



# Got Story Brand? An Interview with Donald Miller

October 16, 2019

Donald Miller: I can't tell you how many websites we've seen—we just changed the headers so it's not vague, and we've seen up to a thousand percent increase in business. And the reason is, it's almost like if you're fishing—and you and I like to fish, we like to fly fish—and let's say you and I go out on the Bighorn, Pat, and I pull out my fly rod and I've got a Fisher-Price hook made to not hurt children, a giant piece of plastic on the end of my fly rod and I start fishing. You think I'm going to have a good day?

Pat Flynn: I mean, you're going to have me laugh at you quite a bit. But—

Donald: I think that's the kind of hooks that we're putting on our website. These vague and confusing messages are the equivalent of fishing without a hook. There's no hook, there's nothing that's making me interested. And so, that's one thing. The other mistake we can make is we can use too many hooks. So, if I take you to a movie and Jason Bourne . . .

Pat: You're listening to Donald Miller, author of [Building a StoryBrand](#) ([Amazon link](#)). StoryBrand is a movement that's happening right now in the entrepreneurship space where companies are finally starting to realize—and not just big companies, single-person companies like ours—we're starting to realize that we need some help with the story that we're telling our audience and the hooks that we're creating to pull them in. And the ability to have a person on the other side of the world, on the other side of a computer, on the other side of a podcast, on the other side of a YouTube video, on the other side of a blog, realize that we have the solution for them. *[Full Disclaimer: As an affiliate, I receive compensation if your purchase through this link.]*

And today, I'm so excited to welcome Donald Miller on the show as our featured guest. I've been trying to get him on the show for quite a while. He's been in such high demand. He's a busy person helping companies, big and small, with understanding the message they need to be telling around this framework that Don is going to tell us today in this episode. This is going to be one of those episodes that

I'm going to have be required listening to everybody who comes in new to the brand, and you're listening to it today. This is awesome. Stick around. Here we go.

Announcer: *Welcome to the Smart Passive Income Podcast where it's all about working hard now so you can sit back and reap the benefits later. And now your host, he prefers flip flop silver snow boots, Pat Flynn.*

Pat: What's up everybody? Pat Flynn here and welcome to Session 393 of the Smart Passive Income Podcast. Thank you for joining me today and our special guest, Donald Miller, who I'm going to hit play on this guy in just a little bit because, ah, I'm just so stoked for what you're about to learn. Because I imagine, six months from now, even four, three months from now, somebody or several people who listened to this episode are just going to tweak a few things and they're going to have massive changes in their business and, of course, their lives and the lives of those that they're helping too. And it's just the framework and the understanding of it and of course the implementation. But it's so funny because when you hear me and Don talk about this, it's like, "Well, why didn't we know this stuff from the beginning?"

And a large part of it is because we just didn't know. Another part is, you've heard me say this before perhaps, it's just hard to read the label when you're inside the bottle. So Don's here to help us read our labels and help us to understand how to portray our brand, our story, to others. And more than that, how to make your audience the character, the hero of the story, because hey, we're just guides and I'm your guide today and our guide with us to help co-guide us into this is Donald Miller from Building a StoryBrand and [storybrand.com](http://storybrand.com). Here he is.

Don Miller, welcome to the Smart Passive Income Podcast. Thank you so much for being here today and spending time with us.

Donald: My pleasure. I'm a big fan. It's an honor to be on.

- Pat: Well, I'm a big fan of yours. And I've just launched a book called Superfans and I was paying attention to the rankings and there was one moment where my book overtook yours for number one spot, and it was like thirty seconds, literally, and then yours shot back up after and it's—
- Donald: You'll be up there soon, I guarantee you. Mine's been out for a little while. So, yeah, thanks. That's awesome. I'm glad to hear you've released a book. I'm going to go grab it.
- Pat: Oh, well, thank you so much, but your book is amazing. *Building a StoryBrand*, and like you said, it was published a while back. I see the date is October, 2017, yet now, two years later, it is still number one. I would love to hear from you, the author, why do you think this book is resonating with so many people?
- Donald: I think a lot of people are beginning to understand how important messaging is, and a lot of it is because we see it in our political climate, we don't necessarily see the best candidates winning elections. We see the ones who have a disciplined, controlled narrative message and so a lot of people are realizing, “Man, I've got a great product, I've got great customer service, I've got a great staff. What's missing?” And what's missing is probably the way you are talking about your product or service. It's probably not resonating with your audience and it's costing you thousands, certainly, and for some hundreds of thousands and some even millions of dollars.
- And so, to sit down and spend a day to figure out, “What language am I going to use to talk about my product and service,” is absolutely foundational. And then once you do that, so many things become much more easy. Your marketing becomes a lot more easy, your elevator pitch becomes more easy. If you give keynotes or speeches, it just becomes very easy. Essentially, you come up with a messaging framework with seven different categories of messages. If you memorize those seven messages and just repeat them over and over, word for word, it's almost like using a magic spell. People finally understand why they need your product and they begin to buy it.

