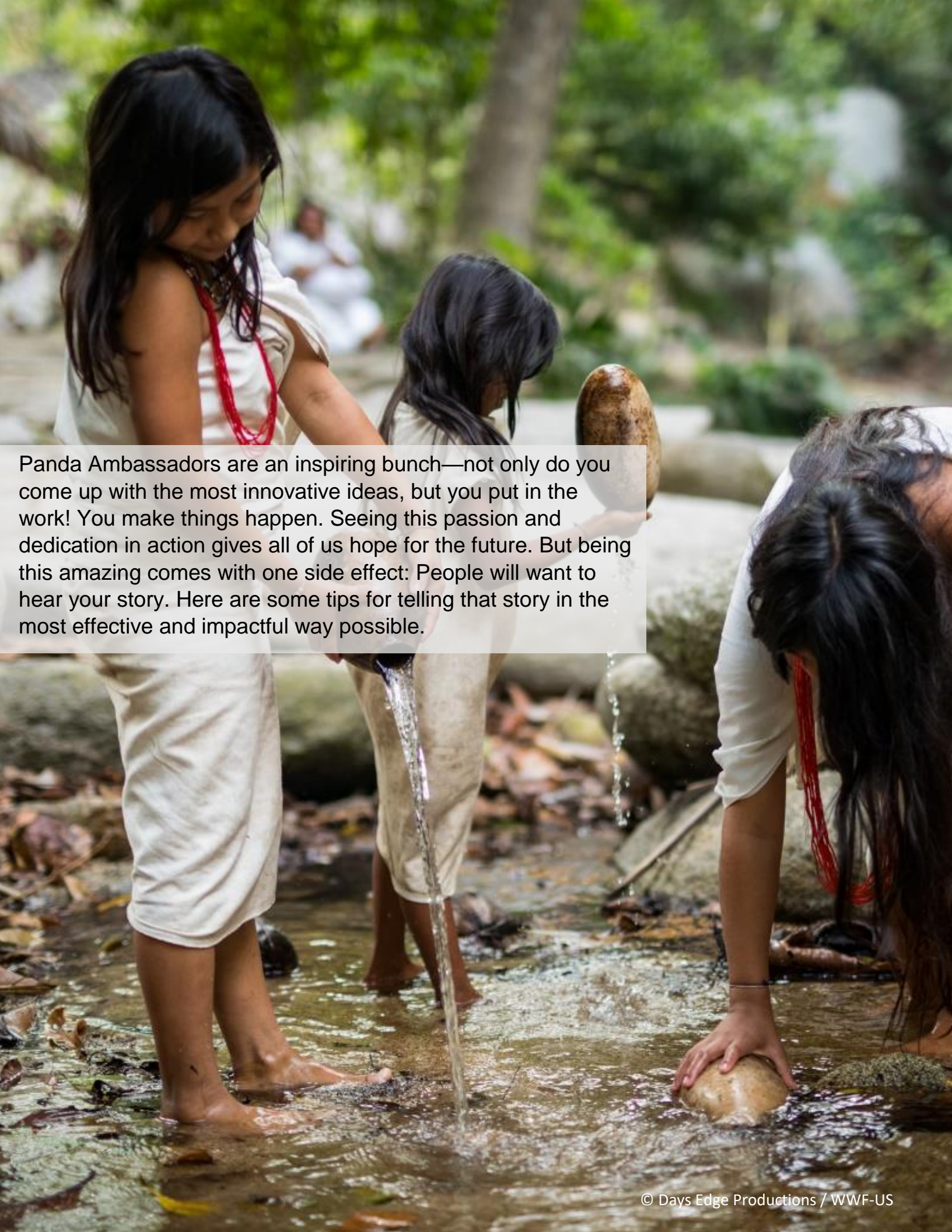




How to

TELL YOUR STORY

Panda Ambassadors



Panda Ambassadors are an inspiring bunch—not only do you come up with the most innovative ideas, but you put in the work! You make things happen. Seeing this passion and dedication in action gives all of us hope for the future. But being this amazing comes with one side effect: People will want to hear your story. Here are some tips for telling that story in the most effective and impactful way possible.

Storytelling > reciting facts

Let's say you hosted a successful fundraiser. There are a series of facts that you can recite to explain how that happened. But you know what's better than a series of facts? A story. With a little forethought, it's easy to turn any series of events into a story. While the story of your fundraiser might not be worthy of a summer blockbuster, it can still be thought provoking and meaningful.

Know the components of a story

This may seem basic, but bear with us; it's important.

The difference between a series of events and a story is a narrative structure—a beginning, middle, and end. There's conflict, climax, and resolution. You also have characters, including a hero. The hero will face a challenge, and their response to that challenge drives the story toward its conclusion. Dissect any fairytale and you'll find all these basic components.

This gets fun when we apply these same components to your awesome fundraiser. As the person who hosted the fundraiser, you are the hero of the story (get used to it—more on that later). Now you just have to decide where your story starts. It could be when you decided to organize the fundraiser, or it could be the night of the fundraiser. The end is probably going to be the end of your fundraiser. And the middle is all the stuff that happened in between those two points. Easy!

