

SPN NEWS

STATE POLICY NETWORK

Strategies for State Think Tanks – November / December 2011

RONALD REAGAN, WHERE ARE YOU? Who Will Tell the Free-Market Story

BY KEVAN KJAR

MY HIGH SCHOOL buddies and I decided to skip school and celebrate my birthday a day early. Our choice for the celebration was breakfast at my home. Our excuse: We wanted to see the inaugural speech of the newly elected president, Ronald Reagan. The day was Tuesday, January 20, 1981.

We were high school seniors with our lives in front of us. The country had been mired down with economic doom and gloom. America felt helpless with 52 of our fellow Americans being held hostage for 444 days by radicals in Iran.

In his inaugural address Reagan said, “We have every right to dream heroic dreams. Those who say that we are in a time when there are no heroes just don’t know where to look. You can see heroes every day going in and out of factory gates. Others, a handful in number, produce enough food to feed all of us, and then the world beyond. ... There are entrepreneurs with faith in themselves and faith in an idea who create new jobs, new wealth and opportunity. ... Your dreams, your hopes, your goals are going to be the dreams, the hopes, and the goals of this administration, so help me God.”

At the conclusion of Reagan’s speech, there was breaking news that the radicals in Iran



President Ronald Reagan delivers his inaugural speech in 1981.

had released the 52 American hostages. It was easy for this 18 year-old kid to connect the dots after seeing the passion in Reagan’s speech. He was someone to be taken seriously. America was going to be great again. Reagan touched our hearts and minds that cold January morning, and gave us a reason to hope for a better America.

Now, almost 31 years later, we are again mired down with economic doom and gloom. The value of the American brand is shrinking around the world. The voices for ever-bigger government are loud and personal, and amplified by the mainstream media. The grow-government faction is

pressing its advantage. Free-market and liberty-loving people struggle to be heard in this story war. Why are we struggling? Because, as Reagan said in 1977 at C-PAC, much of our language is “based on abstract theorizing of the kind that turns off the American people.”

I know there are others out there besides me asking, “Ronald Reagan, where are you when we need you the most?” Would it surprise you if I said, I found him? I have. Before telling you where, let me explain why you need to find Ronald Reagan too.

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Reagan had the unique ability to look at our nation from the eyes of a citizen. He could focus on the key issue. He could tell a simple story of how a policy would impact the American citizen, be it good or bad. Reagan was the master at putting a personal face to public policy. Reagan could focus, personalize and deliver a story with passion.

For example, in a 1978 radio broadcast, then citizen-Reagan delivered a commentary he wrote about Jim Hendricks, the world's only paraplegic cowboy, and his horse Calvin. The government had unreasonably cut off his social security disability payments. Reagan spoke of Hendricks's spartan life on the road to inspire people with disabilities. He never took a hotel, and always slept in the stable with his horse. Reagan pondered aloud, "I wonder how many discouraged and depressed people with handicaps have been encouraged to find a purpose in life after seeing Jim Hendricks as Hopalong, the world's only paraplegic cowboy and his horse Calvin."

So, where did I find Reagan? I found him in many of the happy warriors of state think tanks.

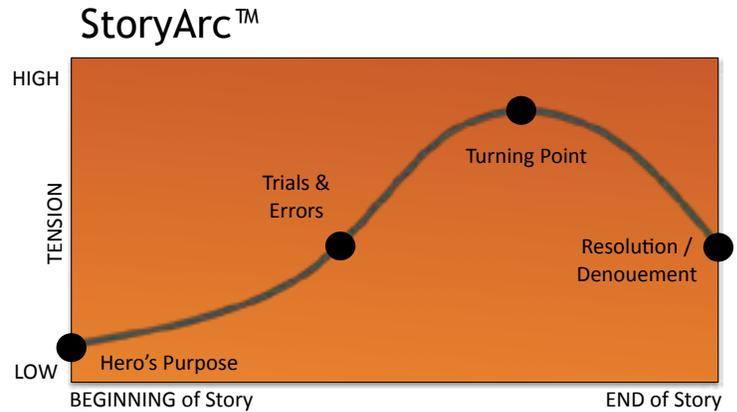
I found Reagan in Michael Jahr and his team, at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy in Michigan. Michael tells the story of Sherry Loar, a home-based daycare provider in The Great Lake State, who one day received a letter that told her she was now a member of a public-employees union and was required to pay union dues. Loar questioned, "If [the government] can do that to me in my home...where does it end?" Their story-telling effort

garnered statewide and national attention, which prompted the state government to put an end to this illegal practice.

I found Reagan in Emily Dietrich, with the Illinois Policy Institute. Emily tells the story of Jonathan Wallace and Mike Martin, two entrepreneurs in Illinois who lost a large source of income when Governor Pat Quinn signed the "Affiliate Nexus law," also known as the Amazon Tax. This shortsighted law drove online vendors like Amazon to terminate advertising agreements with businesses like Jonathan and Mike's. Jonathan said, "This law is a flashing neon sign to young start-ups and entrepreneurs that 'you're not welcome in Illinois.'" Emily produced an online video telling their stories, and invited viewers to "Suspend The Affiliate Nexus Law."

I found Reagan in Scott Roberts, of the Freedom Foundation in Washington state. Scott told the story of the Jim and Doris Cassan family, owners of the Park 'N Fly that has served the Seattle and Tacoma area for more than 42 years. The city of SeaTac disregarded the Cassan family's private property rights when it unfairly condemned their business property by citing eminent domain. Scott helped tell the Cassan's story – and the city of SeaTac unanimously repealed the condemnation.

Early in 2011, SPN's Tracie Sharp and Lynn Harsh asked me to prepare a keynote speech for SPN's 19th Annual Meeting in Seattle, with the topic "winning the story war." After months of research about effective political persuasion, together with what



I've taught my Fortune 500 clients over the years, we came up with three principles you need to win your story war:

1. Focus your message.
2. Personalize your policy.
3. Deliver with passion.

Focus your message on two or three key points; describe what your policy *means* to your audience, which is generally the American citizen – not what your policy *is* or *does*. Personalize your policy by telling a story about how it will help the American citizen. (Refer to StoryArc chart.) Finally, deliver your message with passion. Do not give a boring presentation; make your message stick with your audience by using an attention-getting spike or two.

These principles are explored in *The ArrowHead: Winning the Story War*, which I co-wrote with Kelly Shaw. The book was given to all attendees at the SPN Annual Meeting. I shared these principles in my keynote presentation, and suggested the best method of delivery was a simple story.

I believe Reagan told winning stories intuitively, just as many great communicators do. The

rest of us can learn by applying the simple principles stated above and inspiring others to do the same.

To awaken your inner-Reagan and tell the life-changing story of liberty and the free market, I recommend listening to Reagan In His Own Voice, edited by Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson and Martin Anderson. This audio book features many of his radio addresses from the late 1970s during his interregnum of governor and president.

You are in a story-war: Focus, personalize and deliver your story with passion. If you do, like the Gipper, you will win the hearts and minds of the American people. [SPN](#)



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