



JAMES SCHRAMKO

Using Tiny Thunder for Irresistible Messaging

In a world where even storytelling has been overdone, copywriter Sue Rice proposes a communication concept that could upgrade how you sell.



Sue Rice

James: James Schramko here. Welcome back to my podcast. This is episode 985, and we're chatting with Sue Rice again. Welcome back, Sue.

Sue: Thank you so much for having me again. It's a pleasure.

James: Yeah, well, you know, I love having guests back when they did a good job the first time, I'm always gauging the response from my audience. I mean, I don't do things always just for my audience. I mean, you don't do this many podcasts without having a self-interest in it. I think one of the greatest assets for having a podcast is that I get this glorious education and opportunity to be able to interact with people at a high level and doing really cool stuff.

You know, like six weeks ago, I was sitting there in emergency ward of my local hospital in a lot of pain. It turned out I had broken some ribs. And it was from the day before, I was riding home from a surf and out of the corner of my eye, I saw this little flash, this little blink. And I thought, oh, maybe that's a bush turkey, because there's a lot of those around here. And they're pretty small.

But it was bigger than that. And I felt this thud and next thing you know, I was just on the ground on the asphalt. And momentarily, I feel like I blacked out a little bit. And then the next thing you know, I was sitting beside the road, and I was winded, I couldn't breathe. And then I just imagined a big eagle flapping its wings. And then I finally was able to release my breath.

And then I'd noticed the car behind me had stopped. And he was on the phone to the ambulance. And the ambulance came. And they checked me out, and I did a pretty good job of convincing them I'm okay to ride home. I had someone pick up my motorbike, it was just a scooter. And the ambulance followed me home.

And as I got home, I said bye. And they said, Bye, James. But the next morning, I knew I'd broken my ribs, I was in so much pain. So I went and got it checked, got some painkillers, took those for one week, and stopped taking them after a week because I didn't want to get hooked on oxys. And that whole week, I did all my podcasts, I did all my coaching calls, I didn't mention anything to anybody.

And it was about three weeks in, I was able to just start surfing but it was just too painful. And then I skipped a few days. And then by week four, back again. And then week five, finally, and now, six weeks in, I can sleep on my right hand side, and I can surf and swim, and I'm completely back to normal.

A really good book

And the meaning of this whole story is to say that now that I'm back in full health and feeling vibrant and fantastic, I have a lot of gratitude for just how lucky we are. If we're still functioning, and we're still breathing, we're lucky. And beyond that, as I pull up my microphone and my camera, I'm just lucky to be able to speak to you, Sue, and to talk about your book, Tiny Thunder. So I appreciate you sending this to me.

And I get sent a lot of books. But I picked up this book, and I thought, I have to speak with Sue about this. And I asked you if you'd do this podcast. And I could see it in my schedule coming up. So I started reading it. I couldn't put it down. I couldn't stop reading it. I'm like, Hang on, I've got to go and pick up something. I'll come back.

And then I came back. I'm even in my infrared sauna reading it, trying to turn the pages without sweating on it too much. And it's such a good book. It's unusual that a book will be that good for me to read straight away. I read this book in like, literally half a day today and last night. So it's a really good book. Thank you.

Sue: Thank you. That's so nice.

James: I wasn't sure what to expect from the title, Tiny Thunder. It didn't mean much to me at the time. I read the sub headline, Irresistible Messaging for an Overwhelmed World. And I thought, okay, because I knew you were good at emails. We've spoken many times before. We did some coaching for a while. [We did a podcast before about emails](#), not making boring emails.

And then I read the back of the cover. And it gave me, the only persuasion tool you'll ever need. That's very seductive. And then it talks about overwhelm, etc. And it positions you well as having been the female David Ogilvy. But the book is great. I actually took notes, which is also a good sign of a book. I ended up with about a handful of notes that were great.

And here's the really interesting thing. This is what happens when I read a good book like that - in my coaching rounds, which I do, I start recommending it to people. I actually took a screenshot of one thing. It was circle thinking versus square thinking. And I sent that to a friend of mine, who I think is very linear and very conversions-focused.

And I said, I read this and I thought of you. And he's like, I'm really intrigued. Where did you get that from? That's fascinating, that's very deep. And so I sent that to him.

And then another guy, who's at the moment trying to come up with his amazing campaigns for his online marketing. And I said, Please just get this book. It's going to tell you why, if you're doing the hero's journey, and you're so interested in making this brand story, that you might be doing it all wrong. He's like, Wow, I've got to get this, because that's what everyone's been telling everyone to do. Right?



Story after story after story

Sue: That's exactly right. I feel like, I mean, and I know as a copywriter that when people talk about storytelling, vis-a-vis marketing, everyone thinks they're talking about brand storytelling. And there's nothing wrong with brand storytelling, by the way. But as a copywriter, I realized early on that it has a really short runway, right? Because there's only so many times you can tell your brand's story.

