

Heroes vs. Characters

Hi and welcome to Module three. Solutions Journalism. New ways of elevating your reporting and engaging audiences. We're heading into the part of the course where we will be reviewing fundamental concepts when choosing a narrative. Reporting a solutions focused story requires time, resources, and often a lot of patience. But a good story doesn't always need words. In this week's first reading, journalist Mira Vijan outlines five simple ways to tell a powerful visual solution story. In the second reading, transparency in journalism is about answering audiences' questions both asked and unasked. Trusting news is joy. Mayer writes about unpacking the story in order to regain the public's trust.

Our guest this week two Booky Alec Bosso, senior program manager with Nigeria. Healthwatch, will be speaking with us about applying a system thinking approach to solutions journalism, unlocking new possibilities in the community, actors involved in the solution. So, let's start there. Let's talk about heroes versus characters. Systemic responses to entrenched social problems require more than a few extraordinary people. They require armies of ordinary people employing strategic and effective techniques.

That's why solutions journalism is more engaging when stories focus richer, three-dimensional characters and compelling narrative tension rather than relying on heroes. We'll talk about the narrative tension a little later on. How can you keep yourself from slipping into hero worship even when you find yourself legitimately impressed by someone's leadership or ingenuity? Well, here are some tips from the Solutions Journalism Network. First up, like all good writing show, don't tell. Observe the architects of the solution and the clients in action and make it visually vivid for your reader. The more you can be on site, the better. If you report what you observe without the use of editorializing adjectives like amazing or terrific, you can let the reader draw their own conclusions about the characters qualities. Don't forget the value of revealing a character's challenges. This isn't to shame or condemn them, but to make them real. Perhaps the leader of an organization is a fantastic visionary, but a dysfunctional manager. Or perhaps he struggles to achieve scale because he's unwilling to let go of control. We would argue that it's actually a more helpful act to report on someone's honestly than to flatten them into a flawless hero. Behind every story about a changemaker. There is a hidden privilege and ant's big startup investment. For example, a heartbreaking fallout with a collaborator or an abysmal failure. Don't dramatize for the sake of it, but also don't shy away from the dark moments that can be instructive. Look for the unlikely characters. In fact, many times the so-called recipient can be the catalyst for a far more interesting narrative than the social entrepreneur or consider people within the organization, but those without position of leadership. Many times, great characters are overlooked because they don't have CEO or executive director next to their names.

Now let's unpack a little more the tension in the solution story and other key concepts and structure. The tension in a solution story is often the how that's different than the tension in traditional stories. How did this person, institution, place manage to accomplish something that others haven't? How did they go from problem to response? What did they do differently? Virtually all solution stories contain some description of the problem. They can come in any order. Which one to lead with? Depends on which is fresher and which anecdote best conveys the story's point and hooks the reader. One common structure for a solution story is chronological. The story takes the characters from realizing there's a problem through building the response. Remember, all solutions. Stories have characters. They show the characters doing the work, but they are used differently than in traditional stories. Traditionally, characters often provide quotes about their aspirations. Or beliefs

over reliance on these can sound like fluff or advocacy. In addition to getting quotes, a solution story will often show a character in action. Starting out with a new idea. Confronting opposition or failing. Thanks for watching. In our next video to book AG Bozo, a senior program manager with Nigeria Health Watch, will speak to us about developing journalism collaborations for Local Impact. See you in the forums.