

# Learning Meets Quality LLC

Rick Swanson, Chief Consultant 651-338-1349 rick@learningmeetsquality.com

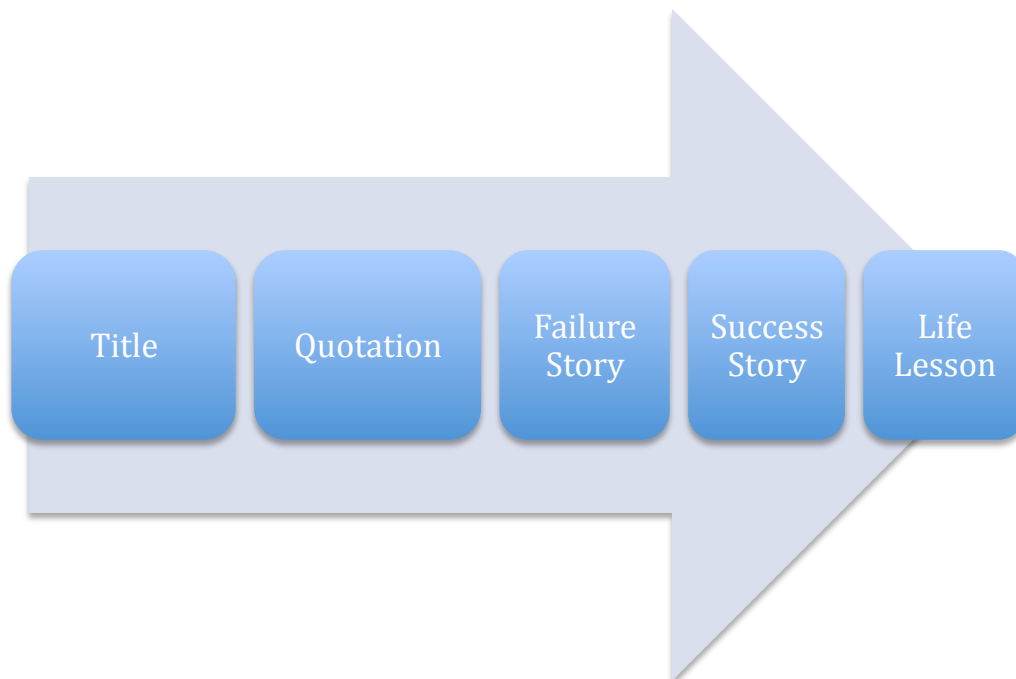
## Success Story Writing Guide

By now you've read my book, *Success from the Ashes*, and you are ready to write your own success story. This guide provides you a structure to do that.

Storytelling is a powerful way to build trust, influence people, develop relationships, or even market a product or service. Whatever your motivation, there's a lot you can do with a good story.

Even though we often tell a story in a linear fashion, from beginning to end, it doesn't mean that we create the story that way. What follows is a series of questions to help you create the elements of your story. The flow of the questions does not necessarily follow the flow of the story. However, be patient, let the process do its thing, and you'll have a compelling story to tell when you're done.

Here's a picture to keep in mind as you develop your story. It shows the overall flow of your story. However, we are going to create the story a little bit out of order.



# Learning Meets Quality LLC

Rick Swanson, Chief Consultant 651-338-1349 rick@learningmeetsquality.com

Here we go!

## 1) The Success

Start at the end of the story! I recommend that you get in touch with the positive feelings associated with one of your successes. Write a simple sentence that states your victory and the emotion that goes with it. Here are some examples from my own life story. I write them in the present tense.

- I'm relieved that I earned a second Masters degree, and didn't waste the PhD credits I had earned.
- I'm delighted that my wife and I can enjoy golf together.
- I'm happy beyond my wildest imagination in my second marriage.

Go ahead and take the time to write out a few of your own. You might develop just one of these into a full story, but the others will be available when you want them.

## 2) The Pain

Get in touch with the feelings of anger, sadness, remorse, or frustration related to events prior to the success. Write a simple sentence stating the failure event, with the emotion that goes with it.

- I'm disappointed I didn't complete my PhD.
- I'm angry my franchise business flopped.
- I'm sad my first marriage failed.

## 3) The Life Lesson

There's a broader lesson you can share with your audience. Spend a little time crafting a sentence that reveals the greater lesson you learned. Here are the three that accompany my examples above.

- You always have options, and your supporters can help you find them.



# Learning Meets Quality LLC

Rick Swanson, Chief Consultant 651-338-1349 rick@learningmeetsquality.com

- Your professional life can strengthen your personal life, rather than weaken it.
- You are not defined by your worst mistake.