You know, maybe Sarah Blakely is an exception to that rule. But most of us, our brand story is something that we can only repeat a number of times. What's great about Tiny Thunder, which is essentially taking any story and using it as an illustration of a value, or a benefit, or a pain point, or a challenge, the runway becomes infinite, because there are infinite stories out there. So the other day, just a few days ago, I read this story about Steve Jobs, and his wife took eight years to decide on which couch to buy.

James: Well, he didn't have furniture for a long time, did he? I imagine that would have been a very confronting thing.

Sue: [laughs] Yeah, I feel like that was like, a real challenge for him. And also because, you know, he was really into design and all that. But I could write an email and say, Are you having trouble making a decision? Or I could just tell that story. Which one would you remember? Would you remember me saying, Do you have a problem making decisions? Or would you remember the Steve Jobs story?

It's a perfect illustration of it. And there are millions of different examples like that. I remember, I was telling the story, I don't know if you read the story, there was this guy who was flying from the Bahamas to Miami. And he was the passenger, and he was in his flip flops, and his jeans. And he looked up, there were like six people on the plane. It was like a small little private plane. And he realized that the pilot was slumped over. Right? And not driving the plane.

So he'd like, he ran up, he pushed the pilot aside, got to the, whatever, the navigation board, and he called the air traffic controller and said, Well, the pilot's out, really sick, and I'm flying the plane, but I've never done that before. And anyway, the whole story is about how they brought him in safely.

It's actually a really funny story, because, you know, he ended up landing safely. But everyone was holding their breath at the air traffic controller because he went off the radar. And all of a sudden, after about a minute of everyone holding their breath, they heard, Okay, I'm on the ground now, what do you want me to do now?

And so, that would be a great story to illustrate what happens when you're trying to fly your business without navigation and how you need help. And you know, but it's a much more entertaining way of, instead of saying, I think you need a mentor, you tell that story. That's the kind of thing that, it's much more fun. It's much more entertaining.

And the thing that's most important, is it's much more memorable. And you get people's, all their radars down. It doesn't feel like a sell. It feels like we're talking like people. You're joining the conversation. You're not interrupting it.

James: It's crazy. I don't know if you can hear this on the podcast, either, but there is literally thunder outside right now. It was a massive thunderclap. I don't know if that's a sign, but we haven't experienced that for a while. It's been very, very hot. And there's a thunderstorm.

Sue: That's my guardian angel saying hi to you.

James: That's saying, You're right, Sue, you're right. What I noticed about the book, the reason I kept reading it is it was story after story after story, all the way through, using stories and illustrating what point you're making with a story. But then you also had a technical breakdown. I really liked the part where you talk about how you can tap into your own library, like where you can get the stories from, because that's where people run aground.

And you've got this very technical stuff about what the story can be about, like choosing your story. I like that - value, an obstacle, a pain point, a benefit, a dream. And then you talk about the treasure troves of different places you can get stories. I won't spoil it all. Of course, you have to get the book to understand where you get those from.

But here are some of the sound bites that I love the most. These are the things that I was nodding to. And I'm speaking to the person listening to this podcast, we need to eradicate these canned communications. Often as a coach, people are saying, I'm doing my funnel, I've got my webinar, and I've pre-written my first 50 emails, and I say, Can you put them in a document and share it with me?

And I read them and it's just rubbish. Just schlocky stuff that's basically, I'll be three emails in and asleep. It's like, come on, we've got to do better.

Sue: It's copy and paste.

James: We've got to stop doing this. We've got to eradicate this canned communications. What you're teaching with the Tiny Thunder is metaphoric storytelling.

An alternative to the hero's journey

The big things that really hit hard for me are that it does not have to be the full hero's journey. That might have a place, you said there might have a place for that. But what you talk about is these little tiny sound bites, I think you call them vignettes as well. But we might be able to use micro content in a far more engaging way, whether it's an email, whether it's a video, and it's almost certainly going to be video for me and a lot of my audience. These stories are very, very powerful, but they can be quick.

Sue: It's more of a scene. Like if you think about when you go to, like, this weekend, I had a bunch of friends over and when you talk, it's like stream of consciousness. And it's the little story snacks. Did you see that meme? Wasn't that funny? And no one sits down at the dinner table and says, Okay, here's my hero journey. This is what happens. And this is the victim. And this is the - no, that doesn't work. There's a villain...

James: I feel like, sometimes, if someone does that, I get the feeling that this is basically a premeditated, canned spiel, like when a bit of vomit starts forming in your mouth. Oh, here we go. Here's that park bench story. I know where this is going, right? You can tell this is completely contrived. And we switch off.

Sue: That's exactly right. And I also think that people underestimate what has happened to our communication ecosystem in the last 20, 30 years. And the amount of data and input that is flooding our way on an hourly, daily basis. And that if you were doing those 15 cut-and-paste emails that you were just talking about, you're not going to cut through it.

