

# Upgrade Your Customer Journey Maps to **Value Story Maps**

Sharpen your focus,  
deepen your insights, and  
discover new opportunities  
for more ...



Authentic  
Marketing



Inspiring  
Offers



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Services

# Time to update your customer journey maps?

Maybe you have new customer research that seems to tell a different story.

Or maybe you need new research because your customers, competition, or own products and services have changed.

Or maybe it's just that the original surge of empathy has faded, the company's overall customer focus has blurred, and too many internal stakeholders have drifted back to business-as-usual.

Whatever the situation, the question is: Could the process of generating new customer insights be better this time?

More important, what have you been missing that could make all the difference in gaining new customers, delighting users, and turning existing customers into enthusiastic brand advocates?

In this overview I'll explain the value story mapping process and why learning "value story thinking" is like getting a major upgrade to your customer experience insight abilities.

Specifically, you will learn how to:

- Reveal the ***transformational storyline*** that is critical to your success yet often missing or under-developed in traditional journey maps.
- Recognize the different ***phases*** of a journey from your customer's perspective and focus on the ***pivotal decisions*** that matter most.
- Build a ***sensemaking hypothesis*** to uncover the "why" behind your customer's pivotal decisions.
- Develop a strong, trust-based relationship with your customers by moving beyond the transactional role of ***Provider/Enabler*** to also fulfill the transformational roles of ***Empathizer, Storyteller, Guide,*** and ***Partner***.

My goal in sharing this overview is to spark a new perspective on customer and user experiences for those marketers, designers, product managers, and service professionals who truly care about building trust-based, value-driven customer relationships.

Happy mapping!

Michael



## Contents

The Power of Stories . . . . .	1
Why Customer Journey Maps Are Only Half of the Story . .	2
The Master Storyteller’s Secret . . . . .	3
Value Story Mapping Process . . . . .	5
Step 1: Frame the Journey as a Value Story . . . . .	6
Step 2: Build a Sensemaking Hypothesis . . . . .	10
Step 4: Identify Your Key Roles . . . . .	14
Using Your Value Story Map . . . . .	20



# The Power of Stories

Business success today is intimately tied to delivering better customer and user experiences, from high-level customer journeys down to individual moments.

That makes it critical for marketing, product design, and service professionals to understand how their customers make decisions and calculate value.

But understanding your customers in a way that is meaningful and actionable for your business is surprisingly difficult.

Tools and processes designed to help gain that understanding are usually based on storytelling ... and for good reason.

We humans are wired to think in stories in order to understand the world around us.

You can think of the human brain as a continuous prediction machine that uses past experiences, current context, inner drives, and sensemaking stories to continuously interpret what just happened and decide what to do next.

These stories that we (mostly unconsciously) tell ourselves from moment to moment are not just any type of story. They are problem-solving stories.

It could be a tiny problem that we solve completely unconsciously, such as where to place our next step as we walk down the street.

Or it could be a big problem that we spend hours consciously reasoning about, such as whether to accept that job or buy that house.



# Why Most Customer Journey Maps Only Tell Half of the Story

Customer journey maps are a popular tool to leverage the power of storytelling to spark empathy among company insiders.

A journey map calls out the major events in a customer experience as they interact with a company and its products or services.

This story-based approach can be a great way to highlight specific points of friction or delight and make otherwise dry customer data more meaningful.

But traditional journey maps haven't kept up with the some of the emerging challenges that companies face today. Specifically, it's harder than ever to:

- Distill the truckloads of customer data and myriad of possible journey paths down to a clear and focused storyline for each customer type.
- Generate deeper insights that spark more innovative ideas by going beyond who, what, where, when, and how to answer the most important question of all: Why?
- Show internal cross-functional stakeholders how the roles they play in their customers' experiences have a cumulative effect on their company's success.

A few years ago, I decided to tackle these challenges and started to look for a better way to model customer and user experiences.

I took a deep dive into the latest cognitive science behind human decision making and the surprising revelations from the relatively new field of behavioral economics.

I studied the craft of storytelling, including how and why people respond so strongly and predictably to certain story structures.

I researched some of the most successful brands to learn how they stay relevant by fulfilling certain roles in their customers' stories.

As my research progressed, a pattern started to emerge.

Eventually, I realized that I had seen this pattern before.

