

*Change the stories people tell about themselves...
... you change in an instant who they are and can become.*

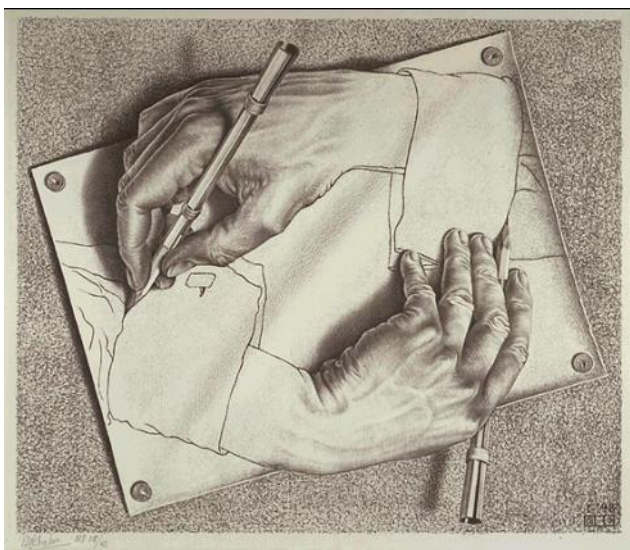
*Change the stories people tell about their universe and about others...
... And you change the world.*

Patrick A. Horton, PhD

MASTERING THE POWER OF STORY

The Story Coach – Practical Magic

*Redefining Story, Craft, Collaboration, & Success
in the Emerging Media and Brave New World*



Patrick A. Horton, Ph.D.
www.thestorycoach.com

"In the instant we open our eyes
and become aware of the world...
There is Story.

In the moment we endeavor to express ourselves,
or attempt to entertain, inform, or transform others...
There is Storytelling.

It is not just something we do...
It is who we are."

Patrick Horton, The Story Coach
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Introduction:

A Brave New World

At any given moment in life, you can accomplish *extraordinary* to seemingly *impossible* things if you can fulfill a few deceptively simple conditions for action and success. You need to know what you are after. You need to know what it takes to do that. You need to know what it takes to do what it takes. You need to step up to the plate and commit. Most of all, it has to matter. Then and only then can you rally the support and resources to realize in the world what you have realized or are coming to realize in your imagination. Then and only then can you create and sustain the necessary personal levels of persistence, focus, and thresholds of action for it all to come together and succeed. Then and only then can you create in the external world the needed sense of need. Then and truly only then can you fully recognize, shed, and leave behind those things in your world that needlessly impede, limit, or stop you.

That's it. Pick up a pencil. Write it down. Put it up on your wall. Then go out and transform your life, your story, your work and career. What does meeting or not meeting these conditions have to do with a book on life, story, and success in the Brave New World? Everything.

These are the implicit challenges you present to yourself, your characters, and your colleagues in all the myriad collaborative processes that must emerge and *converge* to bring any story, intention, project, or endeavor from initial concept to realized fruition. They are the implicit challenges you present to your audience in any setting or medium when you ask them to get on board for the ride. They are the driving force and critical path to real and lasting success at anything. They are always about story and what story is always about, *and*, they almost never occur. Not separately, not together, not in your life or your stories, your work or your career. It is why things fail, from projects and programs to entire industries and nations. It is all about *need, intention, action, and choice – character, context, challenge, and change*. Everything else is just noise and stuff happening – unless, of course, it is *fate, destiny, or divine plan*. But we'll come back to that later.

Do I have your attention? Good.

As it turns out, your attention, along with where you put it and how, are key to all that follows in these pages and what becomes both possible and impossible in your awareness, imagination, and visions of the world. Where and how you pair all of that up with and through action are key to everything else that is to be realized or not in all life, commerce, and art. And much of what you have been told or sold, thought or taught about almost everything in and about life and the world – most especially about story – ranges from piecemeal and inadequate to outdated, irrelevant, or flat out wrong, while much of what you just know to be true gets lost or dismissed in the shuffle. We are about to readjust all that so you can better understand the real creative and commercial processes as they are understood in the media industry, how they are actually played there, and as you can make them work better to assure your success (and keep your head when all others, including the ‘experts’, literally are losing theirs). Better, *we are going to show you how to take charge and open the floodgates to your own creativity and that of other as we explore how life and story both work and are inextricably interconnected.*

