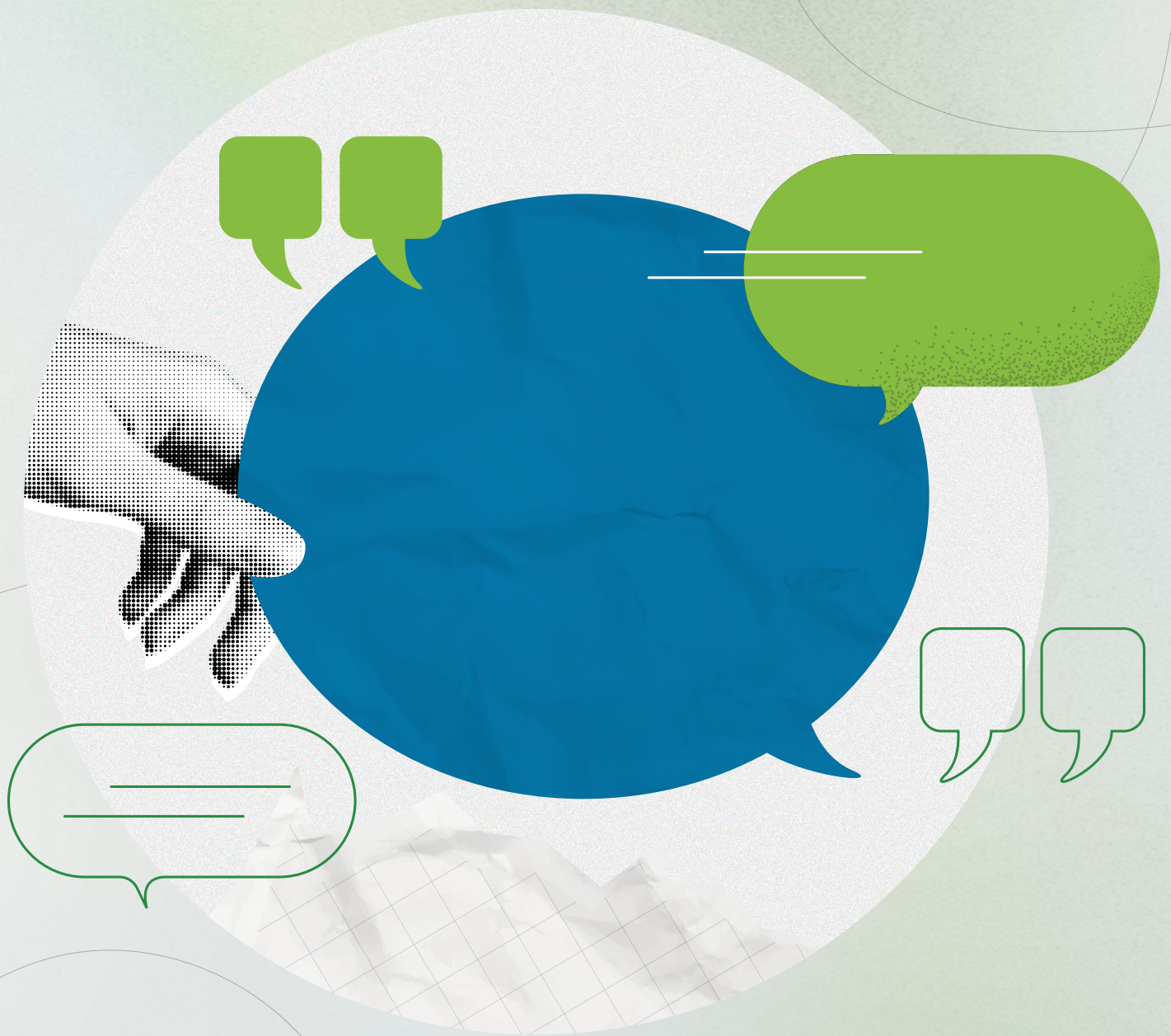


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Stories that *resonate*

Judy Marks, CEO of Otis Worldwide, tells stories that inspire and become memorable.

Great storytelling does more than recount a series of events, it captures the emotional weight of uncertainty, the tension of high-stakes decisions, and the exhilaration of moments that matter. These emotions often linger with us long after the story ends. One such story came from Judy Marks, Chair, CEO, and President of Otis Worldwide Corporation, when she was a guest on [Fortune's Leadership Next podcast](#).¹ Marks shared a story about a pivotal moment as she prepared the company for its relisting as a publicly traded company. It was during the COVID-19 pandemic a time filled with uncertainty as shutdowns loomed, plans were disrupted, and executives, including Marks, had to make quick choices about protecting the health and safety of colleagues and the riding public—all while physically isolated:



"I was doing this from home, as many of us were. And it was the first day that the Otis Board was officially active following the spinoff. We had met a few times before....but everything was being done real time. We had to act fast, because we provide an essential service. Remember, if we couldn't service elevators in hospitals and in transit [centers], people weren't going to survive."