The irony about Tiny Thunder, because it's using stories that aren't actually about your product, to illustrate your product, you're actually going to get much farther with your product if you do that, versus talking about it in linear, this is the features I do, which is what all those copy and paste templates, that's how they're organized. It's very left brain. And whereas these little story snippets get people really fast.

It's the destination that counts

James: It's such a big idea.

Sue: They open your email. I mean, as you know, to me, email is a really great delivery system for this. But you can deliver it on social media, you can do it through videos.

James: You could do it in coaching or in any kind of sales platforms.

Sue: Presentations.

James: Like for example, I had a conversation today. I've got a client, he's a partner of mine. He's got an agency. But every time I talk to him, he's got this dream of a membership. He just wants a membership. And he's like, So I want to do a membership. What deliveries will I need to do, like how many calls will I need to offer?

I said stop, please stop. Like, you're approaching this the whole wrong way. Like your whole thing is, I want a recurring subscription business, it'll be a membership. What do I have to give people to make that - like no. Find out, what are the goals and aspirations of the people you want to serve? Like, let's say they're software companies. And you said this in the book, right? So I just literally took the idea from the book that you said, and I said this to him.

So I just read it. And then I'm just having this call, I said, they've obsessed with growth. That's what they want, right? They want growth, and they want a big payout. That's what they want. So you say, if you'd like growth, and if you'd like a big payout, then I have created the system that will get you there, right? We'll go on this mission together. If that's the goal, I've got the whole spaceship. We can do this, we can get you in there, we can take you through the program, we can get you certified. We'll look after all your nutrition and everything else. And we'll get you to that destination.

Rather than saying, Oh, we're going to serve meals with this content of protein and this content of carbohydrates, or that we will be doing structured lessons of no longer than 17 minutes, seven times a day, like, don't bore people with all this nitty gritty stuff, get them involved in that big emotional idea. And you know what I loved?

Sue: And the destination, right? I mean, of course, you know, I'm in France. So this is a little biased. But when you fly to Paris, you don't care what you're eating on the plane, you care about the scene at the cafe when you get there and wandering through the street, the destination. People are way too much involved in what seat they're going to be sitting in on the way to the destination. That's not what's important. It's getting to the destination that's important. And the hope and the dreams that that embodies, right?

James: Yeah, I don't think anyone's thinking about airline food. [laughs]

Sue: Yeah, exactly, no one cares what they eat on the plane.

James: My friend was telling a group of people the other day, he sent me a video of it, that he was on a plane watching a video on the plane about some team who got crashed in the mountain, and they ended up having to eat each other. And then when they ran out of eating each other, then they had to go for the airline food, right? It was last on the list.

Sue: [laughs] That was really funny.

James: It was so funny. So what I loved is you've put all the science in there and explained why we are so biased towards that emotion. One of the things in there was fascinating, was where students placed the meaning on things that we as humans want. We want to put that story in there. Even if it's not there, we're going to create a story around it.

Another level of relating

And it sort of made me think about, imagine the stories we tell about ourselves. And if we can tap into those stories that people are independently having about themselves and collectively move them along in a way that's good for them, that could be a very powerful tool.

Sue: And think about it too, because that sort of elevates marketing to a whole other plane, right? Because if you're telling stories that are important to you, like what you told at the beginning of this podcast, right? And then someone else independently can really relate to that story. You guys are relating at, you're not relating on James's products, you're relating at a much higher level.

And that's a much stronger bond. And it's much more profitable at the end, because you're hooked up here versus at this sort of lower level, which is where most people are playing. That's the playground that most people are playing in. And it's a pity because there's this whole area up here where there's a lot of room to play, and not a whole lot of people are taking advantage.

James: Well, it's a tremendous opportunity, isn't it?

Sue: Yeah, I think so.

James: There are three reasons I told that story, at the top of this episode. One is I wanted to use an example of the framework that you talk about, which is to tell a story, then explain the meaning and then provide a call to action. Two is, [in one of my previous episodes](#), I mentioned that I had some broken bones to one of my guests.

And I've been inundated via email, like what happened? Tell me what happened. Because I didn't go to socials about it. I didn't post the pictures of the destroyed surfboard to my business community or whatever, or the helmet and all the rest of it. I just kept it to myself, because I know a lot of people love the drama, right? They want the drama, they want all the attention. And now that I've recovered, I don't feel like I'll be doing it to attract attention. I'm already fine.

But the third reason, and this is probably critical, and it speaks to the library behind me, when I learn something new, I want to implement it straightaway. I want to get it into my repertoire. I've read your book today and last night, and I've already been using it on several calls using the examples and getting these ideas across. So it's a very usable text, which I think is terrific. And it's not too big. And it's not too short. It's just right. So absolutely delightful.