Put most simply, this is a book about the life and power of *Story*. How it works – where it comes from – how to divine and wield it to understand and shape your life and the lives of others. It is derived from long-running Story Coach – Practical Magic presentations, workshops, and seminars with a similar primary focus on achieving and even redefining success in the changing worlds of media, in part by helping to create a more successful media. The book also retains the material’s versatile applications to life, creativity, and to work in other arenas as well, and will give new depth and power to virtually everything you do. It not only will help you to step up to divine and claim your rightful place in the world, it will help you step up to fulfill your calling to inspire and lead. None of it is secret. It is simpler than you imagine. You are needed as never before in ways both immeasurably ancient and breathtakingly new. Most importantly, there has *never* been a better time or a greater need for Story in all its forms, or for those who understand and effectively wield its power. Not because in any given situation they have any or all the answers, but because in almost any situation, they are uniquely able to bring into relief and effectively ask the right questions. More specifically, the right questions at the right time.

In the pages that follow, we will explore a comprehensive yet elegant blend of paradigms and practices for the creation, development, and promotion of story, even as we explore applications of story in shaping and guiding everything else in life. It looks like magic. It redefines practical. It raises the bar on success. The point, of course, is not to learn the paradigms themselves, but to execute their stunningly effective steps. We will show how the most pervasive models for creating, developing, and delivering story often doom stories, projects, and careers from the outset, as do the corporate cultures and structures built around them. We will balance the very private aspects of creativity and the equally crucial collaborative steps and stages needed to assure congruence between the creative and commercial sides of things and to help you tell stories you did not know you had in you with an ease you will not believe.

In the still grander scheme of things for those specifically interested in the media industry, we will illustrate some of the ways the media industry itself gets in its own way and limits its success with the very models, organizations, and corporate cultures purported to assure success. We will have a little to say for industry organizations and guilds that sit idly by and accept these trends when they could lead the way in impacting them. Perhaps most importantly for many new to the doors of Hollywood, it will shatter the appalling message of the cottage industries that have emerged to sell you on the idea of selling your idea. It is almost an outright lie. Almost. This book and its applications in the media world and everywhere else are for those who, as we will say over and over again, are ready and willing to do and to become able to do the real work. As we will also say over and over again, success in Hollywood these days must occur as much in spite of Hollywood as because of it, and in spite of many gurus who profess to hold the keys to the kingdom.

If you are a writer, you must powerfully capture and express your vision in a way that speaks to and moves publishers and/or actors, directors, producers and, ultimately, an audience. If you are a publisher, actor, director, producer, you must clearly convey *your* needs and vision to guide the best from writers AND know how to listen to get theirs. If you are a development or marketing executive *really* worth your salt, you must have the goods for more than a campaign for a successful *opening* weekend and short run of DVD sales or downloads. If you are a change agent of any kind, you need to know how to draw out and handle all the ‘story’ held by those you wish to impact, and offer up alternative visions they can try on for size and actually *experience* as viable scenarios worth embracing and in fact helping to flesh out and bring to full realization. At every step of the way, regardless of your role or arena, you have to deliver the goods and be able to sell it all. And, if you are among those who must manage and/or influence all of this, you especially must understand the changing pieces of the puzzle and how they all connect. ***You all must understand what generates, drives, and shapes change.***

It is here that this book differs most substantially from others on story, including some that seem akin to it as *it is equally a book about story and transformation – how transformation shows up or fails to in real life and how that shows up or fails to show up in story*. It is about bringing into relief the shared critical paths of both, beginning at their *real* beginnings, and how our own story about the world impacts our needs, willingness, and ability to explore and tell stories that speak to our times. It is about discovering how to divine and resonantly capture those stories and visions that want us to tell them and irresistibly attract and hold an audience. As it turns out, *all stories worth telling (and well told) are ultimately about transformation, and transformation always has its own need, structure, drive, and point*. It is where myth comes from. It is how we are wired. It means you always will have something to say, something worth saying, and the best means to say, package and sell it. Not just what we usually think of as ‘story,’ *but the real and living thing*. This book is nothing less than a practical map to a radical paradigm shift.

Many of the elements covered will be as ancient as story and storytelling themselves. The context and conceptualization of them will be as current as the times we live in. As a result of mastering them, you will be better able to succeed at and redefine your given craft or career. You will be more able to impact the media industry and others personally as you go. You will better understand how to collectively and/or institutionally impact the industry as a whole. You will show up for success with what everyone ultimately is looking for whether they explicitly know it or not; confidence, conviction, commitment, and craft. You will learn to trust and tap your own voice to tell stories you did not know you had in you and successfully promote them in ways you did not know were possible. Moreover, you will increasingly have the sensitivity and tools to help others do the same. Just as importantly, you will be able to convey your visions even to those who resist them in order to hold on to inadequate to blatantly false visions of their own as you create unprecedented control over your own life, intentions, work, and career.

