

Legendary Leaders are



Great Storytellers

BY GINA RILEY

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By tapping into personal accounts and life lessons, great storytellers take others on a journey that connects with people's souls and inspires them to be their best. The stories they tell become one with their personal brand and signal they are an authority in their space.

Storytelling is the essence of thought leadership

Are you a go-to leader who others seek out as an authority? How do your stories impact those you lead? How about those in your industry?



The stories you tell and the way you tell them are an indicator of your unique value proposition and contribute to your personal and professional brand. By now, you should know a strong brand is vital - impacting your ability to progress in your career with greater ease.

I could not think of a better person to interview on this topic than Cathey Armillas, Marketing Strategist and

author of the award-winning book, *The Unbreakable Rules of Marketing: 9 ½ Ways to Get People to Love You* and creator of the *How to Rock a TED Talk* program.

She is a passionate, heart-forward TEDx speaker, organizer, and internationally renowned speaking coach. She is also notorious for wildly successful marketing campaigns with clients ranging from big brands to mid-sized companies.

Providing the spark for her clients to realize both sales and marketing success,

Cathey is a firecracker, full of enthusiasm and passion. She has reached millions with her thought leadership strategies.

Start off the new year with inspiration and actionable ideas to find your voice and make 2021 the year to showcase your unique opinions and thought leadership.

Let's dive straight into the conversation with Cathey!

For some, the idea of "thought leadership" has become a buzzword. What does thought leadership mean to you?

The easy answer is a thought leader is a person who is known for their ideas.

You are considered a thought leader when people value your ideas, the way you think, and you inspire them to act.

Thought leadership is usually born from honing your life experiences, applying them, testing, re-working, and experimenting. Then, putting those ideas into a useable form and getting them out into the world. It's not about a title or position...it is cultivated and grown.



CATHEY ARMILLAS

MARKETING EXPERT

TED COACH

SPEAKER

AUTHOR

IMAGE BY CATHEY ARMILLAS

Not everyone agrees they should put their thought leadership “out there”. What reasons would you give to people considering why they should showcase thought leadership?

If you want people to understand how you think, then you need to communicate your ideas. This is part of being a thought leader.

But here’s a good reason: you get the opportunity to change the way people think, act and feel with the power of your thoughts and ideas.

Your thought leadership is your unique way. What is your system? How do you do things different or what’s your specific angle?

Everyone has a system that works for them. We all process our life experiences in different ways. Sharing the way you do things can inspire others to take action.

What if a person doesn’t think their ideas are unique or special?

Everyone has a useful idea worth spreading. Everyone. Now finding it.

That’s a different story.

I work with people and reverse engineer everything. Sometimes I ask them to do the 3x3 which is asking 3 people you know (preferably people close and not close to you) to give you 3 adjectives about you. This says a lot about them. What are they known for? What do people come to them for?

Other times we inventory their biggest impacts in life, both good and bad. We have to get to the heart and soul of what they do.



IMAGE BY CATHEY ARMILLAS

You have done something special and there are people who think it's special. So, find it and share it.

Many leaders I talk with are apprehensive about showcasing their ideas and opinions. What are the micro-steps you recommend getting started on the right path? How do they step into their thought leadership?

I recommend they explore and answer three critical questions:

What idea are you contributing to the world?

For example, if you speak on the topic of leadership – you don't own that entire topic. What is YOUR contribution to the topic of leadership or unique angle?

Why are you the best person to talk about this idea?

What qualifies you as someone who can talk about this idea? What stories do you have that showcase your expertise in this area? These stories can be small and seemingly incidental or very large. These unique experiences inform our expertise. Your stories are your secret sauce

How will this idea impact other people?

How might your idea or information help the audience who needs to hear it? How will this change their life?

In your work, you talk about the "bold statement". What is that?

It's the thing you say about you or what you do in a bold, not cliché, way.

What is "the thing" you can say about the work you do that's different and bold? Nobody wants to hear a repeat formula.