Marks' description of working from home is a prime example of what we call *texture*: the addition of key details that tell an audience what you were thinking or feeling throughout your experience as a way of connecting to listeners, which in this case is especially powerful as it may resonate with their experiences working from home. Of the four components our research has identified as key to building an effective "CEO story"—grounding, telling, texture, and framing—texture is perhaps the most powerful, yet often least acknowledged.² Texture allows a storyteller to connect with audiences by sharing sensory and cognitive details that are relatable and personal.

Stories that resonate: Judy Marks, CEO of Otis Worldwide, tells stories that inspire and become memorable.

At the heart of the framework are four core elements:

Ground it

Ask yourself

What details are needed to understand the events?

What it does

Signals *who* you are

Tell it

Ask yourself

What happened?

What it does

Establishes a plot and keeps the audience engaged

Add texture

Ask yourself

What was I thinking or feeling?

What it does

Conveys authenticity and invites connection

Frame it

Ask yourself

How do I want the audience to interpret the story?

What it does

Guides meaning and highlights what matters most

Imagine reuniting with a friend and telling them about a recent trip. You describe the views of the ocean, the sounds of the waves, the meals you had, the dance hits at a late-night hotspot, and the daily stops at the ice cream shop. It's almost as if you can still taste the sweetness of the ice cream or feel the texture of the sand along the shore. These details engage the mind and senses, enticing the listener to experience, or think, the same things.

Marks' story is rich in such texture, taking the audience through her emotional journey and enhancing her relatability as she grounds the details in the context of an IPO. In our own experience working with executives, leaders often express goals of enhancing their communication to build connection, authenticity, and memorability and our research confirms that stories create resonance and stick in an audience's minds.³

What follows is an analysis of Marks' story as told by her on Fortune's Leadership Next podcast. Our aim: to demonstrate that powerful storytelling is not as hard as one might think.

Texture in action

Marks begins her story by running through her journey to her leadership role, including a spinoff from a former parent company to eventually become Otis Worldwide Corporation. She vividly described the emotional weight of the moment, the resilience required to navigate it, and the tangible achievements that made the experience feel real for all. Texture is the element that transforms a simple recount into a living experience. It is the detailed brushstroke that captures the sounds, sights, and feelings of a moment. Judy Marks excels at adding texture to her story. What can other leaders learn from this?

1

Share experiences to build connections

Grounding a story means outlining the environment, the challenges, and the stakes from the outset. For instance, when Marks recounts her journey during the onset of the pandemic, she immediately establishes the backdrop of uncertainty and rapid change. By February 2020, Marks was monitoring the real-time implications of the COVID-19 pandemic as she prepared the company for its relisting as a publicly traded company—100 years after its initial listing on the New York Stock Exchange:



“We were in Puerto Rico at the last board meeting of the former parent company,” Marks recalled.
“Everything was a go. I came back. The next week was our first investor day at the New York Stock Exchange. An exciting time, except my head of China couldn’t join us in-person because it’s already February of 2020, and there was no travel at that point.”



By rooting her narrative in a recognizable moment of uncertainty and disruption Marks sets the stage for the unfolding story.⁴

2

Recount emotions to show authenticity

Through her story, Marks shares both the strategic decisions made and the emotional trials encountered—from pivotal board meetings and a virtual investor roadshow to critical moments of resilience in the wake of shutdowns. This careful recounting not only informs but also draws the audience into a real-time unfolding of events.



“Then we went into an equity roadshow where everyone had warned me, ‘You’re going to get exhausted because you’re going to be traveling all over.’ And guess what? We went virtual for two weeks. And during those two weeks, the state of Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York shut down, right in the middle of that. We couldn’t even go into the office to do our second week of the equity roadshow. And then the most exciting part was on April 3rd, everything was a go [for separating and relisting]. There was no way to turn back. Everything was ready to go. We all wanted to go.”



She goes on to recall feeling the weight of her responsibility while virtually connecting with 15,000 colleagues in China, an event so rich in detail it allowed the listener to experience the moment as if they were there. This richness not only humanizes her leadership but helps ensure that the narrative remains memorable and impactful.



“And I vividly remember at midnight getting on a [video call] with, at the time what was 15,000 of our colleagues in China and basically starting the company and welcoming them to the company. Didn’t get to ring a bell. The stock exchange was closed, but we started there. And they had an app and...they’re all waving their phones because they had downloaded an app to ring a [virtual] bell for us. And so that’s how it started.”



