

FCS Storytelling Tips

Always tell a story. As a family and consumer sciences professional, you see the human impact of laws and policy every day. You witness the successes when students or clients receive the education they need and the problems that results when they don't. Make these experiences come alive for legislators, decision makers and others who don't get to see what you see. Data can overwhelm people. Too many numbers and details can cause eyes to glaze over.

It doesn't matter whether you're meeting a senator's aide, talking to a reporter, or speaking at a rally, a good story about a student or family will make your point about family and consumer sciences. Stories will help lay audiences connect emotionally with your argument, something that the best statistics and research findings can't do on their own.

Here are some tips for telling a family or student story that is clear and compelling:

- **Don't start with a stereotype.** Think about your listener's point of view, frame of reference and values.
- **Rely on everyday language** as opposed to technical terms and acronyms. Imagine you are talking to a friend outside your field. If your story hinges on a word or phrase that might be unfamiliar to the general public, define it briefly. Some examples: Instead of FCS, say family and consumer sciences.
- **Provide a few details about your student or client** to help your audience envision the person. How old was she? Did she have children or a partner? A career? What emotions did she show? What was she most concerned about? Be sure to use a pseudonym for her—so privacy will be protected and your story will be more memorable.
- **Quote or paraphrase your student or client.** If a student or parent says something that impresses you, try to remember it or write it down. Incorporate their words into your story, and she will come alive for your audience.
- **Surprise your listeners.** Unusual details will make your story memorable. Images like these will stay with your listeners.
- **Let your passion show.** Don't be afraid to include your own emotional reaction to your student's or client's situation. Audiences will respond to your sincerity and conviction.
- **Keep it short and sweet.** You might not need more than a few well-chosen sentences to make your story effective.
- **If you don't have a relevant story,** tell a story from another colleagues. "Another teacher told me about one of her students who . . ."
- **Connect the dots;** provide the larger system and program context. Your story should tell how **YOUR FCS program** made a difference in this person's life; not just how one individual "pulled themselves by bootstraps."

Support your story with a one-page, overall data summary about your total program and its impact. Your story is one example of your overall impact. Be accurate. Your story will soon be told by that legislator.

**"Tell me a fact and I will learn. Tell me a truth and I will believe.
Tell me a story & it will stay in my heart forever." — Indian Proverb**

Sharon Hoelscher Day, CFCS
2010-11 Chalkley-Fenn Public Policy Scholar



Sources – American Medical Women's Association, Physicians for Reproductive Choice and Health, Ray Blunt, "Leaders and Stories . . ." http://govleaders.org/stories_print.htm Framing Institute, <http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/> 6-2011