Pat: I'd love to know the origin story of the framework. Where did this come from?

Donald: I wish I could claim that it's mine. The derivative is certainly mine, but it actually comes from Aristotle from twenty-five hundred years ago. It is a story-based framework. Aristotle sat down and wrote a book called Poetics ([Amazon link](#)) and he explained a story formula that he believed would cause people to pay attention. You know, the human brain really daydreams about thirty percent of the time and if you start into a story, the human brain stops daydreaming and pays attention. And so, those stories have been turned into formulas. Most scholars would agree that there are really only seven of those formulas, Pat, and if you go to a movie, you're probably watching one of seven "story formulas" unfold. They have proven to captivate somebody's attention. And so what I did was, really, I took the formulas and said, "Okay, how could we use this as a filter for our marketing? If we were running a campaign to promote a certain product, how could we more or less invite people into a story in which they would understand what it is that we're offering and how it can solve their problem?"

And so I spent a couple of years thinking about that, developed the framework, took my own business through it, and we saw more than a hundred percent growth. Took about fifteen or twenty other businesses through it as a beta test, and all of them saw a hundred percent growth without spending any more money on marketing. So now we've taken probably about fifteen thousand businesses through it and it's worked. It's been extremely effective.

Pat: And it's literally a program that you have now set up based on this framework that you can take people in, and so people can work with you and your team to help you. And I caught something earlier in the beginning of the podcast. You said you can just take a day to do this.

Donald: Yeah. Take about a day.

Pat: Is it really that easy?

Donald: Well, I mean, it's hard work. It's mentally challenging work. And what's interesting is, the mentally challenging part is you're actually taking something, your message, and you're simplifying it. So you're coming up with very simple statements that everybody can understand. The hard thing is, most people, when they come up with a message for their marketing or message, they go the opposite direction. They actually get more confusing, more cute, more clever. They come up with taglines that don't make sense. They use inside language. I just reviewed somebody's website the other day and I said, "You know, this is supposed to be marketing copy, but it looks like you had a lawyer write it." Right? That's not going to sell anything.

So, I don't want to say that it's easy. I will say that it does not take a lot of time. We do workshops here in Nashville where we have a bunch of coaches in the room who sit down and kind of do it with you over the course of about two full days. But by the end of that two full days, you have a very clear marketing message and you've put those marketing messages into a sales funnel that will get you results. So, I wouldn't use the word easy, but I will say unbelievably effective.

You know, the human brain has to burn calories to process information and there's a calorie limit. The brain burns between six and eight hundred calories a day just processing from just driving around, sitting in traffic, paying bills, they burned seventy calories. In order to survive, the brain is always looking for something that will help it survive, but it will only give you about twenty calories to process your information before it'll say, "I don't think you have anything that will help me survive."

So if you have confusing messaging, it's going to give you those twenty calories. It's going to say, "You know, this is too confusing. I cannot afford to give you any more calories to figure out whether you can help me survive," and it's going to bounce onto your competitor. And so, if you don't have something very, very simple that you can say very quickly that promises, "I have something that's going to help



you survive and thrive.” If you can do that, it will say, “Okay, I gave you twenty calories, I'm going to give you two hundred more and I'm going to stick with you,” and now you have the opportunity to give your sales pitch. If you don't nail that first part where you invite somebody into a story, they're going to bounce and they're going to buy from your competitor and you're going to lose money.

Pat: I mean, it seems like common sense that we would create messages that would help people understand what is going on and what we're trying to offer, but why are we so bad at this? How come this isn't natural for us?

