

Use Personal Stories to Connect with an Employer and Get a Job

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Whenever I meet a merchant, the biggest question I often have is how much something costs. Lots of merchants refuse to tell you how much something costs until they have shown you what they are selling and all of its various features. Many merchants also often want to tell you a quick story about the product they are selling.

No one is more notorious for doing this than the merchants who sell rugs in the Middle East. I think Middle Eastern rug merchants are about the best salesmen there are. The way these merchants conduct their business is a huge story in itself, about using the power of storytelling to sell product. Storytelling connects the customer with the merchant and the product, creating a bond that often results in a sale and the customer's appreciation of the rug for years to come.

When you walk into a rug shop in the Middle East, the salesman will sit down and spend a lot of time with you, especially if he believes you are looking for something expensive. He will explain the story behind the rug you are interested in. You will learn about how the rug was made and the geographic area it came from. Different lights will be turned on to show you how the rug looks at various shades. You will be shown the rug from numerous angles. Many rug merchants keep a small loom in their shops, which enables you to see up close how the rug was made.



You might be offered tea and perhaps even liquor, if it is legal in the country you are in. After an hour or two of discussing the one rug, you might even be offered a snack. The merchant will then proceed to tell you about himself and his family. He will tell you how well and where he lives. He will tell you about the books he likes and dislikes. The merchant will also ask you numerous questions to get to know you.

After all this has occurred, you will eventually learn the price of the rug--if you did not ask earlier. I have witnessed this enough times in Turkey and other countries to know that storytelling is an important ritual in the sale of rugs. It is the sort of ritual that has been occurring probably for as long as rugs have been sold.

Storytelling can be extremely relevant to your job search and how you market yourself. In fact, if you understand its significance, you are likely to have a great deal of ease getting employed.

What the rug merchants are doing when they present you with so much information is telling you exactly what you are getting before they give you a price. What you are getting when you purchase a rug from them is not just a rug but also the tale of the rug, its history, the merchant who sold it to you, and how you came upon the rug shop in your travels. You become significantly connected to the rug you purchase.



Many families have owned rugs for generations. They feel connected to these rugs, and a great deal of that has to do with the stories that go along with them. There is an emotional energy that is invested in the rug.

I remember the first time I went into a rug shop in the Middle East: I was surprised by how much time the salespeople wanted to spend with me. The salespeople were really selling a connection more than simply a pile of colored wool. I was taken to a casino. I was taken to Turkish teashops to spend time with other customers of the rug sellers. I learned about merchants' families. The stories that went along with the rugs (which I would tell again and again to friends) were really something special. They are why I cherish the rugs I bought there, to this day.

How many times have you heard someone tell a story about why they bought something? When people talk about a purchase, they always seem to have a story to go along with the product. Take the purchase of a car, for example. There is always a story about the car, the deal that was gotten, and sometimes even the remarkable timing of events that led to the purchase of the car.

So what does this mean for you? As a person [seeking employment](#) you are at first seen as a commodity, and when an

employer is hiring you, they are making a purchase of sorts. The more information the employer has about you, and the more (positive) stories that they can associate with you after your interview, the more likely you are to receive a job offer. A story about you can create a positive, memorable connection between you and your prospective employer. The more engaging the story is, the more likely people are to pass it around.

In marketing, there is also something known as an *elevator pitch*, which is relevant to your job search. An elevator pitch is a story that you can tell (and that can be told again) quickly, which is memorable and to the point. For example, most people know that Google was started by two students at Stanford. People know that Henry Ford, the man behind the Ford Motor Company, developed the assembly line. You have a story too. That story can be useful to your employer if you develop it in your interview and application materials effectively. I will explain this further:

As a recruiter, one of the primary jobs I do for candidates is to write a story describing their work and personal history. I then forward that to the prospective employer(s) along with the person's application. I love writing these stories. I know that this document must thoroughly engross and draw in any employer who reads it.

Throughout the years, I have realized that the better this story that I write is, the more likely the candidate is to get hired. In fact, developing a story for my candidates is one of the most important things that I can do for them. With very rare exceptions, every one of my successful candidate placements was due to the development of an outstanding story.

There are some common characteristics of stories that get people hired, which I want to share with you so you can understand the entire process. The best stories typically revolve around the employee being very motivated to do a good job and continually wanting to improve in his or her employment. The person is generally portrayed as someone who works hard, has a positive attitude, is loyal, and, due to forces entirely outside his or her control, can no longer grow in his or her position or company. When the story is developed correctly, each job move is shown as part of this quest for continual self-improvement. A well-written story will also detail the candidate's daily life. It will mention his or her family and friends, so that the prospective employer can come to identify with the candidate as a person.

A good story requires a main character that has a positive attitude, who is trying to do well, but due to forces beyond his or her control, cannot. Think of the typical cops-and-robbers type movie or show. In these shows, the police officer is most often misunderstood while pursuing the bad guy. His boss thinks he is out of control and he receives frequent lectures about this. The cop is often so misunderstood that he is taken off the case.

This story is incredibly popular and is so beloved that you can see it on probably any television set at any given time on any given day. When you think about why this story is so popular, it is pretty simple. It is about people trying to do good, putting in their best effort, and then being thwarted by various forces. In the process the people are often gravely misunderstood and may lose the respect of their peers. When we watch these types of shows, we almost want to scream at the television screen. *We want to help the detective because we know he is in the right.*

When you are [looking for a job](#), you need to think of the cops-and-robbers story and have a similar story that shows you are out there trying to do good. You want to present a story that is memorable and that sets the employer up to care about you to the degree that they feel like they are the *good guy*, intervening on your behalf to help you, and *doing the right thing* by offering you a job.

The employer will also be more interested in you if you provide some personal information. Just like the police story shows you the personal life of the police officer, you too should give the employer a glimpse of your personal life. As a recruiter, I always ensure that I put information about my candidate's personal life in the story so the employer can connect with the candidate. You want the employer to closely identify with you--the more the employer knows about you, the more you stand out, and the harder it is to reject you.

I am not telling you to pour your heart out. Nor am I telling you to share everything about your personal life with the employer. But, if employers have a short story they can pass around about you, and if they can understand you personally, they will be more likely to hire you. In addition, if your candidacy is portrayed to the employer as something that furthers the cause of good, the employer will be much more likely to *help you* by offering you a job. People want to feel like they are doing something good when they are hiring someone. If you present your candidacy as a *cause for good*, the employer will remember that connection and will likely want to hire you.

THE LESSON

Marketing is crucial to your job search, because employers are essentially purchasing a product when hiring you. The more positive information your employer has about you, the more likely he or she is to hire you; personal stories create a connection between yourself and the employer. Stories that revolve around your motivation, dedication to your job, and drive for improvement will portray you as a hard worker with a positive attitude, who can no longer grow in your current position for reasons outside of your control.