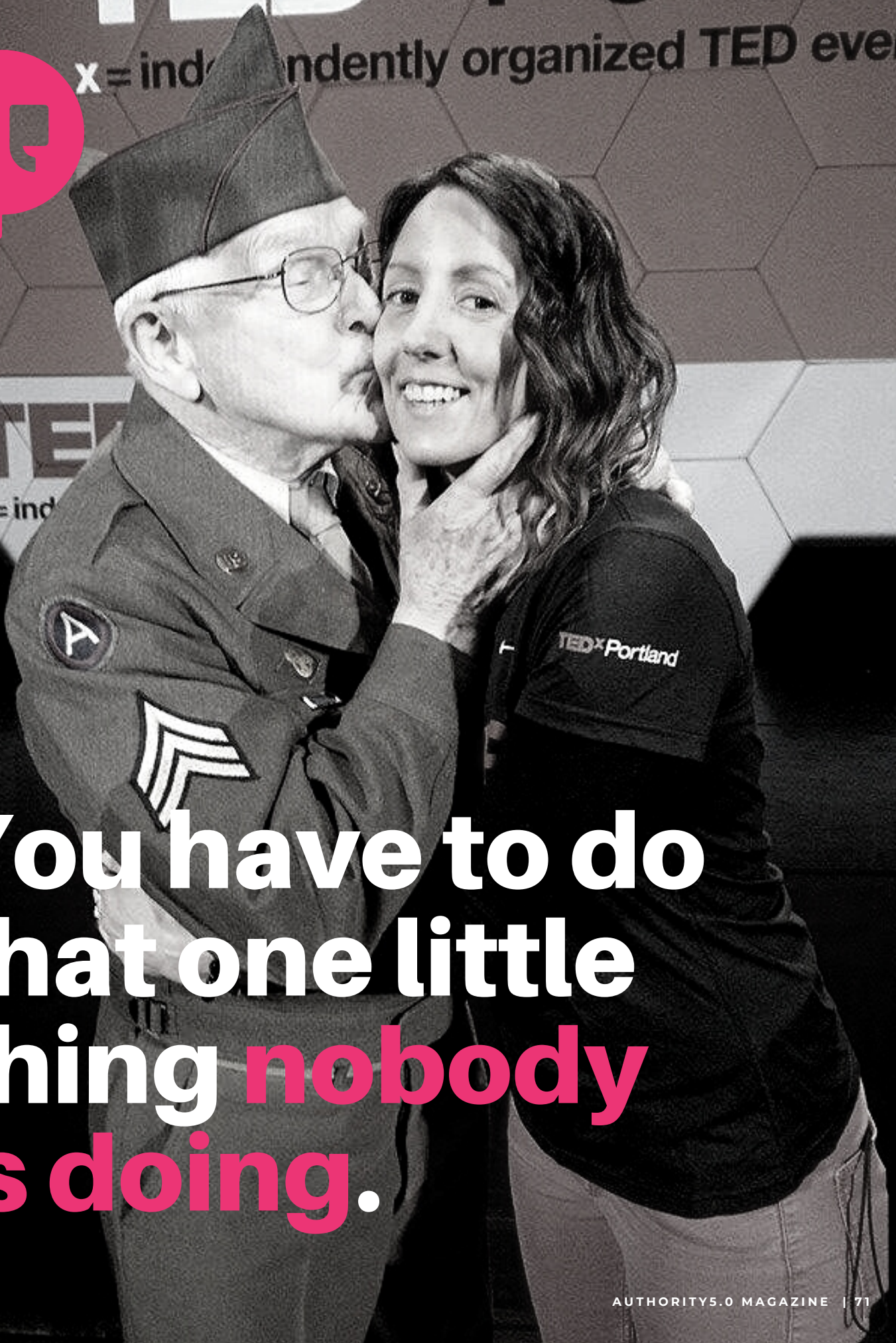
You need to be boldly, authentically you and bring your unique position forward. It is YOUR voice we need to hear.

The most important thing about thought leadership is you need a model you are teaching. If you don't do this, you are failing.

Don't lean into cute titles...you should be teaching people something practical and useful.

Thought leaders bring forward their "memorable models". These are the systems or programs they've created. It is their IP (intellectual property).

TEDx Portland
x = independently organized TED event



You have to do
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If you think about it, everything bought or sold in the IP space is a model. After it is out for public consumption, we downgrade it to general communications or teachings, but it starts with models.

Think about what your memorable model is. What are you teaching and how can you wrap it up in a way that's memorable? You should be sharing who you are, how you do it, and what you are doing – and it should be boldly, authentically yours.