Donald: I think it's called the curse of knowledge. We are so close to our products and services that we project our understanding and our feelings of importance about why those products matter onto our customer. Meanwhile, they are not that close to it. So you're actually asking them to burn a ton of calories to understand. For instance, you can see how . . . I was watching the NFL last year, I'm a football fan, I'm a Seattle Seahawks fan, and in the end zone of one of the football fields was painted the words “Crucial Catch.” And, you know, there it is, “Crucial Catch,” painted in the end zone. It's an advertisement. There are some tri-colored bars on either side of the motto or tagline “Crucial Catch” that looked like the old Polaroid logos from back in the day.

And I literally thought to myself, “Wow, Polaroid has come out with a line of digital cameras and they are advertising that you can catch the shot,” you know, the picture. And I said to my wife, I said, “You know, this is another example of really cute and clever language that they could have just painted, ‘We have a line of digital cameras’ in the end zone and sold fifty times more digital cameras.” Come to find out, Pat, this is amazing, three weeks later, I'm watching another game and I'm seeing “Crucial Catch” in end zones all over the NFL. Three weeks later, there's a halftime presentation that takes place. The TV happens to show it for a second. One person has a shirt that says “Crucial Catch.” The other person has a shirt standing next to that

person that says “Intercept Cancer.” The whole time this was a cancer awareness program.

Now, you say, how does it get that bad when you're spending a million dollars per end zone? Well, they go to some big advertising agency. The agency says, “Well, we've got to associate with football. You know, you catch a football. Oh, you can catch cancer early if you screen for it. Oh, you know, if it's in the end zone, it's a crucial catch. Oh, my gosh, cancer is also a . . . Could it be more crucial to catch cancer early? Let's come up with the phrase ‘Crucial Catch,’ paint it in the end zone.” Meanwhile, they didn't realize nobody else was involved in that conversation.

So you have the result of a large amount of thinking without it guiding anybody through the process of that thinking. Now listen, let's change that campaign. Let's paint the end zone pink and then let's say, “Promise to get screened for cancer.” That's it. Just, “Promise to get screened for cancer.” You put representatives at the exits of every ballpark in the country with a little pink card and they say, “Look, I'll only hand you this pink card if you promise to get screened for breast cancer. This is a breast cancer awareness campaign.” We know that people are eighty-five percent more likely to follow through with something if they promise, and even more likely if they accept something for that promise. So ninety percent of people would've gotten screened for breast cancer if you would have just been clear. But instead you were cute and clever, paid millions of dollars, and got nowhere.

Pat: They should have read *StoryBrand*.

Donald: They should have read *StoryBrand*. Yeah, they should've read *StoryBrand*. The idea is, nobody wants to be confused. Nobody will move into a fog. You have to say it super, super clearly. You know the best billboard campaign in the country? I read billboards all the time as I'm driving down the freeway. I may be the only one who's reading them, and they're so confusing. The lettering is so small. Sometimes they use cursive. You'd literally have to break down, pull over and



change a tire and get bored and take a break and sit on the hood of your car to read that billboard to ever actually process the information. So that means these billboards are a waste of money. The best billboards in the country are painted neon green and they say, “Gun Show.”

Pat: Yep.

Donald: Because I know it's a gun show and it's taking place at the Expo Center this week. That's effective advertising. You say, “But, Don, I don't want my brand to be cheapened like that. . .” Well, there are ways to do it without cheapening your brand. But the idea here is, you've got to communicate something that people can understand within a millisecond or they will pass, and every person who passes, the more complicated you are with that message, the higher percentage of people who are passing it up, and the higher percentage of revenue that you are not making because you confused them.

Pat: And this isn't just about . . . Even if you're selling a product, it's if you have a website, if you have a blog or a brand of any kind, a YouTube channel, you need to hone in on that message. So my question to you, Don, is, how do we know what to say and share? We're not maybe as clear as putting on a gun show, but we have something that we want to offer to others. Of all the words that we could say, how do we know which words to say?

Donald: Well, I'll give you the framework in a nutshell, and really, just grab the book and read it or listen to it on the audio book because it'll help a great deal. But the idea is this. There's seven parts to a story. Each of those parts can teach us an enormous amount about how to do business. The first thing that happens in the story is you have a character and that character has to want something. It has to be clearly, clearly, clearly defined. Jason Bourne wants to know who he is. Bridget Jones wants to be in a relationship with her boss. Erin Brockovich wants to beat the energy company that is poisoning the river in the small town. Rudy wants to play at least a down at Notre

Dame. Luke Skywalker wants to destroy the Death Star. Tommy Boy wants to save his father's company. King George wants to give a speech without stuttering.

