

Building The Will

Pro Tips for Strategic CaseMakers™



A BIGGER STORY: MAKING YOUR CASE WITH SYSTEMS STORYTELLING

Q:

We love telling stories and we're really working to make our storytelling as powerful as it can be. But it's hard to do that AND the kind of CaseMaking we need to do. **Help!**

A:

You're right. Storytelling is powerful! When we tell stories, people listen differently. They lean in with their whole selves — hearts and minds — and are more likely to take action. That's exactly what we want them to do!

But we need to make sure our stories don't sabotage our CaseMaking. If the goal of our storytelling is to activate people to change systems — rather than helping people or families one by one — we need to tell our stories very differently.

RETHINKING OUR STORIES

In the social justice space, we often tell stories about the individuals we serve to draw people into a bigger conversation about the systemic change we are trying to make. Or we invite people to tell their own stories to help them feel the power in their voice.

Here's the problem: Research shows that stories that focus on people's individual circumstances tend to move us in the direction of trying to "fix" those circumstances.

We might ask, "Can I give a small donation to that family? Can I pray with the family or for the children? Can I bring canned goods or run a toy drive for the children?"

While there's nothing wrong with those offerings, they won't transform the world we live in over the long term. If we're really after justice, even well-intended charity won't cut it. We need our systems to deliver for us, and our stories should reflect that.

Visit our [website](#) to join the wider community of Strategic CaseMakers and help lead the charge for justice.

Here's how you do it:

Center the experiences of people who are directly impacted in your communities. Make space for people to narrate their own stories and encourage them to do so authentically, speaking truth to power. Encourage them to include the ways in which the systems around them supported or undermined their ability to thrive.

Make people AND systems the main characters in your stories. Tell fascinating stories about the ways our education, health care, housing, and workforce systems make a difference in people's lives and the ways that we need those systems to be reimagined to deliver a better tomorrow for all of us.

Direct attention to the dignity, strength, and resilience of the people in your stories, and remind us of how we ALL benefit when everybody in our communities has what they need to thrive. Don't describe what's wrong with people and where they live — that only invites othering and exclusion. Lead with language that invites people to a conversation about our strengths.

Tell visionary, future-oriented stories about the way our systems could be operating to help us meet the future. We all know that most of the systems that are meant to keep us strong in our communities are in deep crisis. It doesn't help to keep reminding people of that. Help people see that there are already real-world solutions and all we need to do is mobilize our communities to lift them up.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Here are some examples of stories that focus on people's dignity and strength, while highlighting the systems that support them.

Don't Do This	Do This
Ever since she was little, Ana has struggled with her weight. Now the pediatrician has warned her that her kids are on the path to long-term health problems, too, if the family doesn't eat better and exercise more. With your help, our church is establishing a healthy eating program where families like Ana's can learn about nutrition and build a healthier future.	Ana and her kids love going for long walks and cooking dinner together. But they don't get to do that much these days, since her commute is long and the closest grocery store is a 20-minute bus ride away. She's worried the lack of options nearby is going to be bad for her family's health over time. Ana and her neighbors have banded together to build a community garden and advocate for a new grocery store so that all the adults and kids in the neighborhood can live healthier. And her church community is pitching in by establishing a healthy eating program.
"I'm Cindy Moore and I have three kids. Last year, I lost my job and since then I haven't been able to make the rent. I've tried to get another job but nothing is coming. I was able to qualify for eviction protection, but that's gone now and I'm afraid. My oldest son is autistic and my youngest is having trouble in school. I'm a really hard worker but I just can't seem to get back on my feet." Your donation could support many families like Cindy's, helping them stay in their homes.	"I'm Cindy Moore and I loved my job. I did home health care, and I could always find ways to make my patients smile and ease their burden. But then the pandemic came, and the schools closed. Like any parent, my first priority was keeping my kids safe, even if that meant giving up the work I loved. When the eviction notices started arriving, I knew I had to do something. That's why I'm working to make sure that all families have the support they need to get through life's rough patches without losing their homes. Join me in holding our leaders accountable to building the future we all deserve."



CHECK THIS OUT

Vice News' mini documentary **"Trying to Eat Healthy in a Food Desert"** tells the story of community members in Brooklyn, NY, who are making healthier food available to more people through urban farming.



CHECK THIS OUT

Built for Zero's video tells the story of the Jacksonville, FL, community that is solving homelessness by knowing every person experiencing it by name.

