



RON PLOOF'S  
**STORYHOW™**  
PITCHDECK

INSTRUCTIONS

Congratulations, Business Storyteller! By purchasing the *StoryHow™ PitchDeck*, you've taken the first step toward becoming a better communicator.

I've spent my life using the power of story to convey meaning. In 2005, I produced one of the first storytelling podcasts, *Griddlecakes Radio: Exploring the Lost Art of Audio Storytelling*. A few years ago, a sudden interest in business storytelling sent me a steady stream of colleagues who wanted to learn more about the craft. Many expressed their frustrations in finding storytelling resources that spoke their language. It didn't take me too long to see that they meant.

Some authors described business storytelling anecdotally, encouraging readers to "Just do what I did." Others approached the subject through an inward focus on one's personal journey. Some taught Joseph's Campbell's 17 Stages of the Hero's Journey while others used un-businesslike vocabularies such as *rising action*, *falling action*, and *dénouement*. And while none of these methods were wrong, they just didn't answer the question my colleagues were asking: "How exactly do I tell a business story?"

The deck of cards that you hold in your hands represents my answer to that question.

I hope that you'll use the *StoryHow™ PitchDeck* throughout your career to transform your ideas, messages, and presentations into stories that are interesting, memorable, and persuasive.

Are you ready to start telling business stories? Great! Then let's get to work.

## 1. What is a Story?

The *StoryHow™ PitchDeck* is built upon the following definition:

*A story is the **result** of **people** pursuing what they **want**.*

Any story, including your business story, is a collection of **events** that occur when **people (roles)**, pursue what they **want (influences)**. By focusing on these three elements, you have everything required to create a compelling business story.

The *StoryHow™ PitchDeck* deck consists of sixty cards evenly divided into four suits. You already know the first three--the three story elements:



**Role cards** determine the characters (customers, audiences, products, and services) that play parts in your stories.



**Event cards** represent the situations that occur during your stories.



**Influence cards** uncover the motivations behind people's actions.

The fourth suit, **techniques**, offers ways to organize the story's **roles**, **events**, and **influences**.



**Technique cards** add structure, meaning, and, ultimately, memorability to your stories.

Take a closer look at each card. Note how each one is divided into three sections: a definition, examples, and a call-to-action. For example, pull out the **Big Idea Card (#48)** and read it. Note that the top of the card defines what a "Big Idea" is, the middle contains some examples, and finally the bottom prompts you through an exercise.

TECHNIQUE  
48 BIG IDEA



The **big idea** is the overarching concept that your story is built to support. It will be pushed, pulled, diced, sliced, and tested throughout the duration of the story.

To find your big idea, ask:

- What's my core message?
- Why should the audience care?
- What are the counterarguments to my message?

Big ideas frequently take the form of simple, three-word sentences that describe something that increases or decreases.

- Delays increase risk
- Conservation decreases waste
- Triage saves lives
- Speed kills teenagers

Craft a simple, three-word sentence to describe the big idea your story must convey.

*The StoryHow™ PitchDeck* is designed to take an idea, message, or a presentation through the process of becoming a story. Without something to say, however, you have nothing to transform. Therefore, before its use, you must have something of value to communicate.

What message must you deliver? Are you presenting a product? Teaching a new concept? Delivering bad news? Requesting budget?

Remember: No idea—no story. The best way to use the *StoryHow™ PitchDeck* is to start by defining that big idea.

### Exercise 1: Find Your Big Idea

Use the **Big Idea (#48)** card to determine the message that you'd like to convey. Once you've completed the task, move onto the next section.

## 2. Digging In

Now that you have that big idea to share, you're ready to dive deeper into the deck.

### Exercise 2: The Starter Hand

It's common to feel a little overwhelmed by the *StoryHow™ PitchDeck's* sixty cards. You may be wondering, "Where do I start?" Well, fret not because we'll be using the *Starter Hand* to establish the foundation for all of your stories.

The *Starter Hand* consists of eight cards: 1, 2, 16, 17, 31, 32, 46 & 47. These cards are easily identified by their white card-backs.

- **Audience (#1):** Every story has an intended audience.
- **Protagonist (#2):** Good stories have obstacles that keep people from achieving what they want.
- **Initial Impulse (#16):** Every story has an event that kicks it off.
- **Ending (#17):** Every story has an ending.
- **Jeopardy (#31):** Every decision a person makes comes with risk and consequence.
- **Emotional Choice (#32):** People buy on emotion and justify with logic.
- **Purpose (#46):** Every business story has both a reason for telling and a call-to-action.
- **Meaning (#47):** Every business story has a moral that the audience takes with them.

Go through the *Starter Hand* and complete the instructions on all eight cards. Once you've completed this exercise, you'll have taken your idea, message, or presentation to a level that few business communicators will ever achieve.