You have to know exactly what the character wants or there is no story because when we know exactly what the character wants, we are able to open a story loop in their brain which asks the question, “Is the character going to get what they want?” There are two mistakes that people make, screenwriters make, amateurs make, and they're the same mistakes amateur marketers make. One is, they are too vague about defining what the character wants. Pat, if I said, “Hey, do you want to skip today's interview? Let's go down to the theater. There's a movie about a guy who's looking for fulfillment.” Yeah. It's not hooking you, is it?

Pat: No.

Donald: But if I say, “Pat, let's just cancel this interview right now. Here's why. One of Liam Neeson's other daughters has been kidnapped and he has to rescue her.” You understand exactly what I'm talking about. You know the kind of movie it is. People will move into familiar territory more than they will move into confusion. So, rule number one: do not be vague at defining what your customer wants.

Pat: Do you think that's a part of people trying to capture more of an audience and going more general, which is a mistake?

Donald: Absolutely. It's a huge mistake. When you try to capture a wider audience you capture, often, nobody. I review websites all the time at our workshops. I'll put your website up on a screen, I'll review it. There'll be something that says something in the header, it'll say, “Trust is the commodity we exchange.” Okay, I don't know what you're offering me. I don't know how it's going to make my life better. I don't know the trouble that you're saving me from.

Pat: Is this the new bitcoin situation called trust that you're giving—

Donald: It's nothing. It means nothing. And that website will perform zero. We've seen . . . I can't tell you how many websites we've seen—we just changed the headers so it's not vague, and we've seen up to a thousand percent increase in business. And the reason is, it's almost like if you're fishing and you and I like to fish, we like to fly fish, and let's say you and I go out on the Bighorn, Pat, and I pull out my fly rod and I've got a Fisher-Price hook made to not hurt children. A giant piece of plastic on the end of my fly rod and I start fishing. You think I'm going to have a good day?

Pat: I mean, you're going to have me laugh at you quite a bit, but—

Donald: I think that's the kind of hooks that we're putting on our websites. These vague and confusing messages are the equivalent of fishing without a hook. There's no hook, there's nothing that's making me interested. And so, that's one thing. The other mistake we can make is we can use too many hooks. So, if I take you to a movie and Jason Bourne wants to know who he really is and he also wants to lose thirty pounds and he'd like to run a marathon, he's thinking about marrying the girl, and he's considering whether or not to adopt a cat. I've thrown too many story questions at the audience and the audience will be forced to burn too many calories and their survival mechanism will say, "I'm going to shut my brain down because I can't figure this story out." And they'll start to daydream and they may even leave the theater.

You have to define really one thing that you offer your audience, your customer, and it has to immediately be understood as something that helps them to survive. We have to do that. If we don't do that, you're not going to do very well in business. And you say, a lot of your readers or listeners are probably saying, "Well, Don, you know, I . . . We offer twenty-five things." Okay, well, you need to offer one umbrella thing that everything can fit under her.

So Dave Ramsey is one of our clients. He sells board games, he sells books, he has multiple radio shows, multiple podcasts, has multiple events, multiple personalities are rising up out of that organization.

He can help you retire, he can help you get a mortgage, he can help you buy real estate, he can help you buy life insurance, he can help you manage your money. How in the world do you message that? Well, he's done a great job. He offers one thing: financial peace. And everything he offers now fits under financial peace. And financial peace is the opposite of financial anxiety.

So we have embedded, there's a story element. You are saving me from anxiety. You are giving me the climactic scene of peace. And then he goes even further. He has a villain. He has a problem that he helps people solve, and that is debt. He's created a villain out of debt and credit card companies. And then there's a climactic scene to you, the hero, overcoming the villain of debt and that is the debt . . . Yeah, so he's actually running a climactic scene on his radio program several times a day. What's that doing to the three million other listeners? They're saying, "I want to be in that story too." He's inviting people into a story in which they experience a climactic scene and overcome a problem, overcome a villain, so that they can be free. That is fantastic narrative messaging.

