

## Transforming Actions into Stories to Mobilize Support

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Paul Graham, Silicon Valley venture capitalist and co-founder of the accelerator program Y Combinator, says he looks for signs that an entrepreneur is “relentlessly resourceful” when he evaluates new ventures. As an entrepreneur, how can you communicate your resourcefulness to investors when they can’t witness you in action?

One way to highlight your resourcefulness is through telling a story that showcases your actions and paints a picture in the minds of potential investors of who you are and what you’re willing to do for your venture to be a success. In a recent article in a premier entrepreneurship journal, my colleagues and I introduced the concept of a resourcefulness narrative. A resourcefulness narrative is a specific type of story that focuses on an entrepreneur’s creative actions in order to overcome a significant impediment.

Resourcefulness narratives are different from many other stories because they are centered on an entrepreneur’s creative actions. By focusing on concrete actions, these stories can convey important information about an entrepreneur’s competence, commitment, and credibility. Through the creative actions highlighted within the story, potential investors can gain more confidence in the entrepreneur and as a result, will be more inclined to provide support.

An example of a resourcefulness narrative is found in the startup story of Airbnb. During an interview for the *How I Built This* podcast, one of the Airbnb founders, Joe Gebbia, described their experience interviewing for a spot in Y Combinator. Joe and his co-founder were leaving the interview with Paul Graham feeling like it didn’t go so well when he remembered he had brought a box of cereal as a gift for him. He ran back into the room and shared the story with Paul about how they had raised initial funding through repackaging and selling politically-themed cereal boxes. On the ride home, Paul called them and offered them a spot in the program. Joe said, “we later found out that the reason we got in wasn’t because of our idea, it was because through the breakfast cereal we had proven to him that we had hustle... If we could figure out how to sell breakfast cereal for \$40 per box, we could figure out how to make our website work”.

Ultimately, the resourcefulness depicted in their story inspired confidence in their ability to be successful as entrepreneurs. They showed a high level of *competence* and *commitment* by using unusual methods to overcome financial

constraints. Additionally, by being resourceful, Paul Graham saw them as more *credible* because they resembled other highly successful entrepreneurs.

Resourcefulness narratives can also be particularly effective at mobilizing support because of the emotional reactions they generate in those hearing the narratives. The way in which an entrepreneur works to overcome an obstacle or challenge can generate surprise, interest, and admiration in potential resource providers. Paul Graham was taken aback and intrigued by how the Airbnb co-founders raised their initial capital, which led him to offer them a spot in his selective accelerator program.

Remember, when you're pitching your venture to potential investors, you're not only selling your venture, *you're selling yourself* as well! Leveraging this type of story can completely change the way investors see you by elevating you in their minds.

If you want to increase your chances of acquiring an investment, identify a resourceful action you took in the past or are currently taking that conveys your unique capabilities and high level of commitment and then craft a story around that action. To be most effective in generating support, your story should describe a significant obstacle faced and the action you took to overcome it. You can refine and develop your resourcefulness narrative over time as you determine what aspects are most impactful and adjust it for particular audiences, but when perfected, storytelling can become your secret weapon.

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