

Great storytelling nailed

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I assume by now, like me, you've seen amateur filmmaker Phil Beastall's short Christmas film, Love is a Gift. And I assume, like me, a lump came to your throat as the story unfolds. You perhaps even shed a tear. If you've not seen it, watch it now before you read on, and even if you have, watch it again, please.

Why did it make us feel like this? Why did it go viral, generating more than 6 million views? Why was he invited to talk about his film on Good Morning Britain? And why are fans suggesting he make John Lewis's next Xmas ad?

I think it's not only his central message – reminding us that family comes first (especially at

this time of year) – but the quality of his storytelling that has truly touched people. Great stories are highly emotive and can be used to great effect; changing behaviour, perceptions and attitudes or creating lasting and deeper connections between people and brands.

So how do we go about learning to tell great stories?

Well for me there is no better place to start than Pixar or rather former Pixar employee Emma Coats who back in 2011 tweeted a series of observations on storytelling. These tweets were subsequently compiled into a list with the heading “Pixar’s 22 Rules of Storytelling” (although she described them as “a mix of things learned from directors & coworkers at Pixar, listening to writers & directors talk about their craft, and via trial and error in the making of my own films.”).

Nonetheless they make for excellent reading and though you can Google them to get to the specifics the essence of it can be summed up as:

- Great storytelling needs structure, a ‘story spine’
- The story should be relatable, making the audience experience the same feelings as its narrator or characters
- These feelings will appeal to one or more of our deepest emotions; anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, surprise etc.
- The story must serve a greater purpose and teach us something
- It should challenge or change our perception of reality in some way, leaving us thinking about the story well after it is over
- It should have a character to root for, one with a journey not just a destination
- Also keep it simple and focussed

Now watch Love is a Gift again. Great storytelling nailed. Wishing you a happy Christmas spent with your family, friends and loved ones.

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