Now, there are hundreds of thousands of financial advisors in the country. Thousands of those have written books. Hundreds of those who've written books have podcasts or radio shows. There's only one that we really know of and it's Dave Ramsey, and it's not because he gives better advice, although I think Dave gives terrific advice and I follow it. It's because he has the clearest message. The clearest message is going to win every single time. You cannot be vague about what you offer the customer. You cannot offer too many things. You need one clear thing that associates with their survival.

Pat:

That's beautiful. Financial peace. What an amazing way to phrase everything like an umbrella, like you said. Are there any exercises that one could do if they know that their brand, their tagline, their mantra is not quite to that level yet? Because I know some people will go through that exercise and just get so frustrated with, "I can't find the right word." And I think a number of listeners who finish this podcast episode may start trying to figure that out, but then get so

frustrated. How do you find your equivalent of financial peace? Are there any tactics or strategies for that?

Donald:

Yeah. It's actually pretty easy. You change it and change it and change it until you're starting to get a response. And when you're so close to something, it does take a minute to figure out. We used to call our marketing workshop “the StoryBrand Workshop,” and I realized nobody knows what a StoryBrand workshop is. And so when I changed it to the “StoryBrand Marketing Workshop,” we doubled in business. And people weren't telling me they didn't understand what a StoryBrand workshop is. I, like a moron, assumed that they knew StoryBrand was a marketing workshop. And they don't. So I think that's the problem, is the curse of knowledge. But here's what you do. You actually wireframe the header of your website—that is the top of your website—and you put a tagline, you put a header. We have a whole formula for this that we share, but you basically create it.

And then what I would do is, I'd go into a Starbucks, and it's going to be a little bit embarrassing, but here's what you do. You actually just go up to somebody and you say, “I'm so sorry. I run a business, or I own a business, and I've just created a new website and I'm testing it. I'm doing market research. Can I show you my website for ten seconds and then ask you three questions?” They're probably going to say, “That actually kind of sounds fun.” You show them your website, you count to ten, you just let them study it. You count to ten. Slam the laptop closed. They don't get any more than ten seconds.

Then you ask them these three questions. “What do I offer?” If they can't tell you what you offer after reviewing your website for ten seconds, you are losing enormous amounts of money. They have to know you sell mattresses, or you sell real estate, or you sell a cheaper mortgage, or you sell fake plants that look real, that you can put in your home. I mean, they've got to know. And if they can't figure that out in ten seconds, because they're going to bounce shortly after that, their brain is literally saying, “You're burning too many calories. Let's get rid of this.” Then you're losing money.

Now, the second thing, if you can cross that hurdle, is this. “What do you offer? How does it make my life better?” If they can answer, “Well, you offer mattresses and it makes my life better because I’ll get a great night’s sleep.” Now you’re onto something. Right? And then the third and final question is this. “What do I need to do to buy it?” So, if they can say, “You sell mattresses that helped me get a great night’s sleep and I need to order today because you had three buttons on there and they were all bright orange, they said, ‘Order Today.’” If you can do that, if they can answer those three questions after looking at your website for ten seconds, you’re going to do a lot better business. It has to be that clear and that fast.

So, you just do market research. You just talk to acquaintances, preferably friends who don’t know what you do because you don’t want any inside language. You don’t want any curse of knowledge. As soon as your friends understand what you do, they have the curse of knowledge, right? You’ve got to go to a stranger and make sure. We call that the first date, and a relationship, to use a metaphor is, a sales relationship is like a series of dates. The whole first date is, “I’d really like another second date.” That’s the whole point of the first date. If you ever want to get married, that’s what you got to do. You’ve got to get to the second date. You can share more information in the second date. But on the first date, which is the header of your website, what do you offer? How does it make my life better? And what do I need to do to buy it?

Pat: I love that. It’s so funny you mentioned the Starbucks exercise because in my book [Will It Fly? \(Amazon link\)](#), when helping people do market research, I literally tell them to do the same thing. Like, go to a Starbucks and talk to a stranger. And the replies that I’m getting are, “That’s so embarrassing. That’s so scary.” *[Full Disclaimer: As an affiliate, I receive compensation if your purchase through this link.]*

Donald: How embarrassed would you be for thirty seconds if you knew it was going to make you half a million dollars?

Pat: You know what?