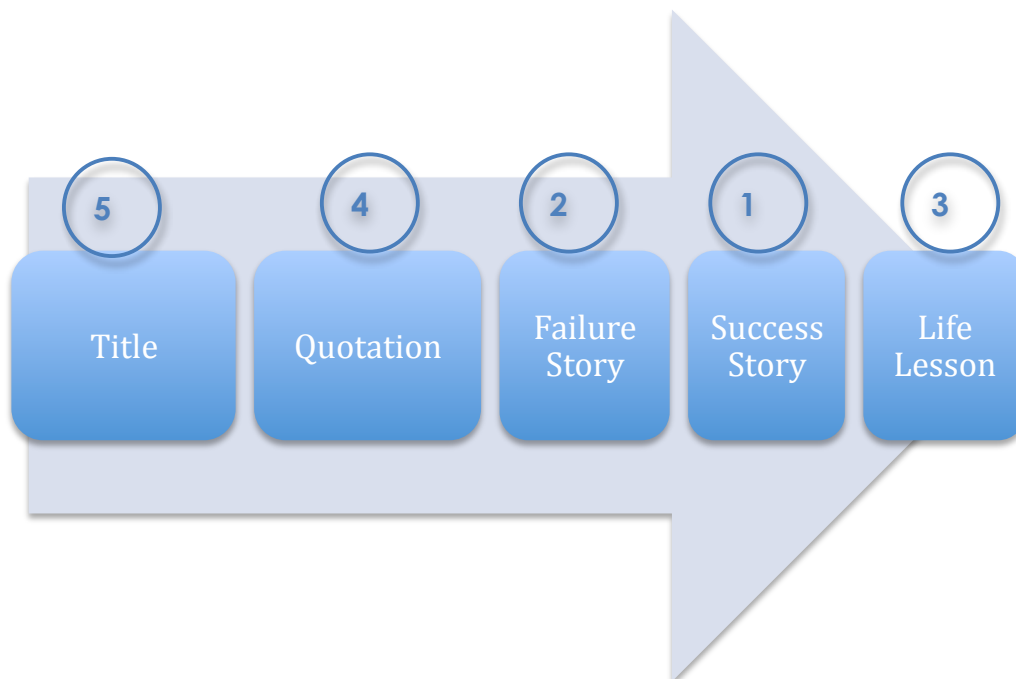
## 4) Quotation

You might have a favorite quotation, saying, song lyric, or other memorable phrase that relates to your story. Choose that after the main part of your story is written.

## 5) Story Title

Several of my friends who are professional writers suggested that I make my titles catchy and memorable, like a “hook” that makes the reader want to dive into the story. I pass their wisdom along to you. I actually came up with my story titles last, after I had the main story written.

Here's the diagram, summarizing the order in which I suggest you create the elements.



With these five elements identified, you can start the actual writing of the story. Here are a few thoughts to keep in mind.

# Learning Meets Quality LLC

Rick Swanson, Chief Consultant 651-338-1349 rick@learningmeetsquality.com

## A. Inject a little humor

Laughter is always an effective storytelling tool, so be sure to keep your story light-hearted. Even though you are telling a story about a failure-turned-success, you are not writing a sob story.

## B. Share the pain and the joy

Readers will relate to you and your story if you are willing to convey the emotions you felt during the episode. That's why I encouraged you to include the emotional context for the Success and the Pain of your story.

## C. Drama is okay

As you tell your story, let the drama unfold. Put the reader in the situation where they think, "Oh no, this can't get any worse!" When you finally reveal how you climbed out the trouble you were in, the victory has that much more impact.

## D. Use a formula

In the chapters of my book, my stories follow a simple five-part template, as I showed you in the diagram above. Here are the parts, with a short reminder about each:

### Chapter Title

- Make it catchy. Use a play on words based on keywords in your story

### Quotation

- Use a truism or quotation that relates to your story.

### The Failure Story

- This is based on your sentence from "The Pain" above. Keep this sentence in front of you as you write, and keep focused on telling this story.



# Learning Meets Quality LLC

Rick Swanson, Chief Consultant 651-338-1349 rick@learningmeetsquality.com

## My Victory

- This is based on your sentence from "The Success" above. Again, stay focused on this sentence.

## Life Lesson

- This is only a paragraph or two in length. It gives the reader a key piece of your wisdom to take with them.

## Optional: Epilogue

- I used this section occasionally to tell a follow-up anecdote relating to my key story, or to share writings from my blog. I didn't have an epilogue for every chapter.

Since I had nine stories to tell, I wanted to use a consistent formula for each story. There's nothing magical about my formula, but I found that sticking to the formula helped me write a clear story that didn't wander all over the place. You can substitute a joke in place of the quotation, for example, or change the section headings to suit your own style.

Now it's your turn. Everybody has a story to tell, and you stand to benefit from telling your story. Once you've written your story, post it on a blog, tweet about it, or turn it into a full book.

Please consider mentioning your story on my LinkedIn group, Flames of Glory. Here's the link:

<http://goo.gl/ux7cVr>

Best success!



Rick Swanson  
Learning Meets Quality LLC