Introduction
Everyone is a liar. We tell ourselves stories as shortcuts because we're too overwhelmed by data to discover all the
detail. The stories we tell ourselves are lies that make it far easier to live in a very complicated world. We tell stories
about products, services, friends, job seekers, the New York Yankees, sometimes even the weather.

We tell ourselves stories that can't possibly be true, but believing those stories allows us to function. We know we're
not telling ourselves the whole truth, but it works, so we embrace it.

We tell stories to our spouses, our friends, our bosses, our employees and our customers. Most of all, we tell stories
to ourselves.

Marketers are a special kind of liar. Marketers lie to consumers because consumers demand it. Marketers tell the
stories and consumers believe them. Some marketers do it well. Others are pretty bad at it. Sometimes the stories
help people get more done, enjoy life more and even live longer. Other times, when the story isn't authentic, it can
have significant side-effects and consumers pay the price.

The reason that all successful marketers tell stories is that consumers insist on it. Consumers are used to telling
stories to themselves and to each other, and it's just natural to buy stuff from someone who's telling us a story.
People can't handle the truth.

Georg Riedel Is a Liar
Georg Riedel is a 10th-generation glassblower, an artisan pursuing an age-old craft. His company makes wine
glasses, whiskey glasses, espresso glasses, even water glasses. He and his staff fervently believe there's a perfect
(and different) shape for every beverage.

"The delivery of a wine's 'message,' its bouquet and taste, depends on the form of the glass. It is the responsibility
of a glass to convey the wine's messages in the best manner to the human senses," the company's website says.

Most people who hear that claim are initially skeptical, but it doesn't last long. Robert Parker Jr., the king of wine
reviewers, said, "The finest glasses for both technical and hedonistic purposes are made by Riedel. The effect of
these glasses on fine wine is profound. I cannot emphasize enough what a difference they make."

Other wine experts agree and millions of wine drinkers have been persuaded that a bottle of wine tastes better
when served in the proper Riedel glass. But double-blind scientific tests that prevent the subject from knowing the
shape of the glass have found there's actually no detectable difference among different wine glasses. A $1 glass and
a $20 glass deliver precisely the same impact on the wine: none.
As Daniel Zwerdling explained in Gourmet magazine, the reason wine tastes better in a Riedel glass is because people believe it should.

Taste is subjective. If you think the pancakes at IHOP taste better, then they do - because you want them to. Similarly, Riedel sells millions of dollars' worth of glasses every year to intelligent, well-off wine lovers who then proceed to enjoy their wine more than they did before.

Marketing, apparently, makes wine taste better. Georg Riedel makes your wine taste better by telling you a story.

**Telling a Great Story**

People believe stories because they're compelling. We lie to ourselves about what we're about to buy. Consumers covet things they believe will save them time or make them prettier or richer. And they know their own hot buttons better than any marketer can. So they tell themselves a story, an involved tale that explains how this new purchase will surely answer their deepest needs.

Take Stephanie, a physical therapist who recently bought a pair of limited-edition Puma sneakers for $125, about what she earns, after tax, for a hard day's work. Was Stephanie thinking about support or sole material or the durability of the uppers? Of course not. She was imagining how she'd look when she put the shoes on. She was visualizing her dramatically improved life once other people saw how cool she was. The sneakers cost $3 to make in China, but what the marketers sold her was a story that made her feel special. Stories - not ideas, not features, not benefits - are what spread from person to person.

Truly great stories succeed because they capture the imagination of large or important audiences.

- **Great stories are true.** Not true because they're factual but because they're consistent and authentic. Consumers are too good at sniffing out inconsistencies for a marketer to get away with a story that's just slapped on.

- **Great stories make a promise.** They promise fun or money, safety or a shortcut. The promise is bold and audacious and more than very good - it's exceptional or it's not worth listening to.

- **Great stories are trusted.** No marketer succeeds in telling a story unless he or she has earned the credibility to tell that story.

- **Great stories are subtle.** Surprisingly, the less a marketer spells out, the more powerful the story becomes. Talented marketers understand that prospects are ultimately telling themselves a lie, so allowing them to draw their own conclusions is far more effective than just announcing the punch line.

- **Great stories happen fast.** They engage the consumer the moment the story clicks into place. First impressions are far more powerful than we realize. Great stories match the voice the consumer's worldview was seeking, and they match right up with his or her expectations. Either you're ready to listen to what a Prius delivers or you aren't.

- **Great stories don't appeal to logic, but they often appeal to our senses.** Pheromones aren't a myth. People decide if they like someone after just a sniff. And the design of an Alessi teapot talks to consumers in a way that a fact sheet about boiling water never could.

- **Great stories are aimed at everyone.** Runaway hits like the LiveStrong fundraising bracelets take off because they match the worldview of a tiny audience - and then that tiny audience spreads the word.