- Donald: I would be, yeah, I mean, you could dress me up as a chicken at that point and I'm still going to do it for half a million dollars. It's just great market research. And not only that. People, you know, it's an awkward ten seconds, but then after they answer those questions, they say, "Okay, so what do you do again?" And you know, "I'm a . . . I sell mattresses down here. If you ever need a mattress, please, I'll give you a twenty percent discount. Thanks for participating." And they respect you for it.
- Pat: Yeah. The chances are that they're going to go home and think about you all day and talk about you and talk behind your back. Like, that's not going to happen, right?
- Donald: Yeah. People like characters who take action, who do bold things, who have fun, who are creating something new. Yes, it's an awkward thing, but they're going to respect you when you're done.
- Pat: And it's a great training for just doing business. You got to talk to people, right? So, I love that. So, you had mentioned seven things. I don't think we'll get to all seven—
- Donald: I'll go through them real quick. You know, you've got a character who wants something, and then that character has to have a problem. They have to feel anxiety, and that anxiety has to move them towards solving the problem. And the point there that I make in the book is, if you stop talking about your customer's problems, you're going to stop doing business, because it's the only reason they're doing business with you. And then a character shows up in the story and that character we just call the guide. Different scholars call this character by different names. We just call this character the guide. We actually ask you to position your brand as the guide in the story, not the hero. Be Yoda, not Luke Skywalker. The purpose of the guide is to help the hero win the day. In other words, the story is not about you.

And people come to me all the time, say, “Don, helped us tell our story.” And I say, “You know, I can, but it's a great way to go bankrupt.” Don't tell your story, invite people into a story, and there's a formula for doing that. You don't want to be the hero of the story because the hero is weak. The hero's always weak. You want to position yourself as the strong character who's helping the hero, and the strong character is the guide. It's Yoda, it's Lionel in *The King's Speech*, it's Haymitch in *The Hunger Games*. Then the guide gives the hero a plan. We recommend and we spell out how to create a three-step plan that dramatically increases the chance that the customer is going to walk with you on this journey toward buying something. If I say, “You know, I'm a used car dealer and I'd like for you to buy a used car. Here's what we do. We analyze what kind of car you want. We find your price point that works and we test drive it for two weeks to make sure you're going to like it.” Those three steps on how you buy a car will dramatically increase the number of cars that I sell. Even if that's just part of my plan, I just never spell it out, you have to actually spell it out. People, again, they don't walk into a fog.

After you give them a plan, you call them to action. You challenge them to take action. Your Buy Now button needs to be clear on your website. Don't use passive language like, “learn more” or “read more.” That is passive, weak language and it's costing you money. And then finally, the last two are success and failure. Taking action on what you're asking me to buy has to result in either a happy life or a sad life. We have to show people the consequences of not doing business with us. You're not going to get a good night's sleep if you have a bad mattress. Well that makes me want to buy a mattress, right? You'll get a great night's sleep if you do buy my mattress. Well, now that there's stakes in the story, something has to be won or lost.

So, the seven points are: a character that wants something, has a problem, who meets a guide that gives them a plan and calls them to action that ends in success or failure. So we help you come up with seven messages out of those categories, and you repeat those all over your marketing collateral, your website, your elevator pitches,

your keynote, your sales scripts, your proposals, especially. Let me just give you one tip. This is one tip from the framework. Always lead with the problem.

So let's say, Pat, you're at a cocktail party and you meet two different people who don't know each other, but they actually happen to do the exact same thing. You say to the first person, "What do you do for a living?" And they say, "I'm an at home chef." Your immediate thought is, "Oh, like who do you cook for?" And you don't do any business with them. Then you meet the second person. You say, "What do you do?" This person says, "Do you know how most families don't eat together? And when they do, they don't eat healthy? I'm an at home chef."

Donald: Who's going to do more business? The first at home chef or the second?

Pat: Clearly the second.

Donald: The second is going to do all the business. Literally, every bit of it, and the first is going to do none if the second chef is in the room. And here's why. Your product or service is medicine. But unless you tell people what the pain is they're not interested in the medicine. So you always lead with the problem because the problem makes the medicine more valuable. That's just one tip from the book and from the framework, but there are seven of them and they all dramatically convert into customers.

Pat: Love it. Everybody better go pick up the book. I'll leave a link in the show notes for everybody, and at the tail end of the show here. Do you mind me asking you a couple more questions to go a little bit deeper?

Donald: No. I love it.

