel this way and that's not right. We've been guiding people through the resolution of this problem for a very long time and in fact, we're quite successful at it and if you do these three things...

Pick up the phone  
Schedule an appointment  
Buy this product

... you are going to have a great life and avoid the pain that you're currently in.

That's a story. So I've taken all this information that I'm throwing at my client. I've organized it and have gotten rather altruistic, because I started thinking about them as opposed to myself. When I put it in that order and got rid of all the stuff about my grandfather and the sale we're having this weekend, clients respond completely differently. So that universal language, it doesn't matter if you're trying to get elected President or if you're trying to sell more Girl Scout cookies, it's the same process.

It's just like, you can go to a movie about Tommy Boy trying to save his dad's company or you can go to a movie about Luke Skywalker trying to blow up the Death Star and defeat the evil empire and I promise you, Ray, those are the same movie. They're the very same, almost plot point for plot point the same, the only thing we did was to change out the hero, what they did and who they were in their personality. Then we changed out the conflict and what kind of conflict it was, but it all has an obligatory scene and it's the same thing.

When you learn the seven-part framework it's like learning chords on a guitar where you can write a million different songs. You can write big epic heavy metal hits or you can write a Taylor Swift song. Even with the Taylor Swift song you simply change out the boyfriend and you have a number one hit, it's the same thing. To me it's an exciting process that makes something that has been complicated for so long, simple and easy to understand.

**Ray:** It really does. One of the things I saw in observing Michael's company and the way he's doing things is it gave the entire team a simple play book about how to construct messages in talking to their customers and the rest of their team. They're all speaking the same language and we're doing the same thing in my company, because we're very clear on what the story of our customers is. It really shifts the total way you think about, not just marketing your products but even creating them, like why are we making this thing? It's because we know our customer has this problem. They have this story in their life that's hurting and they need some relief.

**Don:** Yeah. I'm so glad that someone like you got something from the process because intuitively you've been doing this for years. In fact, I would look at any leader who is extremely successful and I've not found one yet who didn't intuitively understand story.

What do you think about like right now, depending on when people hear this podcast, right now Donald Trump is leading in the GOP race for President. He is a narrative thinker. He understands what people want. He paints a really amazing unachievable scene of what he's going to help them accomplish. He paints a horrible scene of what's going to happen if you don't vote for him. He has a plan in different categories, none of them actually making any sense or are remotely constitutional, but he has a plan. That's why he's leading. It's not because he's the best candidate. It's not because he's the smartest and it's not even because anything he's saying is even capable of being accomplished.

Remember, when you hear a story your rational brain shuts down. When I interact with people who love Donald Trump, I'm interacting with someone who has turned off their rational brain when it comes to this candidate because he is telling such a clear and decluttered and quite loud story.

**Ray:** Yeah and I think it's really important when we hear that that we understand and we're not saying the people who are excited about Donald Trump are not smart, it's just that he is crafty enough to tell these stories which causes people to stop thinking, like you said, and just listen to that story.

**Don:** I have found myself agreeing with him many times and then I go wait a second, this isn't possible. I'll tell you what we're getting into now, Ray, and it's just interesting for your listeners. It's somewhat scary because the Story Brand framework is a tool that has a really beautiful side to it. It helps you understand your customers. It helps you care about their internal fears more. It helps you to become more altruistic. It helps you become a more genuinely loving businessperson.

And, it can be used as a tool to accomplish really bad things. If you interject into these elements untruths or manipulation, you can do awful things. It was really eye opening and scary for me when I was studying Winston Churchill. I asked myself the question... did Winston Churchill position himself as the hero or did he, as we recommend, position the people as the hero, the British people? Indeed, he positioned the British people as the hero. He talked about their courage and he painted these heroic scenes of what life would look like if they would defeat the evil Nazi forces.

Then I suddenly had the question, wait a second, I'm going around telling people that if they position themselves as the hero they're going to fail. Yet everything you hear about Adolf Hitler says he not only positioned himself as the hero, he positioned himself as a God and was treated as such. This would then debunk my theory, so I had to go back and study the speeches of Adolf Hitler and he indeed did not position himself as the hero. He kept telling the German people that they would be the saviors of their nation and indeed the saviors of the world.

It's the very opposite of what we thought of Hitler. He was so manipulative that he knew that he had to give all the credit to the people, meanwhile he's robbing them blind and doing all these atrocious things. But even he knew, as a master manipulator, not to position himself as the hero. It was fascinating and a little dark discovery for me.

**Ray:** It's interesting that you bring this point up, because I think one of the great things about you bringing this framework, this technique, this system of telling stories and explaining why they work the way they do, I think it's good. On the one hand you could think somebody might hear this and do something bad with it, but I believe the more people who understand how it works the more they can understand what's being done to them.

**Don:** I think so too and to me that's one of the reasons I watch some of these leaders and think, why can't anyone else see that this is a manipulative person? The reason is, I understand this framework. I understand exactly what they're doing, so I'm hoping that in all sorts of areas of our lives that we'd be able to say wait, that doesn't add up. This framework is a decoding tool in many ways.

**Ray:** Exactly. You can use this tool and ask yourself, is this story that this person is telling true or not?

**Don:** Right, that's the ultimate test, is it true?

**Ray:** Hopefully people will ask that question during the Presidential election.

**Don:** I hope so too.

**Ray:** Let's say I have a business, regardless of the size, and I'm not sure if I want to come to Franklin, Tennessee to attend a workshop, which I think is a great thing to do. Don't think

about it just go. I know you're now opening your online course, which I'm excited about. Maybe you could tell us some about that.

**Don:** Yeah, we're super excited about it. We filmed it once in Seattle and came back and I didn't like it so I filmed it again in Nashville and we think we've killed it. We're very excited. It's the whole course. There are ways to buy a license for you to take your entire team through it. It's \$3500 to take it live and it's significantly less to take it online.

**Ray:** Don, I want to thank you so much for taking the time to talk about Story Brand. One of the best things you could do for your business is to get this online course and use it to tell your customer's story so you can bring more business to your company.

**Don:** Fantastic. Ray, thanks for having me on the show.

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**Ray:** You can find the show notes for this episode, including a transcription by going to [RayEdwards.com/storybrand](http://RayEdwards.com/storybrand) and you'll find all the information about Don's brand new online version of the workshop.

Sean will be back with us next week and we'll have another episode of the Ray Edwards show. If you received value from this show, please consider subscribing using the Apple podcast app and if you're feeling extra generous, give us a rating and writing a quick review in iTunes is also really awesome?

Until then may God continue to bless you and may He do more for you than you can ask or possibly imagine.

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