In fact, it had been a big part of my successes over the course of my career as a marketing, product, and design manager, although

***Traditional journey maps haven't kept up with the some of the emerging challenges.***

I didn't recognize it at the time.

I also saw how the pattern had been missing or misused in more than a few of my failures.

Now, after many iterations, and some hit-and-miss testing with clients, I've refined that pattern down to its essentials elements.

I call this pattern a Value Story Map and I've found that the process of (re)framing customer journey maps as value story maps never fails to spark a fresh perspective, even for those who have successfully used customer journey maps for a while.

So what makes a value story map a better way to think about customer and user experiences? It's all about how the customer's story is *framed*.

(It's no coincidence that the most popular stories in books and movies follow the same essential value story pattern.)

## The Master Storyteller's Secret

After watching a good movie or reading a good book you can probably describe some of your favorite parts and explain why you liked them.

But, unless you're a master storyteller, you're probably not aware of exactly what makes the overall story so good.



Master storytellers understand that it is the story's structure - things like story arcs and character transformations - that make a story resonate with the audience.

When they experience someone else's story they can automatically see the fundamental story structure and how it all fits together (or falls apart).

So, if the goal of a customer journey map is to better understand the customer's story so we can make it the best it can be while making our own business success story better ...

*What is the master storyteller's secret?*

The answer is that every really good story actually has two storylines.

## One Story, Two Storylines

The first storyline is obvious: it's about what happens in the story. In value story maps, I call this the *Transactional Storyline*.

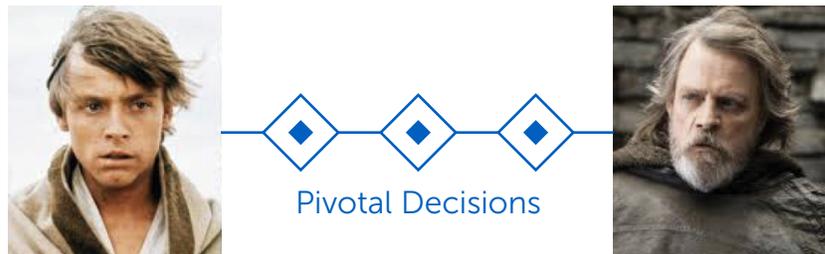
This is the sequence of events, customer actions, and interactions with your products or services that make up the main plot line of the story.



This transactional storyline is what traditional customer journey maps tend to focused on.

But there is a second storyline, that I call the *Transformational Storyline*, which is about how the hero changes over the course of their journey.

These changes are not just the result of what happens but more about how the hero responds by making certain pivotal decisions.



While the transactional storyline emphasizes external events, the transformational storyline is about the inner world of the hero.

In a value story, like any good story, these two storylines are interwoven with each other and are both essential to understanding the customer experience from their perspective.

The transactional story is important because it shows which customer interactions are working well and which are causing friction as the customer searches for and engages with solutions to their challenges.

But the transformational storyline is even more important to your long-term success.

**Transactional:**  
*Things happen*

**Transformational:**  
*People change*

Why?

Because true business success requires more than transactions. It requires building a relationship with the customer.

To build a strong, positive, long-term relationship, your customer must change how they think about your company, products, and services – and maybe even how they think about the whole product or service category.

Crucially, they must also change how they see themselves.

Unfortunately, one of the most common mistakes made in using story-based tools like customer journey maps is to over-focus on the transactional storyline.

This is understandable. Business success is generally measured by transactions. Units sold, Usage metrics.

Also, transactions are tangible events, which are easy to understand and to adjust as needed.

In contrast, the transformational storyline takes place mostly in the mind of the customer, which is much more difficult to research and understand.

But, like it or not, the mind of the customer is where the most important thoughts, feelings, and pivotal decisions take place.

## The Value Story Mapping Process

The value story mapping process has three steps:

1. Frame the journey as a value story
2. Build a sensemaking hypothesis
3. Identify your key roles

But before we begin, I need to note a few important caveats:

### Caveat 1: No Magic Canvas

When I first discovered the concept of a value story map I thought I needed to create a single, standard visual template for everyone to use. That turned out to be impossible.

Just as there is no standard graphical layout for a customer journey map (although there are helpful common conventions) there is no one-size-fits-all form for a value story map to take.



In other words, there is no magic canvas. The magic is in learning to “think in value stories” in order to see your products and services from the outside in.