3

Frame the narrative to guide understanding

Framing involves highlighting the call to action or the key learning points behind a narrative. Marks’s story is framed not just as a recount of overcoming adversity, but as a lesson in resilience, innovation, and the indispensable power of human connection in leadership. It emphasizes that authentic, texturized stories are instrumental in building trust, rallying teams, and driving collective action.



“In apartments or condos, people were depending on us to get their food every day. So, we became a true essential service for the world. Like any good industrial, we said, okay, what lessons can we learn and how do we quickly transition that to the Americas, to EMEA [Europe, the Middle East, and Africa] and Asia? I think it was the ultimate lesson in resilience, in tenacity, and I can tell you now that I’ve been a CEO long enough, there was no one to ask.”



Memorable messages

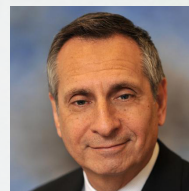
Powerful stories—ones that layer in texture to bring an experience to life—aren't just about telling people what happened. These stories help the listeners experience what it was like to be there in a moment. Just like Marks tapped into memories of a time by sharing her own vulnerabilities, deep, texturized storytelling bridges the gap between strategy and human experience, enhancing trust in the message. At a time when building trust can be a differentiator, delivering a powerful narrative with texture has the potential to motivate a group to relate to a leader, believe in a shared vision, or take collective action.

Skillfully told stories can elevate a CEO's leadership presence, making complex challenges relatable and motivating decisive action. The added texture of personal, human emotion and experience transforms a story into a powerful leadership tool—one that not only informs, but also moves, inspires and ultimately sticks with people long after the story ends.

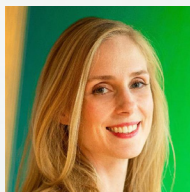
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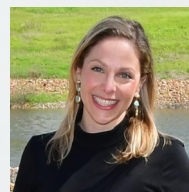
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Transcript

Below we have included the full transcript of Judy Marks' interview with Alan Murray on Fortune's *Leadership Next* podcast.

Marks: So it's something that I would never recommend, [audience laughter] but it's something that I think is really where you get tested as a leader. And for those of you here in the audience, the CEO role is radically different than any other role you've had. I was an operator engineer by background, grew up running divisions, running parts of companies. But to prepare yourself to, first of all, unwind from a company that had acquired us in 1976, to do this three ways because we did it, there was it was a three-way spin...

Murray: Carrier.

Marks: Carrier. And then United Technologies merged with Raytheon. So, it was a very complex spin to set up these three companies. Obviously in a tax-free scenario with everything that goes with that to the benefit of the shareholders to prove a thesis, which is focus counts, go back to your core and let your shareholders figure out really where they want to invest versus having conglomerates do the capital allocation for them. But as we kind of approached April 3rd, I remember seeing you, it was Super Bowl Sunday in February, early February of '20 and...

Murray: We were in Puerto Rico. You're not saying that we were.

Marks: We were in Puerto Rico at the last board meeting of the former parent, where it was a farewell and a get ready because it was 16 months after the decision. Everything was go. I came back, the next week was our first investor day at the New York Stock Exchange. An exciting time, except my head of China couldn't join us because it's already February of '20 and there was no travel at that point.

Murray: Well.

Marks: Then we went into an equity roadshow where everyone had warned me, You're going to get exhausted because you're going to be traveling all over. And guess what? We went virtual for two weeks. And during those two weeks, the state of Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York shut down, right in the middle of that. And we were all, then couldn't even go into the office to do our second week of the equity roadshow. And then the most exciting part was on April 3rd, we everything was a go. There was no way to turn back. We had the debt. I mean, everything was ready to go. We all wanted to go. And I vividly remember at midnight getting on a FaceTime live with, at the time what was 15,000 of our colleagues in China and basically starting the company and welcoming the company. Didn't get to ring a bell. The stock exchange was closed, but we started there. And they had an app and they're all standing there no matter where they are throughout the week. Think of China, right? And they're all waving their phones because they had downloaded an app to ring a bell for us. [Audience laughs.] And so that's how it started.

Murray: Wow.

Marks: And I was doing this from home, as many of us were. And it was our board, first day for the board to be in effect. We had met a few times before. We had formed a new board, but everything was being done real time in an essential service. Remember, if we couldn't service elevators and hospitals and on transit, people weren't going to survive.

Endnotes

1. Fortune, “[Otis’s Judy Marks to future CEOs: It’s ‘radically different than any other role you’ve had,’](#) March 27, 2024.
2. Deloitte Chief Executive Program, “Stories that drive action,” 2025.
3. Dan P. McAdams and Kate C. McLean “[Narrative identity](#),” *Current Directions in Psychological Science*. 22 no. 3 (2013): pp. 233-238.
4. Charlotte Linde, *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence*. Oxford University Press, 1993.

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