Why do you think people hold back from sharing their thought leadership?

They think they aren't good enough. They de-value their own thoughts and ideas. They assume they are normal and ordinary. They are unable to see the beauty or magic that's there.

And a lot of people struggle with this because it is hard to talk about yourself. You need to find ways to identify what works in your life that helps people and then share that with others.

What makes a TED Talk popular?

Great ideas. TED is all about great ideas. Ideas we've either never heard before or ideas we've never heard expressed the way they were presented.

Good TED Talks are deep and wide. By width, how many people can you attract and impact with your idea?

Even if the speaker has a common or ordinary idea, they take it deeper. One of my favorite talks is Tim Urban's "Inside the mind of a master procrastinator", a highly viewed TED Talk with over 30 million views.

Tim didn't give us all the expected formulas – he went much deeper into the science and meaning behind procrastinating.

It was fascinating. It would have been lazy to just come out and say, "don't procrastinate". Instead, he went deeper into why we procrastinate and what the outcome of that is. You get to the end and realize just how far he took it.

How do you help people tease out their ideas?

As my client prepares for a TED Talk, I take them through a challenging exercise I call my "Unique-ify process" by asking them to write down all the things people expect them to say on their topic.

The first few are easy. It gets harder and harder as we go along. Then, I tell them not to say any of those things!

"Memorable models elevate thoughts and ideas in ways people can use, understand, and put into practice"



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You
breathed
an idea
into existence.





IMAGE BY CATHEY ARMILLAS

You don't want to say what is expected because this is NOT your unique angle.

Maybe you say the ideas that others are afraid to say. You have to do that one little thing nobody is doing. Find the thing. This is how you stand out.

Other than the three micro-steps to getting started, are there any exercises you take your clients through to help them tease out their thought leadership ideas?

Yes, I call it "5 great things".

What are 5 of the greatest things you have done in your life and how? I want them to consider the magnitude and impact of their work. There are so many ideas, stories, and memorable models wrapped up in that.

We can easily dismiss our great things because it has lost its shine – it feels ordinary.

The reality is you breathed life into an idea. You breathed an idea into existence.

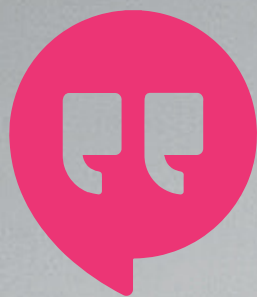
I also created something I call the "idea generator" to help hit people's brains in

every spot. We forget to integrate stories from our childhood all the way through and that is a missed opportunity to connect with people at a deeper level.

I ask them to start a story file to draw upon to incorporate into presentations.

In doing this, we are tapping into why we do what we do and our belief systems. Some of our small or inconsequential stories may seem ordinary at first but have had an extraordinary impact on our life.

Then, we take it one step further by developing a legacy talk.



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We go deeper and further into the idea and ask, "What makes you who you are?"

These questions are critical. We need to answer why you are the best person to speak or write on this topic.

Why do you think it is so hard for people to get their heads around storytelling?

I think it's because they overthink it. They get themselves into a space of "I have to tell a story". What can I say that's interesting? It should be the other way around. Figure out the things that are interesting and tell stories around that.

I make all my clients keep a story file and capture stories they remember and things that happen to them so that when they go to speak, present or communicate, they don't have to force themselves into "telling a story".

Storytelling is compelling. It's also a craft that's honed.

What would you say are the top presentation mistakes?

I actually wrote an article on it and I teach a course called

"The Top10 Presentation Mistakes" because I've seen and heard it all. I would say that one of the most common mistakes I see is the "I before you" one.

It's where the speaker is presenting too much from their point of view and not considering the listener. This happens in presentations, but it also happens in everyday communication. You should always have an I/you balance and if anything, tip it towards your listener.

It's important to tell your stories and to get your ideas out there but make sure they are consumable by others.

What I would leave people with is this - if you want to be considered a thought leader, focus on telling YOUR stories based on your interests and life experiences.

Hone those messages and you will be on your way towards telling stories that attract attention. Your audience will react to your authenticity and remember you for the unique stories you tell.

CONTRIBUTING WRITER'S PROFILE

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