## **Caveat 2: The Map Is Not the Territory**

Obviously, all customers and users are unique and any model of human behavior, especially if it’s attempting to “get inside the head” of a generalized customer persona, is going to be an extremely simplified representation of reality.

That said, if you don’t attempt to understand the customer’s story from their perspective and set the stage for a positive transformational relationship, all you are left with is your own product/service/feature-oriented insider perspectives.

In today’s world of increasing customer expectations, that company-as-hero approach just won’t cut it.

## **Caveat 3: The Model is Linear, the Mind Is Not**

Value story maps are not meant to actually model customer thinking. That would be way too ambitious and the resulting model would be too complex to be useful.

Instead, the main purpose of a value story map is to reveal the most essential elements using the kind of cause-and-effect story form that we humans tend to use to understand new things.

The goal is to sharpen your both your conscious and intuitive thinking, rather than try to capture every convoluted nuance of the customer’s thinking.

With those caveats in mind, let’s look at the three steps:

## **Step 1: Frame the Journey as a Value Story**

Framing is the art of building a mental model that reveals the essential aspects of something while hiding the non-essentials.

The frame you use to understand something will profoundly affect the way you think about it and the conclusions you come to. Or, to put it another way, the answer you get depends on how you ask the question.

*Framing is the art of building a mental model that reveals the essential aspects of something while hiding the non-essentials*

The quickest way to understand something new is to connect it to something familiar. So, when trying to understand the messy world of human behavior, it is tempting to frame your customer research results using a familiar a business-centric model.

Here is a diagram of a common product-focused framework:



A traditional framework like this may yield useful insights but it is also a mental trap because it shifts your focus away from the customer and back to your story.

This premature translation from the customer's world back into your own will tend to overemphasize the transactional storyline and keep you and your colleagues thinking inside the familiar product/service/feature-oriented box.

In contrast, the structure of a value story focuses your attention on certain pivotal decisions that ultimately determine the direction and outcome of the transformational storyline.

The transactional storyline is still there in the events and interactions that take place during the phases of the value story between the pivotal decisions.

Here is a diagram of the value story framework:



At the center of every value story is a pivotal investment decision, with a **Challenge** phase leading up to it and an **Engagement** phase following it.

This pivotal investment is usually a first purchase event but could be some other key point of commitment that transitions our hero from the role of searching for a solution to trying one out.

On either end of the core value story there are two phases that are often overlooked.

The Imbalance phase leads up to the Intention decision. This

phase may be trivial for commodity products but extremely important if your company is introducing something totally new.

On the other end, the Interpretation of the initial engagement triggers the Transformation phase where, as the name suggests, most of those inner changes take place in the hero (or, at least, solidify).

This phase presents an opportunity to turn a mere customer into an enthusiastic brand advocate. (Of course, the opposite can also happen if the customer interprets the experience negatively.)

As an example, here is a super simple value story ...

A value story always starts with a particular customer type in mind, in the form of a persona or avatar. In this case, our persona is Molly the Team Leader.

Molly is relatively new to her leadership role and wants to be sure she's providing the right tools and environment for her team to collaborate effectively.



Molly's value story kicks off with an **Inciting Incident**. Molly is trying to straighten out a misunderstanding among a few team members due to some disjointed email threads.

This inciting incident triggers an awareness in Molly that she has an **Imbalance**. Specifically, she is beginning to realize that using email as a collaboration tool isn't working very well.

Molly's sense of imbalance grows as she sees her team spending a lot of time sorting through irrelevant messages, clarifying who's responding to who, and trying to find past emails by topic.

Finally, Molly gets fed up and decides to find a better solution.



This **Intention** decision triggers the **Challenge** phase, in which she focuses on finding the best collaboration tool for her team.

After a fair amount of research and input from her team, Molly



makes a pivotal *Investment* decision to sign up for a trial Slack account, which triggers her *Engagement* phase.

As Molly and her team have the usual ups and downs as they use Slack every day to collaborate on their projects and work their way through the learning curve.



Eventually, Molly develops a very positive *Interpretation* of her experience. She feels that the new tool has improved her team's productivity and morale, so she signs up for a full year.

Over time, a *Transformation* takes place as Molly's continued experience with Slack changes how she thinks about online collaboration and even how she sees herself as a team leader.



In the end there is a strong Integration of Slack into Molly's work life and the company has another enthusiastic brand advocate.

