

Matt Bahl, Prudential



Matt Bahl is the Vice President of Financial Wellness and Customer Strategies.

Narativ coached Matt Bahl and 5 other Prudential executives in preparation for the Inclusive Markets Summit in February 2019. Prudential brought together the executive leadership of various lines of business and outside experts to speak about the crisis of Financial Wellness in America. Each speaker used a personal story to dramatize the issue driving their line of business. In Matt's

case, he told the story of his father, who at the age of retirement had no money in the bank. We spoke to Matt after the conference.

Key takeaways were:

- Building a narrative for your data engages listeners emotionally and personally
- Personal stories demonstrate the value provided to customers and clients
- Vulnerability is a skillful means to create connection and buy-in

Q *What was your experience of presenting at the Inclusive Markets?*

A It was the most emotional presentation I've ever done, in any context, and far different than my weekly presentations. I think I probably practiced this significantly more than I normally do. I worked late into the night, often running it by my wife. It was hard. But it was great. I'm glad I did it and the feedback from everybody has been really positive.

It's hard to expose your innards in a corporate environment. I'm just thankful to Prudential for

giving us the forum to do that. Speaking personally aligns with our mission of helping working Americans. So, to me, it's coming full circle. It was one of the best speaking experiences I've ever had.

In terms of the evolution from your usual business presentations to this kind of presentation, what were some of the elements that inspired you to take that leap from business-as-usual to the more personal?

For a lot of business presentations, we rely heavily on data. It's one data set after another, and then we

analytically connect them to a business project or an outcome we're trying to drive. In preparing for this talk, we asked ourselves, "how do we leverage those data sets in a way that connects on an emotional level?" Such that, when people leave, it doesn't matter if they remember that 1 in 4 working Americans is going to experience a disability, or that 103 million Americans don't have assets in a retirement account. Rather they remember that the financially vulnerable are in our workforce, and we've got to do things as a business and as stewards of our founder John F. Dryden's vision, to deliver on the promises we make to our consumers.

our story and what we are trying to do.

Did this impact your confidence in terms of presenting?

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I've never suffered from a lack of confidence, but I think this presentation helped me to identify that in the right moments, in the right context, vulnerability is a way to engage people in important messages. As a leader, we don't always have to be stoic and approach with a 3-PowerPoint execution. It's the personal stories we have in our own lives that help inform why we do the work we do, and how we can then deliver that benefit and make those stories real for our clients and customers.

Q *What will you do next with storytelling? What have you learned from your experience?*

A I've got a few more presentations next week with clients. We'll be weaving in stories from the workforce to show why we think certain solutions make sense. So, rather than coming in with large Power Points of data—which we have—it's going to be about how this applies to Jerome, or to Nancy, or someone else, and why they are going to benefit from it. I think using personal narratives as a way to show why this stuff matters is something that I'm going to be incorporating into my presentations in the future.

Did you notice anything different in terms of the audience today from previous presentations?

I did. They were patient with me, like they'd gone on the journey that I was trying to go on. They stayed with me. I think it was evidenced by the fact that I got applause at the crescendo of my dad's story. I wasn't expecting that. Even when you think you're going to get applause, usually you don't in these environments. To me, the applause was an indication that the audience was connecting with

The thing that has struck me the most is just the outpouring of emails after the presentation. People have been coming up to me, expressing how much they appreciated the story because it resonated with an experience they've had, or are having. So to me, it was really powerful, and it continues to be powerful. My story, while unique because it's mine, is not unique in the sense that there are lots of people that have similar experiences.

From a leadership position, telling that personal story gives other executives permission to think about their work in this way; to understand that it doesn't just have to be framed in the corporate sense of suit-and-tie and crunching numbers. It's about all of us finding the deeper story of what we do, even if that's a personal story. I'll add that while I've gotten positive feedback from a few folks that are higher up the corporate chain than me, I think it was most important for a lot of folks that are doing the daily work that makes the business run. The folks that are in the call centers, processing claims or on the phones with participants—it's from them that I've seen the largest

outpouring. I think for them, hearing a personal story connects to the work they do in a more profound way; it leaves them feeling that they are not just a cog in the machine. Then, as they're working with individuals and helping people, they may reflect that they're helping someone like my father in the story they heard me tell, or someone like their parents, or someone they know is going through a struggle. I think it gives them more of a human connection to the work they're doing.

studies in, in order to illustrate the outcomes we've seen for them. Even if it's not my story, it is still a personal story, and that can make a big difference. ●

Q *In the corporate environment, there's the company story, the client's story, and other kinds of stories. But here, we're talking about a work-related personal story that is based in a personal experience. What value and potential do you see going forward in the use of personal storytelling in the workplace?*

I thought a lot about that because I think I've probably used those other forms of storytelling on a daily basis in my work and presenting at conferences. This was really the first time I had leveraged a truly personal story to illustrate a core business objective, and I think that finding the opportunities to do that in an authentic way are really important.

Also new to me: now I think more about the listener. Putting those together, it's about using the personal story in a way that is most apt to connect with a specific audience.

Next, we're going to be highlighting some case studies from work I've done with clients, but I think that the ability to tell those case studies in a way that's not just the data, but in a narrative form, will be really interesting, so I'm going to try that there. I'm thinking about how to weave the case

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