The scourge of the cut-and-paste template

Sue: Thank you, I really appreciate that. You know, I feel like the other thing about it is, you know, you go back to the example of people sending you these big tomes of sort of template-y type messages. That's sludge. It's sludge for the person reading it, but it's sludge for the person creating it too, James.

So what's great about Tiny Thunder is it's actually fun. It's fun, because you can start using all kinds of stories, private stories, things you read on social media, things you read on news, it's just everywhere, and then all of a sudden, trying to share what you're doing becomes much more fun. Not to mention, more persuasive.

James: I actually now reached a level of sort of awareness with the podcast that we get the exact same cut-and-paste template every single day, like dozens of them every day. It's the exact same template. So someone out there teaches this. This is one of my cautions.

If you're buying a course, or you're getting trained on how to do these things, if someone gives you a framework or a template, it's critical to step beyond that and to understand, what caused this template to work when it did work, has it been commoditized? And don't just turn your brain off and cut and paste, because you're going to get into trouble.

I got one classic the other day, there was a guy sending me a message, it's like, Hey, Lincoln, we're going to be able to do your videos completely differently to all the other companies who are saying that they can do it. We customize and individualize absolutely every element of our - I'm like, Dude, you didn't even put my correct name, like, I screenshot it. He goes, Oh, I'm terribly embarrassed.

And like, so that's it, that's like, he shot himself in the foot so badly. It's irrecoverable from that point. And just as an aside, we're not looking for Hormozi-style videos to be done by a contractor. We get that one every single day. So I feel like some stories could be overused.

What I like about the way you've approached this, Sue, is you've told us how this works, and why this works, and what it is. But you've basically given us a toolkit, and we get to build it now, rather than you just giving us a finished product saying, Just send this, it'll work.

Effective AND fun

Sue: Right. That's exactly right. Which, for some people, there's a level of discomfort to be honest with you, because they want to be able to just sort of copy and paste. But I feel like, it's like an exercise, right? Like, if you try Tiny Thunder a couple of times, you realize how much it's not hard, that it is a kind of a really simple formula, right? Story, lesson of the story, and then a call to action. But you can sound individual, and it can be fun for you. And it'll certainly be fun for your readers. The readers or viewers

James: It's only one step shorter than the framework I've used since 1991, when I discovered it. The SPIN Selling formula has pretty much carried me for 30 years as a very good framework for just selling or teaching. And yours is only three parts. So I love how simple it is. And I feel like it's very easy to use. I like how you address the fact that people are going to be challenged to think of stories.

There are a couple of stories in the book that I'd already heard before. And there were plenty of stories that I hadn't heard before. So I thought that that would be the risk. If you lean too heavily on the most famous people's stories, they're more likely to be commoditized. The more you lean into your personal stories, the less likely it is that anyone's actually ever heard of them before. So I think if you could tap that well, that would be endless, wouldn't it?

Sue: Yeah, I think the person will, I do make that point in the book, that's the richest place to start. But it's always good also to kind of bring in things that people are already talking about. I mean, depending on your comfort level.

James: Exactly, like news jacking.



Sue: Yeah, exactly. It's sort of news jacking, but it's a twist on news jacking, if you will. And it's kind of talking about what is top of mind to people. I keep coming back to this idea of most marketing and most communications interrupts, and what's nice about this method is it joins the conversation, just like the story you told at the beginning of the podcast, joins the conversation. And I feel like a lot of people feel like they have to yell louder, when actually, you don't need to do that to be more persuasive. It's not about volume. Right?

James: It's not, no, there's too much noise, like these cut and pasters, they're just contributing to the noise, the meaningless, endless noise, it's like these scraper sites that just publish rubbish, you know, trying to sell their ads. If you can cut a unique path, then you'll get the results. It's actually one reason why I watch Netflix shows and Amazon shows, etc.

How big players influence public thinking

I want to see what normal people are watching and basically, how they're being taught to think and feel about things, like the training that goes on. You made a point in your book, that someone else made a point, I think Steve Jobs made the point that at the time, at a certain time, Disney was basically in control of the whole entertainment thing, you know, for a long time.

And he said, Well, they get to dictate how people think and react. It's true, some of the big content creators are teaching people what to want and what their goal should be. I've broken this down in previous episodes. Like, a lot of people in my industry, they really want their magical \$10 million revenue. That's the number.

I think there's been inflation, just quietly. I think, probably because of Alex Hormozi, \$100 million seems to be the more popular number these days. Basically, unless you're making \$100 million, you're pretty much nothing. It's part of the narrative that starts to permeate through the fabric of it all.

And then we get other advocates like your Gary Vs, who over time, he sort of moved from hustle and grind more to love and acceptance and just being genuine and stuff. So I've seen people shift the narrative. But these power players, it's really good to understand that when you see them post content, and you get all people's reactions to them, they are driving a strong force.