We all have story about virtually everything, even when it is only vague but emotionally charged shadows and fears about the unknown. Everything we ever think, say, or do individually or collectively is a taking in, a playing out, and/or a revisiting, revising, or creating of story. Story is our lens, filter, and organizing principles to experiencing and shaping the world around us. It is what joins us together, separates us by degrees, or tears us apart as individuals, families, groups, and as nations. It is our story about ourselves and about the world that defines and limits us, or opens up universes of infinite possibility. It is story that determines how we remember and understand our past, how we experience and engage our present, and whether or not we have a future, a let alone how we shape it. It is through story that we create, sustain, nurture, or destroy – whether by enlightened intention or by accidental design.

The problem is few of us fully understand or even remotely begin to tap this power in any setting – personal or professional, fact or fiction. We often fail to recognize how and when it is being used for or against us. Ironically, the very media and institutions whose historic mission is the development and circulation of story and our vision of the world now dominate all venues even as they undermine the viability of their own missions, products, and profits. Story and media gurus have it largely wrong, not always because they do not understand, but because they must try to sell what you want to hear in order to survive and succeed. We greet *waves* of new storytellers and media executives with the unfortunate but reassuring lie that all they need is a hot idea and a pitch, even as *that* idea fails us all. We daily lose our way as a people and nation, all too often distracted by new noise, new toys, and reassuring but empty rhetoric. We relentlessly exploit our young in the goal of creating mindless market-bots when we should be nurturing and guiding them. We tend to look behind in time if we bother to look at all as we fail ever more frequently to see what is before us, let alone grasp what could be. And, as grim as this seems to be, there has never been more *promise* or *possibility* at every turn for those who can see and convey them to others.

Professionals throughout the entertainment & media industries can capture and move audiences more successfully while drastically enhancing the collaborative process from concept to successful release. Studios, networks, and production companies can capture, develop, and successfully market the best material possible while drastically cutting investments on ineffective to outright misguided story and project development – with more consistent results. Everyone will have a shared and integrated creative and commercial language, matched by equally comprehensive and complimentary collaborative practical steps. You can create and/or contribute to the creation of product that will sell (and know how to sell and/or help to sell it). Not only will you be infinitely better at doing whatever it is you do in your life, work, and career, you will be infinitely better at helping others transform what it is they do. Best of all, we do all this with a simple exploration of the conditions for success outlined above, a few powerful and empowering principles for life and story, a handful of questions, and one short mantra.

Since this material is based on the simple understanding and potent use of the fact that there is nothing that any of us ever do for any purpose or in any setting that is not an expression or manifestation of story, this book also has a great deal to say for those other arenas as well. Professional speakers, corporate executives, and corporate planners can discover means to develop missions with vision and visions with mission that hit the ground running and draw in the most resistant players as active participants. Advertisers, PR, and marketing - communications professionals can better integrate corporate/product missions, branding, and product promotion/delivery for themselves and their clients. Teachers, clinicians, and change agents can discover a new language, tools, and possibilities for healing, creativity, and taking charge of change. Individuals from all walks of life can shed ways of engaging the world that create limitations or even prisons for them, and take charge of their lives as stories in process in which they are key author and guide – not only in the world as it is, but as it can be and is becoming.

It should be noted before giving a preview of the chapters to come that there is always a temptation in writing a book like this to yield to the impulse to say whatever it is you believe your audience wants to hear, rather than take responsibility for addressing what you manifestly *know* they need to learn, integrate, master, and *do*. The readiness to give in to this impulse, of course, arises in proportion to the extent to which your drive for selling lots of books is matched by a willingness to mislead and misdirect your audience in the bargain. The same basic truth applies to courses, conferences, and consultations. Whether this willingness is based on ambition, greed, or even reluctant compromises to your material so you can manage to reach anyone at all, it has the same ironic and varyingly tragic results; *the better you manage to stand out in the fray and succeed at creating and selling a book on how to succeed in and 'sell' to Hollywood, the less able your readers will be in doing either*. The resulting gibberish can be seen in endless rows of books and in courses on the 'secrets' of selling to and finding 'success' in Hollywood, by people who have done and achieved neither, and in conferences and consultants that multiplied over the last decade. The truth is, the more widely available so-called experts, resources, and events on story and breaking into Hollywood have become, the more misinformation and confusion they have created, even as story has become the most ignored, misrepresented, and misunderstood phenomenon in the media industry.