(At least until the daily barrage of Slack notifications triggers a new Imbalance phase.)

Note that in this example the pivotal investment is not the actual purchase. This is common with software-as-a-service products like Slack because the customer's decision to invest time, effort and content during a trial is often the more pivotal investment.

By inserting these pivotal decision points into the journey sequence, you are anchoring the story to the transformational storyline while showing the cumulative effects of the events in the transactional storyline.

These pivot points are, literally, the intersection of what matters most to the customer and what matters most to the business.

## Step 2: Build a Sensemaking Hypothesis

Cognitive psychology and social sciences, including the relatively new area of behavioral economics, have made great strides over the last couple of decades. We now know more than ever about the human brain and how people make decisions, including that:

- 95% of our brain activity is unconscious.
- We are always taking mental shortcuts to conserve energy.
- In spite of how rational we think we are, there is some emotion at the core of every decision we make.
- We are social creatures, who are profoundly influenced by what others (might) think about us.
- We use sensemaking stories to justify our decisions to ourselves and to others.



While traditional customer journey maps have evolved to place more emphasis on a customer's thoughts and feelings, merely highlighting the emotional ups and downs of an experience doesn't actually tell us much about how it all adds up to a specific decision or a customer transformation.

Instead, the tendency is to focus on the individual transactions that seem to cause these emotional highs and lows. But emotions are not just the outcome of events. They are often also the drivers of customer decisions.

The value story mapping process avoids glossing over these important emotional dynamics by diving deeper into "why".

You do this by first choosing one of the four journey phases to focus on and then building a sensemaking hypothesis for the pivotal decision that happens at the end of that phase.

There are three steps to building this sensemaking hypothesis:

1. Review the customer's context
2. List the potential motivators
3. Describe explicit and implicit sensemaking stories

Here is how it works:

# 1. Review the customer's context

The contextual backdrop of any decision is more important than many people realize. You should at least briefly review the following factors before attempting a sensemaking hypothesis:

- Identity (personality, values, beliefs, affiliations)
- Backstory (relevant past experiences)
- Situation (environment and circumstances).

## Identity

A well developed persona (a.k.a. avatar) will describe the relevant values, beliefs, and affiliations for a particular customer type. Other information, such as demographics (age, gender, etc.), may or may not be relevant to building a sensemaking hypothesis.

### *Thought starters:*

- What values or beliefs play into how they see their imbalance and challenge?
- What values or beliefs, are likely to influence their expectations as they interact with your solutions?
- What relevant brand or community affiliations have already become a part of their self identity?

## Backstory

The customer's backstory will shape their expectations and feed into their potential motivators.

Of course, there can be many nuanced influences from the past so, to keep your hypothesis simple and focused, only consider the most clearly relevant experiences.

### *Thought starters:*

- Have they experienced similar imbalances, challenges, and solution engagements before?
- Was that past experience a success or failure or something in between?
- Have they experienced your brand in other categories?
- Have they experienced competitive solutions?

## Situation

A common mistake in customer journeys is to overemphasize the role of a customer's general characteristics, such as personality, or their backstory and underestimate the power of the situation itself.

The reality is that the same person can make decisions that are cautious or risky, thoughtful or impulsive, or other contrasting behaviors, depending on the circumstances and environment they are faced with at the time of the decision.

The situation is essentially the more immediate backstory of the focus phase itself. Because these events and interactions are so recent and relevant, they can have an out-sized impact on the outcome of the phase.

### *Thought starters:*

- How might their physical environment or state of their own body influence them? Example: the sight and smell of delicious food when feeling hungry.
- Which moments during the focus phase are likely to be the most memorable? Examples: first impression, any peak experiences, the very last moment.
- What are their social circumstances? Example: Are they alone or with others (family, friends, colleagues, boss).

## 2. List the potential motivators

Based on your customer knowledge (ideally, through qualitative customer research), list the motivators that are involved in the customer's pivotal decision under the following categories:

### **Functional Goals**

The functional goals are simply whatever the customer hopes to accomplish within the value story to meet their functional needs. This is usually the most fundamental motivator.

Keep in mind, however, that the product or service itself is rarely the functional goal (unless the customer is an early adopter or a collector). Usually, the customer's functional goal is a quarter-inch hole, not a quarter-inch drill bit.