The conflict of the story is probably going to involve your motivation for hosting the fundraiser in the first place. You want to make a difference for this cause because you feel strongly about it—and that's an essential part of your story. But the conflict could also be something else: Maybe you didn't think you could pull off an event like this and you surprised yourself. Or maybe your event was supposed to be outdoors and then a sudden downpour had you scrambling to make other arrangements. Whatever the conflict, there will be a story climax, where you took actions to address the conflict, and a resolution—what you accomplished, what you learned, or how the experience changed you.

Own the fact that you are awesome

When you tell the story of what you've accomplished as a Panda Ambassador, be sure to give credit where credit is due, but don't forget an important person: you! By joining the program, you decided you wanted to put in extra work in your spare time to help save the planet. That's incredible. And the things you've accomplished since joining? Amazing! You are the hero of this story; don't be afraid to own it.

Since you are the hero of your story, the audience wants to follow you on your journey—see through your eyes and experience what you experienced. To make your story as good as it can be, share your motivation, your thoughts, your feelings, and anything you learned after the experience.

Share specifics

Try to remember a few specifics from your event or other work as a Panda Ambassador that were particularly meaningful for you. Use those as examples when you tell your story. Instead of saying, “I talked to a bunch of people about wildlife crime,” give us details. For example, you might relate how you spoke to a particular person about elephant ivory, how she seemed genuinely upset when she made the connection between her ivory bracelet and slaughtered elephants, and how you responded.

Specific anecdotes will make your story come to life. Don’t just say that the experience was great—tell us a few things that happened that made the experience great.

Don’t forget the resolution

The end of your story is the most important part. It needs to include not only the facts (“the fundraiser ended at 9 pm”), but also what it meant to you (“I was in shock that we pulled off this ambitious event and overwhelmed by the support of the community”). The story is about your journey. Where are you at the end of it? Have you changed in any way? What have you learned? Did other people learn or change? What did you accomplish, not just in terms of dollars raised, but also in terms of building relationships or making a difference for the planet?

Tell your story with photos and videos

Plan ahead to capture photos, video, and possibly sound, that helps tell your story.

PHOTOS

If you have a decent camera, or have access to one, bring it to your event. If you don’t, photos taken with your phone are still valuable. Make them the best they can be by following a few tips.

Show people doing things. The best photos will show you, in action, doing your work as a Panda Ambassador and interacting with the volunteers you’ve recruited. If you’re staffing a booth, for example, ask someone else to take a photo that includes you behind the booth talking to passersby. If you are hosting a cleanup, ask someone to take a few pictures of you and some of the participants actually picking up trash. If you’re hosting a documentary screening, ask someone to get a few pictures of you welcoming people and introducing the film. A race? Ask a friend to take a picture of you crossing the finish line. If you can’t get the right shot organically, try staging it.

Focus on faces. Even in an action shot, we want to see people's faces as much as possible. If you're taking crowd shots, make sure at least one person's face is visible and in focus.

Assign a photographer. If you're hosting your own fundraiser or event, see if a friend or volunteer would be willing to take photos throughout, even if it's just on their phone. Having a dedicated photographer will leave you free to do other things, and you won't have to beg people to take your picture.

Get a team picture. Take at least one posed picture with your team. Try to get all the people who worked on your project together for at least one classic, cheesy photo.

Provide context. Write captions for your photos that explain who is in the photo and what they are doing.

VIDEOS

You probably won't have the option of hiring a video crew to film your next project, but you can still take some useful video on your phone.

Explain what's happening. You can either explain what's happening during the video by talking while shooting, or you can write up a caption after the fact. Let us know what you're filming, where you are, and who, if anyone, is in the video.

Keep it steady. Don't move the camera more than you have to.

AUDIO

There are some occasions where an audio clip might help tell your story.

Make it as clear as you can. If you're recording someone speaking, reduce background noise by using a microphone. If that's not possible, record in a quiet location and place your recorder close to the person who is speaking. Most recording apps on your phone will show levels—make adjustments until the sound is consistently within the green level.

Give some context. Just as with photos and videos, you need to provide an explanation of what we're hearing, either in the recording itself or as a text description after.

Keep supporting documents

Imagine that you are your own historian. If you were putting together a museum exhibit about your work as a Panda Ambassador, what would you include? Keep these materials and share them as part of your story.

Examples could include fliers you made to promote your event, your race bib, an event program, a screenshot of an event website with your name on the schedule, the sign-in sheet at your first club meeting, and so on. Keep these artifacts, or at least keep pictures of them, to help tell your story.

Practice telling your story

As with most things, the best way to become a comfortable, effective storyteller is to practice. Log on to the Panda Ambassador Facebook group and share the story of your most recent effort, making sure you include a beginning, middle, and end; your thoughts and feelings during the event; some detailed anecdotes or examples; what you accomplished; and what it meant to you. Or just talk to your friends about your Panda Ambassador work with the same story components in mind. The more you get used to telling your story, the easier it will become.