There always have been courses, conferences, consultants, and publications on story and the 'secrets' of breaking into Hollywood. They converged and virtually exploded as an entire cottage industry over the last decade, offering up many variations on the 'secrets' to selling to Hollywood and success in the media industry at a time in which the industry itself was being taken over by corporate convergences and professional amateurs. What they sold was the notion that success involved little if any real knowledge or craft. They sold the idea you could succeed just by having an idea, and that breaking into Hollywood was just luck of the draw in which you could cheat and win the lottery.

For many potential readers, little to any of the above will matter. They are not so much looking for how to tell stories as to create product. They are not so much looking for how to define, pursue, and achieve a dream as they are looking for a means to have one and/or keep it alive. Lies and misinformation are actually useful (as long as they are shared) as the real intention or commitment is just going through the motions anyway, pretending they are part of the entertainment industry or could be if only that missing ‘secret’ or big break shows up. For many readers, it is actually comforting knowing they have not made the real effort yet. It means or could be taken to mean that it is still possible to succeed if only they try harder or do something better. The unspoken reality for even those who actually do aspire to try and make it in Hollywood (or anywhere else) is that it is emotionally safer to stay shy of the needed thresholds and types of action for success in order to keep the dream safely untested and thus both its hope and its imagined possibility alive. It is the challenge of having to risk your dream to actually have it.

The initial problem for those of you who are ready and willing to take risk and become fully able is you will have to find your way through oceans of distorted and fragmented information to get your hands on what you really need to know and *do* to succeed before you have the information in hand to be able to know what it is you really need know. The second and inescapably related problem is you will then have to swim through equally vast oceans of people in positions of power who bought or pretend they bought the fragmented and erroneous goods. The third, and as it turns out most pivotal problem or challenge, is whether or not you can step outside of the box of what you know or think you know to explore those worlds that call to you on the horizon or are trying to emerge and speak through you and your creative impulses. This holds true whether you are among those striving to fulfill your creative drive on the creative side of things or executives who want to work with them. The fourth problem is how to address all this at once without getting lost in a world and industry undergoing rapid and unprecedented change.

The great news is six fold. There really is a way to not only proceed, but to lead. You hold many of the most crucial keys yourself. The keys you do not have (some of which are never talked about anywhere) are quite concrete and attainable if you are willing to take a few unfamiliar steps that will seem a little awkward at first, but will seem strangely familiar when you allow them to work and try them on for size. The still better news is that the pages that follow will walk you through discovering and expressing your own voice in a ways that fulfill your creative needs and commercial potential in ways you cannot believe and that you will be doing as you learn because you will be leaning by doing. The inescapable news is that it all comes back to and begins with you, as the crucial source, conduit, and vehicle for this journey of discovery and the necessary agent of action at every step. The biggest news of all is that it is in finding your own true voice that you can do all this by speaking to what everyone wants or thinks they *want* while offering up what it is you and they *actually need* – distinctions that cut throughout this book. Happily, this not only transformationally applies to all those interested in Hollywood and the media industry, but literally to all other endeavors, dreams, and arenas in life, as well and to life in general.

This will not be the last book you will ever need to read on any of the wide ranging topics it covers, either separately or as they are interrelated. It is, however, powerfully and uniquely useful as the first. Most of it you will take in and learn by doing – more often than not discovering you already had many to most of the most crucial pieces to the puzzle – but now with a rapidly growing new ability to bring them into relief in a vastly larger context, and put them into a practical unfolding order and equally practical steps and plans to not only divine and fulfill your dreams but to exceed them. Your life, stories, work, and career will never be the same. They will be greater than you imagined. This book is, after all, about mastering the life in story and the story in life in a rapidly changing world, step by unexpected but increasingly effective step, to discover what it is to live fully and be fully alive.

We begin our little sojourn together in these pages several chapters and a great deal of material earlier than other books or courses you are likely to encounter and will provide unprecedented success where others are doomed to fail because we begin first and foremost with you, the source, medium, and agent of action for all the stories, visions, or missions you will ever hope to conjure and concretely bring to reality. We then move on to...