### *Thought starters:*

- Intention: What do they need to know before they will



get serious about solving their imbalance? Examples:  
What is it costing me to live with this problem? Are there any solutions? Are there (too many) choices?

- Investment: what results are they are looking for?  
Examples: Satisfy their hunger; Have a means of transportation: Get diagnosed and treated.
- Interpretation: Why do they need to take a stand at all?  
Examples: They're being asked in a survey or by a friend; They need to decide whether to sign up after a trial.



## Rational Approach

The rational approach is how the customer thinks about the their problem and about the path to a solution. This includes any mental models that break the challenge down into parts or steps.

### *Thought starters:*

- How do they simplify their decision? Do they create a shortlist based on a few key criteria? Do they look to experts or trusted friends/family (or online strangers)?
- For this kind of decision, do they tend to be primarily promotion-focused (looking for a gain) or prevention-focused (trying to avoid a loss)?



## Social Influences

The social influences are about the customer's hopes, fears, and expectations about what other people might think of their decision and how it might impact their relationships.

Social norms and cultural perspectives can also play a big role in a customer's decision, especially in terms of setting the boundaries of acceptable decision options.

### *Thought starters:*

- Will anyone be passing judgment on their decision?  
Examples: Friends, family, managers, colleagues, online community members.
- Are they trying to impress someone or gain status? Will their decision impact their current social status?
- Will the decision put some community affiliations at risk? Is it at odds with their stated or implied values or ideologies?



## Emotional Drivers

The emotional drivers are the customer's inner challenges and goals that drive much of the outer thinking and behavior. These include their hopes, fears, and expectations about the specific pivotal decision that they are facing.

These internal needs are often rooted in the customer's insecurities. Most customers want to be the hero of their story but don't feel fully confident that they have what it takes to do that.

For instance, they may feel that they don't know enough about the product category. Or perhaps they are unconsciously concerned that they will feel foolish (or, worse, look foolish to others) as they try to learn and use your product.

### *Thought starters:*

- What do they fear they will feel after their decision?  
Examples: Will their lack of knowledge lead to a decision they will regret? Can they learn what they need to learn?
- What do they hope to feel after their decision? Examples: A sense of accomplishment; To feel safe and secure; To feel smart;

## 3. Describe the sensemaking stories

Sensemaking stories are the stories that a person creates – consciously and unconsciously – in order to justify their decision to themselves and others.

When you attempt to describe a sensemaking story for a certain customer type facing a certain pivotal decision you are hypothesizing about which potential motivators are active as well as how those driving forces might be filtered and prioritized.

Sensemaking stories come in two flavors:

The **Explicit Story** is what we are willing to tell others and admit to ourselves. It is often centered on the customer's functional goals and rational approach.

This type of sensemaking is what you will hear if you directly ask a customer why they made a certain choice and it is often biased towards what we believe would make sense to others.

The **Implicit Story** can be similar to the explicit story but it is often quite different because it is based on a very different set of filters

### Molly's Explicit Story:

*"I'm tired of the wheel spinning with email. Slack looks like it will help us be more productive. There must be a reason it's so popular. Besides, I'm just signing up for a trial - I'll know more in a couple of weeks before I have to commit."*

### Molly's Implicit Story:

*Molly is frustrated with email but also concerned about how the team will respond to a change. Finding the right solution and learning new software feels daunting but she also senses her team's morale is slipping. Not taking action could be worse. She feels embarrassed about her lack of knowledge and wants to go with proven solution.*

and priorities (especially if there are strong social or emotional forces involved).

The implicit story is mostly unconscious and **not** something you are going to learn through a typical survey. Most people are reluctant to admit to anything that might sound irrational or foolish.

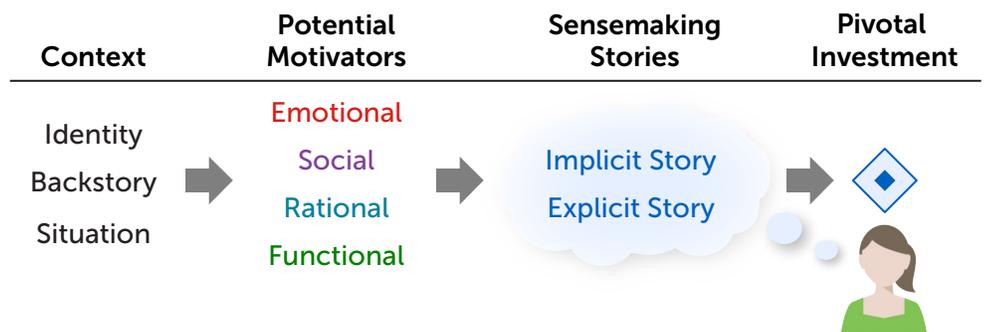
Also, even the most self-aware and candid person does not have conscious access to all of their unconscious sensemaking.