Pat: So, let's say that example of the person who . . . The at home chef who gave me the framework and the character and the story and his

solution, or the fact that he's the guide. How do you balance how many problems to share? That person could have obviously said, "You know how people don't eat at home very often, but when they do, they're not eating healthy and then they get fat and then they die."

Donald:

Yeah, well, you actually . . . In story and in our framework you share one problem, but you share three different angles on that problem. You share the external, internal and philosophical problem. It sounds complicated but it's actually very simple to understand once you hear it a few times. The external problem is that families aren't eating together. The internal problem is that this is making parents feel like they're not doing a good job with their kids, or they're missing out on a great life. The philosophical problem is, families deserve time together. And so, what you do is external, internal and philosophical of the same problem actually are resolved when you click Buy Now, and this is just a story formula.

You know, when Luke Skywalker destroys the Death Star, his external problem is he's got to destroy the Death Star. The internal problem is he's wondering whether he has what it takes to be a Jedi. And the philosophical problem is good versus evil. When he shoots the proton torpedo through the exhaust valve at the Death Star and blows it up, he resolves all three levels of problems in one shot. The external problem is, I need to destroy the Death Star. Done. The internal problem is, I didn't know whether I had what it takes to be a Jedi. Now I know. I do. The philosophical problem is good versus evil, Darth Vader is behind me, he's just shot R2-D2 in the head, and I destroyed the Death Star and Darth Vader goes spinning out of control and the good has defeated evil. At least for now, until the sequel. That's the magic formula, and you see it in almost every movie. You see it in *The King's Speech*, you see it in *Tommy Boy*. There's one thing that happens that resolves the character's external, internal and philosophical problem.

When somebody clicks Buy Now on ordering my at home chef services, I need to have framed my offer in such a way that they are

solving the problem of families not eating together, us feeling like terrible parents, and our children deserving a family that cares about them. I need to use the language that frames that Buy Now button to resolve all three levels of conflict. That is a magical formula that has been used for twenty-five hundred years since the days of Aristotle. It will never stop working. Almost nobody is using it to sell their products. And when you do, you see dramatic growth.

And here's the other thing that's really amazing, Pat. Words are free. We're not talking about spending more money. We're talking about coming up with the right words to use with the money that you are spending. If you spend a million dollars in your advertising, you're going to get X response. But if you clarify your message so that you're resolving an external, internal, and philosophical problem, and you put that message inside of a million dollars worth of advertising, you're going to get what would have taken you ten million dollars of advertising to actually get a return on, because your message is that much more efficient.

Pat: Love it. Thank you. How can people work with you and your team if they're interested in investing a little bit to get some immediate help from you?

Donald: There's a couple of ways. Just go to [storybrand.com](http://storybrand.com) and attend one of our workshops, but if you go to a [businessmadesimple.com](http://businessmadesimple.com), give me your email address and I'll send you a free business tip via video every single weekday. Our goal is to develop the entire American workforce and we give you a a great business tip and a strategy that's less than five minutes in a video every single weekday. Just go to [businessmadesimple.com](http://businessmadesimple.com).

Pat: That's amazing. The final thing I want to talk about is related to the fact that you are the guide. You are not the hero, you're helping others become the hero. And there's a lot of balance that I feel needs to happen between you saying that you have this expertise and you have these credentials and these awards versus maybe showing off a little bit too much and trying too hard. When helping a person

realize that you are their guide, how might one do that? What's the framework for that to really get them to start following you and seeing you as a leader versus somebody who's trying too hard or maybe show off?

Donald:

Yeah. Absolutely. Well, the guide does two things to position themselves as the guide in the hero's life. The guide expresses empathy and demonstrates competency. Empathy is, "I feel your pain. I care about you," and competency is, "I know how to get you out of this dilemma. I've done it before." And so, when you actually say to people, "Hey, I feel your pain. I know how it is to sleep on a mattress that is cheap and I know how it is to not get a good night's sleep, and I know how it is to be tired all the time. I invented a mattress that doesn't do that to people. It gives them a great night's sleep and we've now helped five thousand people get a terrific night's sleep." That one-two punch positions you as the guide the hero has been looking for to get them the climactic scene of a great night's sleep.

Now let's say this. Let's say somebody says, "Don, what do you do?" And I say, "Well, I own a mattress company. My grandfather started it seventy-five years ago and we are trying to double our revenue this year. So we're spending a lot of money on advertising. And on that, we're actually also trying to increase our great places to work metric in our mattress company. We've won a lot of awards. People give us a lot of attention because our mattresses are so good." That's not a sales pitch. That's you telling your story. And notice how me telling my story is not going to sell a mattress, but me inviting a customer into a story is going to sell a mattress.

