



## The Power of One - What every business leader can learn from Kevin Rudd's apology speech

When watching Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's apology speech to Indigenous Australians, what part stood out for you? At what stage did you become really connected and engaged? If you're like many Australians who have spoken to us since that historic morning, you will probably be thinking about the Nanna Nungala Fejo story.

All business leaders can benefit from looking at Rudd's apology speech and reflecting on why it was so successful. Even seasoned political journalist Laurie Oakes made comments to the effect that in his decades of politics he had never seen such a positive reaction to a speech in parliament.

People will have various opinions on why it was such a success but from my perspective, as an organisational storyteller, I believe that there were four factors that contributed to its success and these are 'essential takeaways' for every business leader.

**Use story:** Firstly, and most importantly, Kevin Rudd used a story. The Nanna Nungala Fejo's story. This story demonstrated the power of story. It created a connection and it made us care. Logic alone does not, and cannot do what that story did.

**Address concerns with both logic and emotion:** Secondly, Rudd was fully aware of his audience - the entire Australian public, and understood that some of them would have concerns. He chose to address the concerns head on. He spoke to the people who believed we should not apologise for mistakes of past generations.

*“Logic alone does not, and cannot do what that story did.”*

He gave valid reasons why, explaining that this was still happening in the 1970's and that if we can enjoy the benefits of past generations then we should also deal with their burdens. All valid and all logical. But probably the most powerful point was when he said 'Imagine for a moment, if this had happened to you?' There will always be people who will disagree about the apology but think for a moment how much harder it would be to argue this case if your child had been physically removed from you for no valid reason; I know you would agree that an apology would matter to you then!

The 'imagine if' link personalises the experience because we do just that, we start to imagine what it would be like for us. This created an emotional connection with the viewers and resonated with the Australian audience.

**Take the time to find authentic stories:** Thirdly, The Nanna Nungala Fejo's story was an authentic story that came from Rudd himself. Yes the actual wording of the apology had been finely tuned by a number of people, but what the Prime Minister did was bring those words from paper to life, with an authentically true story. What he spoke about was what he took from his face-to-face conversation with Nanna. In politics, like in the business world, it's no secret that we often have script writers, media advisors and internal corporate affairs to write our presentations and communication material. Let's face it, we simply don't have the time.

***“He listened. At least he listened, and no one else listened.”***

As a business leader, if you want your messages to stick, my suggestion is simple; make the time. If you want to engage and connect with your employees, customers and stakeholders - make the time. After the speech, Kevin Rudd sought out Nanna Nungala Fejo and asked her what she thought. Apparently, she replied with a resounding thumbs-up and a big hug. Rudd in turn thanked her for being able to tell her story. And rightly so, because when someone tells you a story like Nanna's they are giving you a valuable gift. Yet still, there are many of us in the business world who do not see stories in this way.

**Story listen:** Finally, to be a good storyteller, you need to be a good story listener. Listening to your people's stories has numerous benefits. Making the time to listen to your people's stories, really listen, will not only test potential strategies but guide future direction. The experiences of the people you work with can become powerful stories that can help you get your key messages across in an engaging way. They can reinforce desired values, behaviours and actions. And in addition to all of that, listening to your people makes them feel respected and engaged.

As Nanna Nungala Fejo said in response to Rudd's speech *“He listened. At least he listened, and no one else listened.”*

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*To listen to the full apology go to <http://media.smh.com.au/?rid=35435>*