As an example, see the sensemaking hypothesis for Molly's pivotal Investment decision on the sidebar.

Tip: To get into the right frame of mind for sensemaking stories, it helps to write the explicit story from a first-person perspective and the implicit story as an omniscient narrator.

#### Thought starters:

- Of the potential functional, rational, social, and emotional motivators that you identified earlier, which ones are likely to dominate in their implicit story?
- What explicit story might be used by the customer to give themselves permission to indulge in a more socially or emotionally driven decision?



### Side Note: Why educated guessing is essential

Keep in mind that you are building a **hypothesis** that you may never be able to "prove" since it involves unconscious motivations and justifications (although certain qualitative research methods can give you a good idea if you are on track or way off base).

I recognize that this part may be a challenge in some business environments that pride themselves on being "data-driven" but, no matter how much data you have, it will need to be interpreted.

If you leave it to software algorithms, the interpretations will be based on correlations rather than causation. This has the advantage of countering your own cognitive biases and can be amazingly powerful.

However, by making the conscious effort to hypothesize a cause - to trace the motivators and sensemaking behind the pivotal decisions - you and your team will be in a much better mental position to generate the kind of deep customer insights that lead to more creative improvements or even outright innovative leaps.

## Step 3: Identify Your Key Roles

At this point, it can be tempting to jump directly into brainstorming ideas for improving customer experiences.

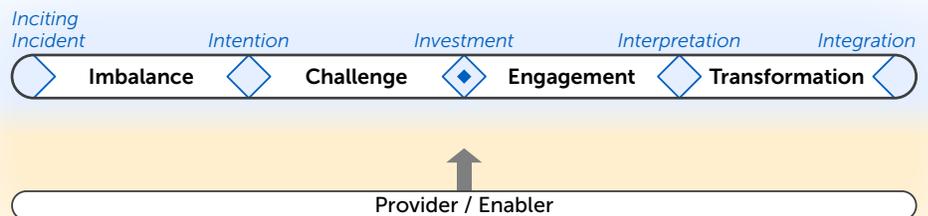
However, if you drop back into your own story too soon, you will naturally start focusing on individual parts of the transactional story and could miss out on the bigger prize of a successful customer transformation.

Instead, this third and final step in the mapping process will ensure that you stay both customer-focused and business-relevant by considering the roles you play in both of the customer's storylines.

## Transactional Roles

There are two fundamental (and rather obvious) roles that are a part of every transactional storyline. The first is your role as a Provider of products, services, and information.

The second is your role as an Enabler to the customer as they try to access the value you have provided.



The Provider role tends to dominate in the first half of the value story leading up to the pivotal investment while the Enabler role is more dominant as the customer engages with your solution.

Of course, you are still a provider throughout the journey, especially if you offer services, such as customer support, that only apply to the engagement or transformation phases of the journey.

Likewise, your role as an enabler may come into play early in the journey as the customer uses your website or other touchpoints to research their imbalance or start looking for a solution.

The best way to fulfill the roles of provider and enabler vary based by industry and business model, so I won't attempt to provide advice on that in this overview.

Instead, I'll focus on some phase-specific roles that support the transformational storyline by building a trust-based relationship with the customer.

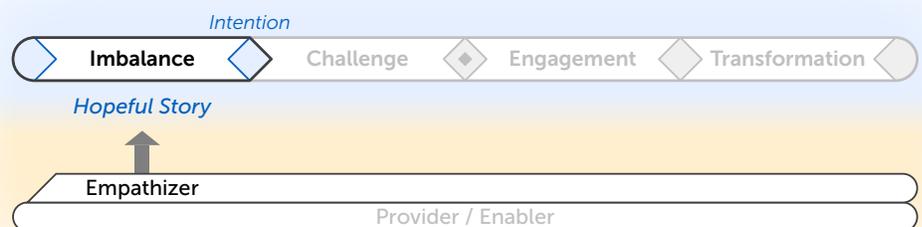
## Transformational Roles

There are four phase-specific roles that can be especially effective in developing a successful transformational storyline:

- Empathizer
- Storyteller
- Guide
- Partner

These are all about building a trust-based relationship and are layered on top of the Provider/Enabler foundation.