## 3. Adding Depth to Your Story

The *Starter Hand* establishes the foundation for your business story. The rest of the *StoryHow™ PitchDeck* helps you add depth and breadth to it.

### Exercise 3: Random Card Method

Rather than going through the cards sequentially, consider using them as a brainstorming tool. Shuffle the remaining fifty-two cards and select one randomly. Read it over. Does it contain something that you can apply to your story?

Don't give up. If you're stuck, you might be thinking too literally. Re-read the card. If you see only two options and neither apply, look for a third alternative. Persistence will likely uncover an idea that makes your story stronger.

## Exercise 4: Create a Booster Hand

Separate the remaining fifty-two cards into four shuffled stacks: roles, events, influences, and techniques. Select the top card from each pile to create a four-card *Booster Hand*.

### *Booster Hand Variation #1: Basic Storyteller*

Try to apply each card to your story. Be creative. A compelling answer may be right around the corner. However, if you are stumped by one particular card and are feeling frustrated, replace it with another of the same suit.

### *Booster Hand Variation #2: Master Storyteller*

The most innovative ideas come from working within limitations. Therefore, rather than giving up on a card that stumps you, force yourself to work within the confines of it. This exercise may take some extra time, but the results will be worth it.

## Exercise 5: Get Unstuck

Sometimes storytellers get stuck. They don't know where to take their story. If this happens to you, flip through the deck until you come to a card that gives you an idea. Perhaps you'll find a way to add a fact, change a circumstance, or provide more clarity. Either way, you'll become unstuck.

## 4. Group (Team) Exercises

The *StoryHow™ PitchDeck* is a great tool for facilitating group collaborations.

### Exercise 6: Starter Hand (2-4 people)

Select the eight *Starter Hand* cards (1, 2, 16, 17, 31, 32, 46, 47). Deal them out as evenly as possible to your team.

*Note: For two people: create two four-card hands. For four people, create four two-card hands. For three people, you'll have two three-card hands and a single two-card hand.*

Have each member work individually. Then, reconvene the team to discuss their ideas as a group.

### Exercise 7: Starter Hand Moderator (> four people)

Assign a moderator to guide more than four people through the *Starter Hand*. The moderator discusses each of the eight cards, but rather than driving the group to a story consensus, the moderator documents the ideas without judgment.

After completing the exercises on all eight cards, the moderator then divides the team into subgroups. Each subgroup is assigned one of the brainstormed story concepts to develop further using the complete *Starter Hand*.

If there's time, have each group add more breadth and depth to their stories using the *Random Card* or the *Booster Hand* methods. At the end of this session, have each subgroup present their stories to the entire team.

## Exercise 8: The Agency Application

The *StoryHow™ PitchDeck* can help agencies draw stories from their clients.

### *Agency Variation #1: Meeting Prep*

Use your *StoryHow™ PitchDeck* to prepare for your next client meeting.

### *Agency Variation #2: Modified Moderator*

Use the *Starter Hand Moderator* exercise to work with an individual client or a group. The goal of this exercise can be either: a) to develop the story on the fly, or b) to gather enough information for you to piece it together at a later time.

## 5. Finishing Your Story

After completing the exercises and developing your stories, you may be asking yourself, “How do I know if I’m finished?”

We recommend that you add some final touches to your story by looking at it from three perspectives: energy, rewrite, and ruthless editing.

### Exercise 9: Test for Energy Sags

Take a look at your story from a speed and energy perspective. Ask yourself questions such as:

- Have I spent too much time explaining tedious points that don’t advance the story?
- Does it take too long to get to a point?

Identify the low energy parts of your story. Then, either elevate them or eliminate them.

### Exercise 10: Rewrite the Story

Master storytellers have empathy for their audiences. Rewriting is how they demonstrate ultimate respect for their audiences.

- If your presentation time got cut in half, what parts could you eliminate safely?
- If you cut your favorite scene, would it change the story’s meaning?
- Can you make your story better by reordering it?

Once you think that you’ve finished your story, rewrite it. Your audience will appreciate your efforts.

## Exercise 11: Edit Ruthlessly

Ruthless editing separates master storytellers from beginners. Use these three simple rules to guide your story editing:

1. Less is better than more.
2. Sooner is better than later.
3. If it doesn't advance the story, it must be eliminated ruthlessly.

Study every story element. If you find something that's too detailed, too slow, or doesn't advance the story, it must be killed immediately and without remorse.

## Final Thoughts

That's it! The rest is up to you. I hope that the *StoryHow™ PitchDeck* will serve you throughout your entire career. And I can't wait to see what you do with it!

### StoryHow™ Workshops:

Would you like The StoryHow Institute to help your team create their own stories? We can. Just visit [storyhow.com/workshops](http://storyhow.com/workshops).

### StoryHow™ Consulting:

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### Snail Mail:

We love to hear from business storytellers. Please reach out to us:

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