I'm going to guess, at the moment of recording this, I've been seeing Elon Musk doing this on Twitter, because he recently bought it. And he has been running polls, and engaging an awful lot of people. So you know, he's got the eyeballs. He's got the attention, and he can tell the stories. And he's certainly got a unique story, the stuff that he comes up with, he's highly imaginative, and he does evoke a strong emotional reaction.

Sue: That's absolutely right. But you look at sort of big players that have really made a mark in the tech industry and beyond, They actually all use these kinds of methods. I mean, Steve Jobs was a tiny thunderite, right? He was nothing but metaphoric storytelling.

And it's why, I mean, a lot of people probably don't remember this, but at the beginning, Apple was the only company that had a personality. It was just one, big, great mass of brands, and Apple. And that's because of the way he positioned it.

James: And that's why it pretty much cornered the creative market in the beginning, didn't it?

Sue: That's right. And so people that were making films or videos, that whole creative crowd, you would never not use Apple, right? I mean, it's changed a lot since the beginnings. But you know, I mean, I was in the ad industry, you know, in the traditional ad industry at that time, and no one would have ever gotten an IBM, I mean, that would have been impossible. Everyone have Apples, even if they didn't know how to use them. They would tuck them under their arms. [laughs] It was a bad joke.

James: I know someone who's dealing with a government website in another country at the moment, and they're trying to get access to a Windows computer because you have to have a Windows computer to use the government website. I was like, It still blows my mind that this is possible, you know, at this time.

Sue: That is crazy.

James: That is crazy. That's very entrenched. I'm sure there'd be a story around that, someone in the government department needs to hear a story.



The counterintuitive thing about stories

Sue: Yeah. But I feel - one thing - a friend of mine, actually from Ogilvy, read the book. And he said, This is a narrative that probably buyers will love and sellers will feel less comfortable with. And I thought that was an interesting point, because I think people feel like if they're not talking about their product in a really literal and linear way, they're not going to get the sales. Whereas if you wrap it up in a metaphoric story, you actually, I mean, I've seen it with lots of my clients, you get a lot more sales.

James: I do too, actually. I remember hearing some sales cassettes, and it would have been in probably around 20 years ago, where they were warning against product dumping. The typical bad salesperson just focuses on specs and dumps all the product features, and they're not concerned at all about the customer.

The interesting thing that I found in my sales journey was by focusing on the customer, and solving their problems, which I would understand better, I could relate to them and tell stories that made them much more aware of how their problem was going to be solved, and they'd feel good about it.

So I found because I was married and had a kid, or had a kid coming when I first got a sales job, and then not that long, six months later, I did have a kid, from that point on, I was able to relate to just about anyone who walked in the door on something, whether it was school, sport, marriage, having kids or whatever.

And there's a lot of stories. Have you noticed how a mother's groups or parents' groups, I think they call them now, there's a lot of storytelling going on in those sort of groups. Or when you go to a barbecue or a dinner, you hear story after story after story all night long.

Sue: I mean, it's interesting what you say, because in the end, at one point in the book, I talk about this, but it's about finding the intersection. So when you were selling cars, for example, you were trying to find the intersection between you and the buyer, right? And that's what these metaphoric stories do, it's like a bridge between you and your consumer so that you're all nodding yes.

And then guess what? It's not that hard for them to nod yes to what I call the invitation, which is whatever the next step is, watching a video, buying something, whatever. But it's finding the intersections versus finding the best hammer to put the nail in, right? And I think there's a Seth Godin talks about, which I actually I really agree with him, there's a generosity to that. And I feel like, really, people underestimate the power of that.

James: Gosh, when you say that, it really brings back memories. I remember sitting there listening to people on the other side of the desk, and just listening and looking straight into their eyes. Like, I was absolutely being generous in hearing them out because I realized that my opinion didn't matter. It was only really down to the customer's opinion. And I had to be responsible to help them form a good opinion that would serve them well. And also meet the needs of me. You're right. A good bridge building. But yeah, definitely endured some nutcases, I can tell you.

Sue: I think we all have. [laughs]

James: There was one guy, there was this guy who was famous for - and I didn't know it at the time, the first time I met him, I didn't know this - but he used to dress up in a pretty fancy suit, like a full pinstripe suit. And he spoke kind of like a judge would, very formal. And he had a little handkerchief out of his top pocket, and he would come and he would order, like one of the most expensive cars, and he'd sign the contract.

And when it came to the deposit, he'd say, I'll send you in the check this afternoon. And then he'd disappear. And I found out, like he would never be able to be followed up. He would ghost you. I found out that he'd done this to all the dealerships. This was pretty much someone who was probably not quite right in the head. And this was just his thing. And he did a lot, so it was like, I remember, I'd listen to the whole thing. I'd go along with the whole bit, but sometimes it didn't pan out.

