

Pinocchio's Nose Grows

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Truth in advertising. It's a simple concept yet so many have, perhaps conveniently, forgotten how dishonesty can ruin careers. We have the politician who exaggerated his service in Vietnam, the renown chef who lied on his resume about where and for whom he cooked, the CEO who, well, didn't actually 'graduate' from Harvard, and the Olympic athlete who, for years, denied taking steroids. Plus, there are countless people who lied about getting Medals of Honor in Vietnam. You've heard the responses, "Oops." "Sorry." "I misspoke." And you've heard their consequences as they were humiliated, fired, jailed and/or forced to take early retirements.

This phenomenon is not just for the high profile professions. The temptation to exaggerate our experiences and qualifications occurs in every field – yes, even in the storytelling world. We too, could use a 'truth in advertising' reality check.

- Are we bilingual because we tell The Barking Mouse?
- Are we bona fide musicians if we occasionally bang on a drum, shake a tambourine, or blow into a recorder?
- Does taking a workshop with fill-in-the-blank-big-name-storyteller make us similarly talented?
- If we have told with fill-in-the-blank-big-name-storyteller, are we also qualified to be headliners?
- Do we have the right to give ourselves the title Master Storyteller, Griot, or Baba?

Are we tiptoeing into Pinocchio nose growing situations? Are we portraying ourselves honestly? Are we standing behind our own credentials? Are we creating experiences and qualifications we don't really have? Are we afraid we blend in with in the increasingly crowded world of storytelling that we won't be noticed?

We all spend hours creating, editing, and tweaking our resumes, brochures, websites, blogs, and all the other marketing tools at our disposal. We check for typos, punctuation, and grammar. How about one more check ... for honesty?

We each want to stand out. That's a human trait. It reflects a desire to grow and get the jobs we feel we deserve. But it is my hope that we want to stand out on our own skills, experiences, and talents. Find your own voice. Figure out who you are and what you have to offer. Ask yourself, "What makes me extraordinary and unique?"

- What type of stories do I tell?
- What kind of emotional energy do I convey?
- What do I offer that is distinctive?
- What is my look, my colors, my signature style?
- What descriptive words do I want someone to say after seeing me perform?
- What do I have to offer that sets me apart from others?
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Be remarkable in your own right and you will never feel the need to define yourself by your relationships with others. There are plenty of ways for you to express your own creative uniqueness.

Seth Godin defined the concept of individuality in his book Purple Cow. Godin's thesis is that we have all seen plenty of black and white cows. Dime a dozen, right? Just think how excited we would be to see something new,

something unique, something that stands out – something like a purple cow! Is there room for individual and event purple cows in the storytelling world? Absolutely!

Purple cow-type storytelling events are growing fast. The Moth is a purple cow. The Moth started as a group of people sharing stories monthly in someone's living room. The concept is to have very short humorous personal stories, selected by lottery, that are told in small bar-type clubs. Since 1997, The Moth has had over 3,000 sold-out events in over eight major US cities reaching over 100,000 people. Check out The Moth at www.themoth.org/about.

A Fringe is a purple cow. The Fringe concept started in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1947 as an alternative festival that played concurrently, but outside the formal location, of the Edinburgh International Festival. Fringes don't focus on a single genre. They are 'performing-arts smorgasbords' that embrace theater, dance, puppetry, and spoken word. Find out more at <http://www.fringefestivals.us/what-is-fringe> There are fifteen fringe festivals in the United States and many more throughout the world. Fringes are growing fast!

Individual storytellers are purple cows too. Today we see storytelling combined with dance, music, mime, and puppetry. We see more movement, more staging, and extreme body language. There are no limits.

Eighteen years ago, I was part of a group of writers who wrote and published Quality Angles. This book, geared to business executives, was a thesis on what it takes to be successful and balanced in the business world. My contribution was to find and interview people with unusual (Purple Cow type) jobs.

Finding them in the pre-Internet age was a challenge. I searched newspaper archives, library reference books, and bookstores. I also asked everyone I knew for leads. In the end, I found twenty amazing people. Among them was an ice cream taster whose tongue was insured for \$1,000,000. I also found a woman who was a professional screamer, a full time rodeo clown, and even a professional storyteller. Imagine making money tasting ice cream, screaming in movies, protecting cowboys, and telling stories (to kids *and* adults)!

Interviewing these professionals was an eye-opening experience. They were all gutsy, determined, and not afraid to take risks. I asked them about the challenges of having unusual jobs and I asked them what advice they would give to others interested in doing the same. "Be unique," they said. "Be known for excellence. Provide the highest standard of what your customers need. Provide your skills in a new way to show your customers the possibilities beyond what they think they require." And from my ice cream taster, "Keep your reputation strong; be known as a person of integrity."

My mother was famous for saying, "The truth will set you free." I don't think she would mind if I alter her mantra just a little bit. Honestly evaluating who you are and what you have to offer is key. Truth in advertising will set you free.

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Dynamic and exciting, Linda Gorham engages her audiences by using movement, humor, and sometimes zaniness as she tells imaginative folktales (and more!) updated with "*attitude!*" Her stories, keynotes, and history programs inspire, entertain, and inspire all ages. Linda performs internationally as a storyteller, speaker, and workshop presenter. Since 1989, in addition to her work in schools and libraries, Linda has customized programs for festivals, museums, keynotes, conferences, staff development, and corporations.