

Practice with an Expert

Supercharge Your Storytelling

Senior leadership at one of the world's largest cloud-based software companies realized that their finance team was not communicating data in a way that could be understood by those outside of the team. These financial leaders needed to improve how they converted critical information into a compelling story for their business partners to comprehend. To remedy this issue, the company partnered with BTS to co-create a customized **Practice with an Expert** solution, ensuring meaningful and lasting behavior change with a tailored experience co-facilitated by Communication subject matter experts with PhDs in Communications and Rhetoric.

For additional expertise, BTS invited a communication consulting firm to partner in developing and delivering the solution. In collaboration, the three companies began building the solution by discussing communication, storytelling, and how to build those skills in an innovative and effective manner. The standard way of learning effective communication is typically presentation-focused, only measuring the audience's reactions to the meaning of a speech delivered. However, BTS' solution was designed with a specific rubric that included behavior-based criteria that can be observed and evaluated in an objective way. By focusing on concrete indicators, participants are left with actionable goals based on the behaviors they need to change to become more effective communicators.

A Storytelling Journey – Communicating effectively

When communicating complex information to other teams, the software company's financial leaders often struggled with an over reliance on data, making it difficult for key stakeholders to understand. The solution, a Storytelling Journey, was therefore designed to help financial experts transform data into a story-like narrative with a clear message. The journey couples learning assets with practice opportunities, involving a set of short videos that teach the importance of messaging and crafting a narrative, as well as one-on-one virtual sessions with experts to put the newly learned skills to the test. Consistent with BTS' belief in 'learning by doing', this multi-faceted approach is one of the most effective learning methods as it combines both self-paced learning and individually-tailored practice opportunities.



Every year, two cohorts of 30 finance professionals at the software company experience the journey, developing their communication skills to become effective storytellers. The Storytelling course objectives are centered on the assumption that business partners are more likely to accept data with the right messaging. Therefore, storytelling techniques help financial leaders:

1. Tell compelling virtual stories with data
2. Engage the audience
3. Persuade the audience to take action

The journey begins with financial leaders reviewing a series of animated video vignettes and practice exercises, designed by BTS, that present communication strategies and tactics, including the importance of choosing the right kind of messaging given what they are communicating and to whom. The videos enable participants to craft an overarching narrative using an understanding of their audience, while also incorporating key data points they need to convey using persuasive language. After completing the videos, participants practice the new skills gained from the videos by engaging in two role play exercises with a communication expert.

The first role play requires participants to understand the needs of a broad audience and make a persuasive case in a presentation format. The participants take two to three hours to create their presentation using data from real-life scenarios they face on-the-job. They then practice delivering this presentation to a communication expert playing the audience. Thus, participants get to experiment and practice communication skills in a risk-free, one-on-one environment. They deliver the presentation over a video-call and the expert evaluates

them according to four skillsets: whether they used storytelling techniques, shaped an actionable story, effectively presented data, and applied varied speech elements. The experts then provide on-the-spot feedback on what was effective and what was less effective during the presentation delivery.

In the second role play, the expert plays a senior audience member who asks to follow up after the presentation to ask questions. This exercise requires participants to form a more personal connection to the individual asking the questions, testing their ability to listen and flex their communication skills to the needs of this individual. The presenter is trying to persuade the 'senior member' to buy-in to various points of their presentation. They are trying to convey these points using storytelling, and the skills they learned from the videos, which includes being conscious of the message they are trying to develop as well as how they may be perceived by colleagues.

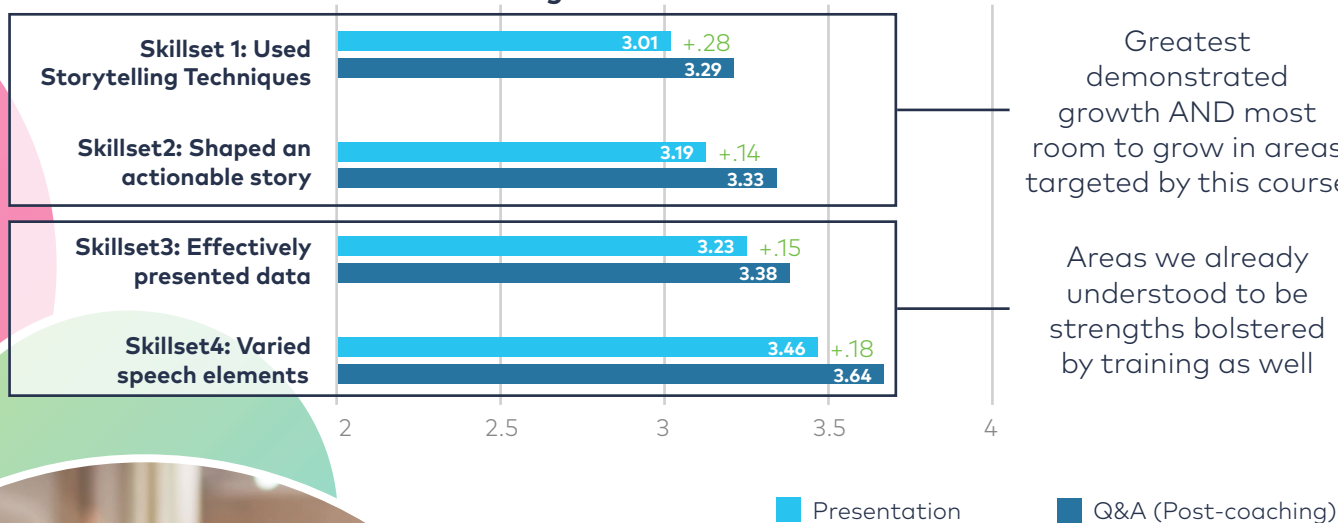
These two exercises, a formal presentation and a question and answer scenario, ensure participants get a chance to practice two forms of communication, tailoring their language to the setting and needs of different audiences. To ensure long-term learning, each participant's role play is recorded and watched by assessors who embed their comments into the video, so when participants view the video, they can read the feedback as they watch their behavior. The participant thereby receives real-time and relevant feedback from the evaluation, and is able to learn from each experience.

Results and testimonials

After this experience, participants are set up with "Go-Do" activities, where they are held accountable for applying learned skills back on the job. As part of confirming that participants make progress towards their "Go-Do" goals, participants receive email check-in notifications and reminders for a defined period of time following the program, at a rate that ensures real actions back on the job. BTS' "Act@bts platform serves as a hassle-free accountability and follow-up resource to log, track, and measure these Go-Do actions and the goals each participant wants to achieve following the program. This tool further cements that these behavior changes will be maintained in the future.

The Storytelling journey and follow-up Go-Dos proved to be extremely successful, with participants, the company's financial leaders, reporting significant improvements in all four skillset areas...

Performance before and after coaching



Greatest demonstrated growth AND most room to grow in areas targeted by this course

Areas we already understood to be strengths bolstered by training as well



Client testimonials:

"I think many of us are taught to explain and then deliver our big idea, but this was useful in really highlighting why you start with your big idea."

"I talked less about the financials and more about the strategy decision-making, my story-telling and passion came alive. I think when discussing the financials, I am going to make it more storytelling and less about the weeds to engage the audience, especially if it's a non-finance executive audience."