Sue: That's crazy that story.

James: Yeah, I still remember his name. I'm not saying his name out of respect for the fact that I've declared that he might be not mentally fit. And I'm almost certain he probably isn't alive anymore, because this was 20 years or so, and he was fairly senior then. But his first name was Terry. I'll leave it at that. But Terry was pretty famous for getting around the car yards and buying cars, just repeatedly buying cars, like going through the whole motions as if it's going to happen.

Sue: Wow, that's a crazy story.

James: You know, the best stories I have, and I wheel them out on occasion, are my debt collection stories, some fascinating things. But the thing that I resonated about this whole sort of you identifying some of the frameworks for it and telling us what's actually going on is I realized I've always used stories to sell. And I've always used stories to teach.

Metaphors versus analogies

And I love how you broke down metaphors. You broke them down into different subcategories. And I was always confused until I read your book about the difference between a metaphor or an analogy, but I wonder if you could just sort of cover that for a second.

Sue: Well, a metaphor, strictly speaking from a literary standpoint, is like a sentence, right? But an analogy, I mean, really, analogy is a little bit more, it's a bigger metaphor, if you will. It goes a little bit deeper, instead of like kind of splitting hairs on those definitions, to me, anything that compare, basically the idea of a metaphoric thinking is that you take an idea from one concept, and you borrow it and apply it to another one.

So for example, my dog is fat. I have a really fat St. Bernard, I call her a whale. That's a metaphor. In French, we call it a baleine. I say she's my baleine, and everyone will know that she's lovely and nice and fat. Right? That's a kind of a very small metaphor. But then an analogy goes a little bit deeper than that.

But there are other things like similes, which are like when you say, you know, she's sweet as honey, she's like honey, that's a simile because you used the word like. But they're all the same. They come from the same family. And the whole key of a metaphor thinking is comparing one unlike thing to another, but they both share an essence, if you will, right? So obviously, my St. Bernard is not a whale, but she shares the essence of a whale, right?

James: Yeah, so things that would apply to a whale could possibly apply to this dog. So a friend of mine, [Trevor Toecracker...](#)

Sue: Right. So like we talk about whales and crypto.

James: Yeah, we do.

Sue: We talk about whales, they're like, big. Sorry, I'm not a crypto expert.

James: Well, nobody is anymore. All my Facebook crypto experts have disappeared. It's fantastic. [laughs]

Sue: [laughs] Funny how that happened. But the whale is someone who's like a big investor, right? Like, you know? But that's a great metaphor. It's a great metaphor.

James: You mentioned all the finance ones. There's so many ones for finance, it's crazy.

Sue: There's so many for finance. But there's also like, so one of the examples I've put in the book that I love, it's one of my favorites, is that scene in Annie Hall, where Diane Keaton and Woody Allen are sitting in the plane. And they look at each other. This relationship just isn't working. And Woody Allen says, Yeah, you know, relationship is like a shark, and it needs to keep moving. And if it doesn't keep moving forward, it dies. I think what we have on our hands is a dead shark.

But I love that analogy, because it's not just about relationships. There are a lot of dead sharks out there in terms of businesses and in terms of, you know, how we look after ourselves. And you could apply that dead shark analogy to a million different concepts. And it's fun, and people will remember it, even if they never even saw Annie Hall.

James: Except for marine biologists who know that some sharks sleep.

Sue: [laughs] Let's not be too literal.

How bad is it to use clichés?

James: Yeah. So a friend of mine, Trevor, [he's often on this podcast](#), Toecracker. You probably know him. He's in copywriting circles.

Sue: Yeah. I've been, we've never spoken, but we're friends on Facebook.

James: All the time, he uses clichés. I love his material. And I've used his headlines, I've published some of them with his permission in my own community, because I use a lot of them for the podcast episodes. But the clichés, I still remember when I was at school, I used a cliché. I think it was, this put a spanner in the works. And my teacher shredded me for it. He said, Don't use clichés, they're lazy. And they're trite or overdone. A cliché sounds a lot like it could be a metaphor.

Sue: Oh, yeah. The thing that I try to avoid, because the whole point of what I'm trying to do with Tiny Thunder is surprise, right? There are a lot of metaphors out there that have been used five million times too, right? But if you've heard it over and over again, and it's almost like, a natural part of your language...

James: Then it's not surprising anymore.

Sue: Comparison has dulled, right? That's the problem with it. So that's why I would avoid that. I mean, yesterday, something happened to me, and I thought of it as a great metaphoric story. So there was a person that I was with years and years ago, who just passed, right. And when I was with him, he had this really young son.

And I remember this young son, swimming in a pool in Hawaii. He was like, two, and I was looking at the video, there was a video of the funeral. And I'm like, It was a 32-year-old man. And I'm like, Oh, my God. I thought, What a perfect story. And I don't know if you've ever had that experience. Like, how could that possibly be the same person that I knew then?