So that's the difference between playing the hero and playing the guide. Playing the guide, you invite somebody into a story in which they give you their money in order to experience the climactic scene that solves their problem, and playing the hero introduces yourself and talks highly of yourself. You just don't need to do it that much. You do need to express authority. "We sold five thousand of these. We've won a few awards." That's fine, but it just takes a millisecond



and then you get right back into the customer story, the customer's pain, the customer's concern, and asking yourself, “What is the climactic scene that this customer wants to experience and how can I guide them there?”

Pat: Amazing. Thank you so much. Do you have any examples of great companies who are doing it right that you'd love to share with everybody so they can see how it's done?

Donald: Ramsey Solutions is one. Dave Ramsey and all that he does. Another client is Chick-fil-A. Chick-fil-A is an enormous restaurant, fastest growing restaurant chain in the country.

Pat: I like their billboards, too, actually.

Donald: Yeah, they're really fun. You know, if you think about the external, internal and philosophical problem that Chick-fil-A resolves, the external problem is— let's not overthink it—is hunger. But the internal problem is, people actually don't feel good about themselves when they go to a fast food restaurant. And Chick-fil-A has resolved that problem. The restrooms are clean, the people are friendly. They want to be there. They like working there. You get a feeling that you're okay in this restaurant. Philosophically, they're closed on Sunday. That's a massive opportunity cost, being closed one day a week, but what they're saying is, “We care about more than money. We care about our people, we care about people taking time off.” They come from a religious background, so, “We care about you going to church.” And what people don't realize when they spend five dollars at the counter of Chick-fil-A, they are resolving an external, internal and philosophical problem.

I'm resolving hunger, I don't have to feel bad about myself for eating here, and I'm associating my values with a values-driven organization. The average Burger King does \$1.5 million per store, per year. The average McDonald's does \$2.5 million per store, per year. The average Chick-fil-A, closed one day of the week, Pat. Closed one day of the week, that's a massive opportunity cost, does \$5.2 million per

store, per year. People aren't just buying chicken. They're resolving three levels of story loops in one purchase, and it's creating raving fans.

Pat: I love that. And I've noticed they've had these new commercials come out where they're not talking about their product at all.

Donald: That's right.

Pat: They're bringing—

Donald: Talking about their heroes.

Pat: . . . a customer on and sharing their story and Chick-fil-A is just the guide.

Donald: That's right.

Pat: It's all fitting together.

Donald: They're exploding.

Pat: Don, you're amazing. Thank you so much for coming on. One more time, where can people go to find out more about you and what you have going on?

Donald: StoryBrand.com. We'd love to hear from you.

Pat: It's as easy as that. Thank you. I appreciate you and all you do to help us entrepreneurs.

Donald: Pat, thanks so much.

Pat: Hey, so what'd you think? So let me know, let Don know [@storybrand](#) and [@patflynn](#) on Instagram and Twitter. Let us know what you thought of this episode and of course go to [storybrand.com](http://storybrand.com). He has a podcast as well and he's just all kinds of great. I cannot wait to

connect with him again in the future. We have a lot of mutual friends and I hope that we get to connect very, very soon.

Don, thank you so much for coming on and sharing your wisdom with us today and inspiring myself and the hundreds of thousands of others who will eventually listen to this episode as well. And if you enjoyed it, like I said, hook us up with a message and what you think @patflynn and @storybrand on Twitter and Instagram. We'd love to hear it. Cheers. Thank you so much.

And also, if you want to get all the links in the show notes, definitely go to [smartpassiveincome.com/session393](http://smartpassiveincome.com/session393). One more time, [smartpassiveincome.com/session393](http://smartpassiveincome.com/session393), and of course, as always, if you haven't yet subscribed to the show, please do that and definitely pick up this book. You can go through my affiliate link for that. If you go to [smartpassiveincome.com/storybrand](http://smartpassiveincome.com/storybrand) that'll take you to Amazon where you can read on your device or get a hardcover book or listen to it. It's amazing. I've listened to it a couple of times and I'm going to do it again right after this. So, cheers. Thanks so much. I appreciate you, and as always, Team Flynn for the win.

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