



# STORIES TRAINERS TELL

## On the Lookout for Body Art

### Contributor

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Lori is the owner of Partners for Progress, a management consulting firm dedicated to helping organizations achieve and maintain a sustainable competitive advantage in their marketplace. Organizations in fifteen industries as diverse as insurance, high technology, association management, and manufacturing have engaged her expertise in the areas of strategic management, enterprise-wide change, and performance improvement. Having positively impacted the lives of thousands of conference and meeting participants, Lori is sought after as a keynote speaker. She is the co-author of *Stories Trainers Tell: 55 Ready-to-Use Stories to Make Training Stick* and *Critical SHIFT: The Future of Quality in Organizational Performance*. Lori holds an M.S. degree in Counseling and Guidance from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and an MBA from Edgewood College, Madison, Wisconsin.

### Type and Purpose(s)

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Vignette; entertain and explore

### Background

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While this story was written originally to entertain people during a lull in energy level, it also is an effective analogy to begin conversations on the topic of innovation.

### Presentation Tips

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Use pauses to gain the most impact when first announcing the pastime of tattoo watching and when communicating Lori's final statement (be careful what you wish for).

### Set-up

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**Option 1**—The most unassuming situations often have something to teach us.

**Option 2**—How do you like to spend your time on Labor Day weekends?

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Each Labor Day weekend in Madison, Wisconsin, there is a festival called A Taste of Madison. [Over 60] of the local restaurants set up booths around the town square which surrounds the State Capitol. They sell appetizer-size portions of their most famous dishes. [From spicy curries to pad thai to chocolate custard and hamburgers, you'll find more food than any one neighborhood could chow down in a weekend-long food eating contest.] Joining in [on the revelry] are the local wineries and breweries and... a variety of music from bands on four different stages. If you happen to name a tune, you can probably find it here—within the span of a few blocks you might hear jazz or swing or pop rock or grunge or country and western music...or the beer barrel polka!

You can well imagine the crowds. Thousands and thousands of people flock to the downtown area for all the festivities. [Parking and space to walk without bumping into others is at a premium.] This time of year it's usually so hot [you can cook an egg on the asphalt and so humid that your clothes stick to your skin]. So, it's not unusual to find people sitting under large shade trees.

That's what a close friend and I did year after year, until we discovered a new pastime. Tattoo watching. Yes, you heard me right. Tattoo watching. We were people watching. Noticing all the scantily clothed men and women—and that's when we noticed all the tattoos. It didn't take long for our "tattoo watching" to become a contest—a contest to find the most innovative tattoo at the festival. [This meant we needed to pursue these tattooed folks and get a closer look. We saw women with small roses on their shoulders and backs and intricate bracelet designs on their arms and ankles. We saw men with serpents and eagles. Some of them brandished tattoos of the barbed wire variety. Not to name those individuals who had tattoos that covered their bodies like a mosaic.]






As we got bolder we started asking people about their tattoos. Everyone was eager to talk about them—why they chose a particular design, why it was located on a certain part of their body, and why it was important to them. We even learned who folks considered to be the best tattoo artists in town!

[After a couple of hours of detective work], there was one [tatoo] that stood out among all the others. It was truly unique. A man wore it in the center of his chest. As we edged ever closer, the details became even more visible. It was a large tattoo of a genie coming out of a bottle. My friend and I both turned to each other in awe. That’s when she whispered, ever so softly, “Do you think we’d get three wishes if we rubbed it?” I responded, “You better ‘be careful what you wish for.’”




All of us over time, pursue innovations of one kind or another at work. They may be to improve operations or they may be the creation of a new product or service to bring to market. While these innovations are meant to provide positive outcomes, remember to “be careful what you wish for.”

## Debrief Questions

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-  How did Lori and her friend define what they meant by an “innovative” tatoo?
-  What did they realize once they discovered the “genie in the bottle” tatoo?
-  What meaning does this story hold for you?
-  What does this story suggest to you about the pursuit of innovation?
-  How does the main point of this story relate to innovations you have been a part of in your work group? Your department? The organization?

### Key: Three Levels of Debrief Questions

-  **The Story:** What the story means—its moral or main lesson. What the story characters have experienced.
-  **The Learner:** How the participant feels about the story and how it personally applies to the individual.
-  **The Organization or World:** How the story applies to the participant’s work group, department, business unit, division, organization, industry, or to society-at-large.

## Key Point Options

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1. Innovations are typically undertaken to give customers something of value that they currently do not have, to catch competitors off guard, and to generate new revenues for stakeholders. Thus, they must possess an element of uniqueness in the market-place.
2. Innovations that lead to positive outcomes can also lead to detrimental effects. For example, a wildly successful new product introduction may overtax a production facility. It is important to identify these potential impacts and risks up front.
3. Even with the best of intentions, innovations can fail when introduced to the market-place. These failures may be due to the lack of or misinterpretation of market research data, groupthink that results in ignoring critical indicators of success, or not identifying emerging trends in specific consumer groups or market segments. Some of these are controllable and can be anticipated; others are not.

## Follow-up Activities

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**Step 1**—Small-Group Activity: Identify organizations around the world that have brought innovative products and services to the marketplace that have failed. Also identify what these specific products and/or services. Describe, to the best of your understanding, what caused these failures to occur. Then, identify organizations that had successful innovations that resulted in them experiencing major challenges. Also identify these specific innovations and describe the challenges you know about.

**Step 2**—Large-Group Discussion: Discuss the responses. Generate a list of learnings that will minimize these types of innovation failures and challenges.

**Step 3**—Small-Group Activity: Apply the learnings to an innovation taking place within your work group/department or within the organization. Outline the implications.

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