JAMESSCHRAMKO

“Sometimes you shouldn't
be relying **only on words**,
you can also be using
metaphor visuals.”

- SUE RICE

So I could talk about, Wow, change is bewildering. But telling a story like that, and maybe showing two pictures of the little boy I knew, and this man that's speaking at this, it's like, how could it be the same person? That's a much more powerful way to talk about change. Too many people rely, I mean, I'm a wordholic, but sometimes you shouldn't be relying only on words, you can also be using metaphor visuals as well, is what I'm trying to say. Right?

James: I like that. I think you've explained it. You can use personal stories that are actually true stories that are much less likely to have been heard by the reader. Like, I noticed, anytime I start reading a story, and I already have heard the story before, it does shut down some brain cells, it's like, Yeah, okay, I've heard this before, and it becomes predictable. And it takes one step backwards in my mind.

Sue: But sometimes there are stories that are sort of what I would call third party stories that you might not have heard the twist on them, right? So it needs to be fresh. I guess that's one, you know, it needs to compare, and it needs to feel fresh. There's nothing wrong with clichés, by the way, but you can also even with a cliché, you can give it a little fresh twist. Right?

James: Well, I think that's probably why things like Game of Thrones were pretty popular, because he would go against the traditional way of storytelling and like, kill off a main character or do something you would never expect that's so shocking. And it's unusual to get something that fresh from such a generic industry.

Sue: But I think we all feel that way. I mean, even when you go to Netflix or wherever you're watching your movies, I sometimes watch from Hulu, I don't know, I just feel like a lot of the stuff is just same old, same old.

James: Ah, you do.

Sue: It's just the same old stuff, and it's so exhausting.

James: It's disappointing.

Sue: Yes!

James: And so, it won't survive. I'll have to kill it, you know, I'll kill it off. But you wonder how far that formula can go. But then some people don't have any formula. That's really where I think we can make the biggest impact, particularly with this episode. If you're not currently putting metaphors or stories into your marketing, if you're just product dumping or doing the logic thing, you're missing out on a whole opportunity.

Sue: Yeah, I mean, not to get into all the neuroscience everything, but you're literally not talking to someone's whole brain. Because our brain needs both the right and the left to be - you can't ignore the logical stuff. I don't have a problem with that. But it needs to be dressed up in a bigger way and with stories that go beyond brand storytelling, because everyone knows that formula now, by the way.

Intersecting with the emotion

James: Well, I love the guy who discovered that. He was sharing that story about how he lost part of his brain and had no emotion for when he was shown disturbing pictures, but he could still make other normal logical decisions.

Sue: But he couldn't make decisions.

James: Yeah, yeah. So he couldn't make decisions.

Sue: He couldn't make decisions because he couldn't feel emotions. So if you think emotions, a lot of people think emotions or even storytelling is a bit sort of, you know, it's sort of like marketing light. And it isn't marketing light, because you really need them.

James: I think it's marketing rich. It's marketing rich.

Sue: Yeah, but a lot of people worry that if they're not feature enough in their - I mean, I had a client, very, very famous client. At the very beginning, when I first started my own agency. And they sold skis, right? And I came in and we were talking about fiberglass and centimeters, and this and that.

And I said, Listen, we need to get - you know, there's nothing more emotional than being on a mountain. There just isn't. So we did this huge research and went all over, from Japan to the Alps to Vail, we were everywhere talking to people about the experience of the mountain.

James: Sounds like a terrible assignment. You get some tough gigs.

Sue: It was fantastic. Yeah, I have some really tough gigs. But someone has to do it, James.

James: I was reading about your holiday in the Maldives and everything. I'm like, Seriously, Sue. What's going on?

Sue: [laughs] Yeah, just shut up. So anyway, it was fantastic. And in the end, I talked about, you know, this whole theme of, there's this idea of fusion. Well, you know this from surfing, it's the same thing. You know, it's like this ultimate concentration that gives you freedom. And it was just a really beautiful, standing ovation for the presentation.

I came back three weeks later, guess what? They were still talking about centimeters and fiberglass. But that's what I was trying to say earlier. I think there's a level of discomfort, of not talking about that. But all I'm saying is you can still talk about it, but just dress it up in a metaphoric story that gives people - you don't have to choose, it's not black or white. You don't have to choose one or the other. But when you don't use the power of stories, you're really missing out.

James: I mean, look what it's done for Christmas or Easter or whatever.

Sue: It's crazy. I mean, like the Americans just celebrated Thanksgiving. That's a story. And it's strong.

James: These big story events are, you know, I think, I can't recall. But someone I think, there was a story about some retailer sort of pushing Christmas a little bit harder back in the day to make sales, more of a feature. But there's a lot of story wrapped around that commercial event. Or, you know, you could say the commercial events wrapped around the story. Either way. They do go hand in hand. I think they seem to amp each other up a bit.