Here is a general overview of each one.



## Empathizer

During the Imbalance phase, your goal is to get the uncommitted prospect to finally decide to take action to meet their need.

As an Empathizer, you will need to consider the functional, rational, social, and emotional factors that are driving your prospect towards a firm intention to find a solution.

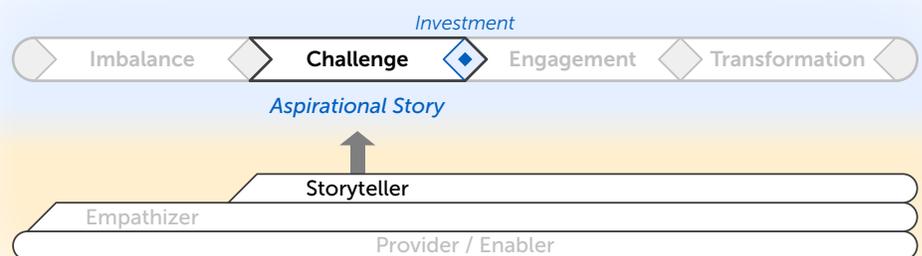
For those prospects who are either unaware of their need or just don't know that it can be solved, your empathetic marketing messages could turn out to be the inciting incident that sparks their first awareness of their imbalance.

This gives you a chance to shape your prospect's understanding of their problem in a way that will put your product or service in the best light later, when they finally decide to look for a solution.

For all prospects, this phase is an opportunity to plant the seed of trust by showing that you truly understand their imbalance.

Ultimately, your messages should provide your prospect with a **Hopeful** sensemaking story about their imbalance that will give them a plausible justification for deciding to take action.

The Empathizer role starts in the Imbalance phase but it doesn't end there. You should always look for ways to empathize, even as you take on other roles during later phases of the journey.



## Storyteller

Once your prospective customer has decided to find a solution, your role as Provider dictates that you deliver the relevant functional information about your particular offering. But, if that's all you do, you'll be missing a huge opportunity.

What your prospective customer really wants is to be the hero in a story in which they make a smart choice and everyone lives happily ever after.

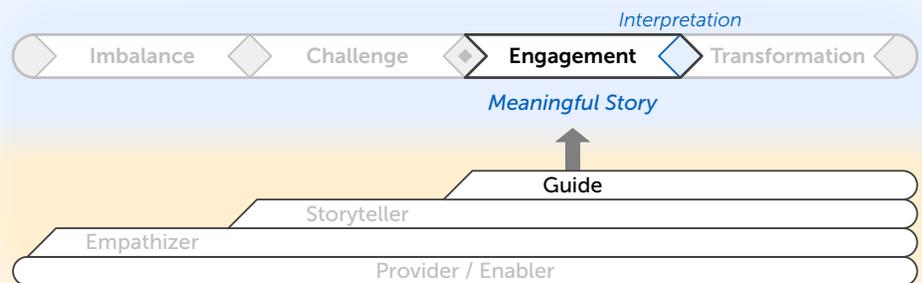
Your most important role during the Challenge phase is as a Storyteller who inspires an **Aspirational** sensemaking story in mind of the customer that will justify their pivotal decision to invest in your solution.

It's important to note that, even though you are a Storyteller, you can't actually spoon feed the Aspirational story to the customer.

They have to build it themselves using the stories you tell for inspiration. Master storytellers know this as the “show-me-don’t-tell-me” rule.

This aspirational story should also clearly show how you will be the experienced Guide, helping them every step of the way to get the most value out of their investment.

Therefore, a big part of your role as a Storyteller is to preview your upcoming roles as a Provider, Enabler, and Guide, should the customer decide to invest.



## Guide

Once a prospect becomes a customer by investing in your solution, you should focus on getting them through the Engagement phase to a **Meaningful** sensemaking story that triggers the beginning of a real transformation.