- **Great stories don't contradict themselves.** If your restaurant is in the right location but has the wrong menu, you lose. If your art gallery carries the right artists but your staff are rejects from a used-car lot, you lose.

- **Most of all, great stories agree with our worldview.** The best stories don't teach people anything new. Instead, they agree with what the audience already believes and make the members of the audience feel smart and secure when they're reminded how right they were in the first place.

There are five steps to making your stories come alive:

1. Remember your audience's worldview and frames got there before you did.
2. People only notice the new and then make a guess.
3. First impressions start the story.
4. Great marketers tell stories we believe.
5. Marketers with authenticity thrive.

**Target Worldview**

An individual’s worldview consists of the rules, values, beliefs and biases he or she brings to a situation. Frames are elements of a story painted to leverage the customer’s worldview - the way you hang a story on a consumer’s existing worldview.

Smart marketers don’t try to change someone’s worldview. You don’t have enough time or money to change people’s biases. Instead, identify a population with a certain worldview, frame your story in terms of that worldview, and you win.

In the 2004 U.S. election, for example, 290 million people had access to the same data and all looked at the two same candidates, with about half deciding on one candidate and the other half disagreeing. Worldviews are the reason two intelligent people can look at the same data - or story - and walk away with completely different conclusions.

Marketing succeeds when enough people with similar worldviews come together in a way that allows marketers to reach them cost-effectively. Your opportunity lies in finding a neglected worldview, framing your story in a way that the audience will focus on, and going from there.

**Noticing the New**

People only notice stuff that’s new and different. And the moment they notice something new, they start making guesses about what to expect next.

The result is that we get what we expect. We expect something to occur - glasses will help wine taste better, for example - and our brains make it so.

The best marketers are artists, not scientists. They realize that whatever is being sold is being purchased because it creates an emotional want, not because it fits a simple need. That means most marketers must learn to be less rational.

Recent research on brain function has focused on four ways we’re able to deal with the significant amount of information we process every day:

- **Look for a difference.** When we encounter something for the first time, we compare it to the status quo. If it’s not new, we ignore it.
- **Look for causation.** Once we decide to pay attention to something, our brains set to work to figure out how it happened. We make up a rule or a theory about how this thing came to occur.
- **Use our prediction machine.** Then we make a prediction of what will happen next in our world. If our prediction is right, the external surprises will cease and our brain can settle back and start ignoring things again.
- **Rely on cognitive dissonance.** Once we have some assumptions about causation and have made some predictions, we stick with them, ignoring contrary data for as long as possible and focusing on events we agree with.

**First Impressions**

You don’t get much time to tell a story. Humans are able to make extremely sophisticated judgments in a fraction of a second. And once they’ve drawn a conclusion, they resist changing it.

Here are the key points:

- Snap judgments are incredibly powerful.
- People do everything they can to support those initial judgments.
- Quick judgments happen whether you want your prospects to make them or not.
- One of the ways people support snap judgments is by telling other people.
- You never know which input is going to generate the first impression that matters.
- Authenticity counts in those first impressions, so authentic organizations are far more likely to discover that
Believable Stories
Why did John Kerry lose the presidency against an incumbent with near-record-low approval ratings after spending $100 million on his campaign? Simple. He didn't tell a coherent story, a lie worth remembering, a story worth sharing. He failed to tell a story we wanted to believe - not in a speech, but living a story, consistently telling us the story in everything he said and did. Like him or not, George W. Bush did an extraordinary job of living the story of a strong, certain, infallible leader.

Stories let us lie to ourselves. It's the story, not the product or service you actually sell, that pleases the consumer. And that story must be coherent and believable.

Marketers with Authenticity
The goal of every marketer is to create a product or experience so remarkable that, like a purple cow, people feel compelled to talk about it. Remarkable goods and services, not hype-filled advertising, help ideas spread.

The challenge lies in figuring out what's remarkable and then actually making the remarkable happen. The best way to do that is to craft a story that people enjoy telling to themselves. Before we're able to share a story with friends, colleagues or the Internet, we need to tell it to ourselves.

Politicians call these talking points. Retailers call them an experience. If you can build your entire organization around delivering a particular story, you've dramatically increased the chances that this story will actually get told.

Conclusion
What's your story?

That's what people want to know from you. You must have a consistent, authentic story that's framed in terms of the worldview of the person you're telling the story to. Your story must be robust and honest and transparent - and you have to be prepared to live it out loud.

Yes, all marketers are liars. But the successful ones are those who can honestly tell a story we want to believe and share.

- End -

About the Author: Seth Godin is a marketing consultant and the author of seven books, including Permission Marketing and Survival Is Not Enough.

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