It consumes people for a whole, well, in Western society a month, in the Philippines it consumes them from the Ber months. So from September onwards is Christmas.

Sue: Really?

James: Yup, you go to a shopping center in September, in the Philippines, you're going to hear Christmas carols and see Christmas trees.

Sue: What's interesting about going back to this concept of intersection, because we were cleaning out some shelves in our house and there's a lot of Christmas decorations. But there's an intersection between those big shopping experiences outside the home, and what's happening inside the home, those little decorations that you have had for 15 years, you know, all the little memories. And that's what makes the story so strong.

It's not just that it's the brouhaha outside the home, but it's all the memories and storytelling that's happened inside. And it's the intersection that makes it so powerful, whether it's Christmas or Thanksgiving or whatever.

James: It's also kind of like a photo album, isn't it? You know, old school photos.

Sue: Yes, that's exactly what it is.

James: It's just paper, paper and some colored ink, but the way that they've formulated to make those highly visual things, it just unlocks memories and experiences and so forth.

Sue: But that's what metaphors do. They unlock photo albums.

James: Exactly. Same with a song on the radio, it's just radio frequencies but was structured in a certain way to evoke a very strong reaction.

Sue: Yeah, but that's like, I mean, lyrics in a song. There's nothing stronger than that. I mean, we all have a song where we were taken back to an old love or something horrible that happened to us or something amazing that happened to us.

And you know, why not bring all that in? Because that's powerful, bring it in. And there are a lot of songs that a lot of people feel the same way about too, again, creating the intersection that you can put in your marketing, why not?

Summing things up

James: Love it. So in summary, you can use this technique across all mediums, even though the message is the message, right? Putting that message in, whatever medium that you happen to be playing with, whether it's speaking from stage, running radio ads, sending emails, use your stories, put meaning to it, and then have a call to action. That's pretty much the formula, right?

Sue: That's pretty much it. Telling a story that illustrates a value that you or your product embodies. It's telling a story that describes a challenge or a pain point, one that maybe captures a dream that people have, that they can't get. So there's an infinite way that you can choose your story. Then you just tell the lesson. You say, you know, we can help you get to that dream, or we can help you overcome that challenge. And then you invite them into whatever the next step is. It might be a purchase, but it might not be. It might be watching a video or reading an article or getting on the phone with you. Right?

James: I love how you do that. You actually shared story, meaning, call to action, like over and over again, lots and lots of examples. That's what made the book strong for me. It covered off the concept, it gave specific clear examples, breaks it all down. That's the book there, *Tiny Thunder* by Sue Rice. And, Sue, I don't know where the best place to get it is. The best place I got it was from you, which is, well, that came from Amazon.

Sue: Well, people have two choices. They can go to [Amazon](#), it's on Amazon everywhere. But I also, if you go to suerice.com/tinythunder, you can also get, for much less cost, a digital download and the audio as well. So that would be great, too. And, you know, if you want to reach out and talk to me, I have people - it's touched a lot of people, and I would love to talk to people - and I'd love to hear how people use it.

I have someone who helps people get out the vote who's been using it on their Twitter. I mean, you know, so people are using it, you know, nonprofit organizations, consultants, everyone, lots of different people from lots of different walks of life. A lot of software companies.

James: Love it. We'll put the links up there on episode 985 at JamesSchramko.com, been chatting with [Sue Rice](#).

Sue: Thanks.

James: Longtime friend now.

Sue: Yeah.

James: I think I originally found you through [Andre Chaperon](#).

Sue: It was either Andre, I think we were in, I can't remember. But I think it was Andrei, actually.

James: I'd have to listen back to my old episodes.

Sue: Who I'm still good friends.

James: Yeah, well, obviously legendary storytelling email copywriter, he said Sue writes good emails. I think at the time, he said you were one of the only few people on the planet that he would be comfortable recommending. If someone's not - because I don't think he was providing a service. You've been providing a service for people, which is terrific.

Well, thank you so much, Sue. Thanks for writing the book.

Sue: Thank you.

James: Thanks for coming along to the show. And I hope you get some people letting you know how they - they'll probably tell you they heard about you on Schramko's podcast. That was the feedback we got so much, [I changed the name of the podcast back to my personal name](#). So there you go. That's the story behind that.

Sue: It's great. And thank you very much, James, for having me. I really appreciate it. It was fun talking.

James: Yeah, let's chat again soon, Sue.

Sue: Yeah, take care. Bye.

A blurred background image of a desk. In the foreground, a silver laptop is open, showing a dark screen with some colorful lines. To the right of the laptop, a pair of black headphones is visible. In the lower foreground, there is a dark blue or black coffee cup with a gold band. The background is out of focus, showing a white wall and some greenery.

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**Optimize your
marketing
strategy with
James's help**