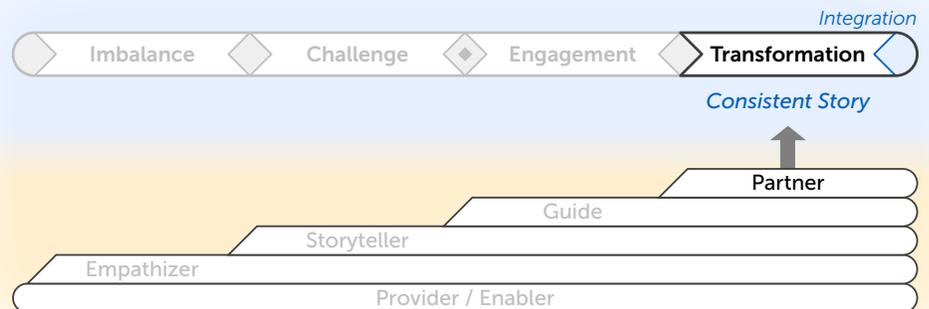
To understand what I mean by “meaningful” consider the times when you engaged with a product or service and, although the experience and outcome were good, it wasn’t meaningful enough to cause you to change how you think or act in the future.

For instance, you meet a friend at a restaurant you’ve never been to before. Although you’re happy with the experience, the next time it’s your choice, you go back to one of your old favorites without really considering that new place again.

In other words, you can form an intention, make an investment, and even have a positive interpretation without a meaningful sensemaking story that triggers a transformation in your journey.

Fulfilling your role as a Guide, typically through a well-designed product or service that fulfills the promises made in the Challenge phase, not only builds trust but is often the way in which you meet your customer’s inner social and emotional challenges as well.

Your roles as Empathizer and Storyteller continue during the engagement phase but your new emphasis on practical guidance is how you will prove to the customer that your empathy and storytelling have been authentic from the beginning.



## Partner

While the transformational storyline has (hopefully) been building all along, the Transformation phase is a period in which your relationship with the customer is consolidated and strengthened into a true partnership.

Unlike your other roles, the role of Partner is not about the customer's current needs. It's about the future. And the only thing certain about the future these days is that it's quite uncertain.

That's why, more than ever, customers are looking for trustworthy brands with a clear purpose and relatable values that support a **Consistent** sensemaking story.

So, in a way, the role of Partner is really about how reliably you will continue to:

- Empathize with their imbalances and throughout their relationship with your brand.
- Show them how to make their stories better by providing new solutions.
- Enable them to extract the full value of those solutions.
- Anticipate their needs as you guide them to success.

The more you consistently you fulfill the role of Partner, the more likely your customers will deeply integrate and personally identify with your brand. Ultimately, the customer must feel that the two of you, together, can take on whatever the future might bring within your product or service domain.

# Using Your Value Story Map

Now that you have thoroughly (re)framed the customer journey, it's finally time to evaluate your messaging touchpoints and product and service interactions during your focus phase.

I'll admit, this is more work than most people put into the framing process but it gets easier as you learn to "think in value stories". More important, the payoff is huge!

With the traditional customer journey mapping process you are very likely to over-focus on the transactional storyline and miss the bigger opportunity waiting in the transformational storyline.

With value story mapping process, you build a strategic framework that is firmly grounded in the pivotal decisions that matter most, the sensemaking process that justify those decisions, and the trust-building roles you play in your customer's transformation.

Now, with your value story map as your mental model, all you need to do to evaluate an experience is ask how well it:

- Supports your target sensemaking stories (or inspires even better ones!)
- Fulfills your roles in the customer's overall value story

Then take your evaluations and turn insight into opportunity by brainstorming, prototyping, and testing new ideas.

## Your Next Pivotal Decision

I hope your investment in reading about value story mapping will spark some new and useful ways of thinking about your customers and their experiences.

Although there is no once-size-fits-all magic canvas for creating a value story map, I do plan to provide templates, cheat sheets, and other materials that are tailored to specific types of businesses.

Meanwhile, I'm [available](#) to help with workshops, coaching, or just a brief (and free) consultation to kick-start the value story mapping process for your unique situation.

Of course, in the end, it's up to you and your team to combine your own expertise with your new skill of value story thinking to deliver more authentic messages, inspiring offers, innovative designs, and responsive services. ♦



*Please share your thoughts about value story mapping at: [www.likewhys.com/vsm-feedback](http://www.likewhys.com/vsm-feedback)*