

Conflict is the foundation of storytelling

Little Red Riding Hood skips happily through the forest, singing to herself. Soon the wolf joins her, a tame and friendly companion. They pass the hunter's garden. Ever since he hung up his rifle, he has taken up vegetable gardening. Cheerfully, he waves to his two friends. Eventually, they reach Grandma's house. The lively old lady has just returned from her morning jog and warmly welcomes her visitors. Yawn. What an entertaining story!

Peter Näf

Zürich, October 2026

Slightly exaggerated, this is roughly how Julia (name changed) told me about her successes during outplacement coaching. Her achievements were impressive, and at first, I was genuinely impressed by her stories.

Julia worked as a specialist in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector. Thanks to her ambition and extraordinary commitment, she was repeatedly entrusted with projects that were actually one level above her pay grade.

Stories too good to be true

Her stories earned the respect of my mind, but my gut remained strangely untouched and my heart completely unmoved. What was missing?

After all, her projects were no walk in the park. They involved change initiatives, the implementation of new ideas, additional work for the employees involved, and a Julia whose determination must at times have triggered feelings of competition in others. Then it suddenly became clear to me: either something was missing from these stories, or the company employed exclusively change-oriented, collaborative, benevolent, and fearless people.

How much I missed them: the Big Bad Wolf who sabotaged Julia's plans because they

interfered with his own. I missed the grandmothers who were tired of endless reorganisations and long, demanding careers. And where was the hunter who came to Little Red Riding Hood's rescue? Or where was Little Red Riding Hood herself, taking up the rifle and fighting back—only metaphorically, of course?

Nobody is looking for fair-weather captains

Admittedly, it took me a while to understand Julia's storytelling style. She was exceptionally skilled rhetorically.

What exactly had been the challenge in the project she described? How had the employees affected by the change reacted? Which manager had been the most difficult to convince? At first, my questions unsettled her, and she avoided them. As our conversation progressed, it became clear why: she feared that talking about problems would make her appear incompetent.

Yet those very questions finally uncovered Julia's real stories. In every single project, she had encountered significant resistance. That is reality. Projects create resistance. Change creates uncertainty. A frictionless glide through working life belongs in the realm of fairy tales. Only then did Julia's true competence become visible: a person who overcomes resistance, refuses to give up, and approaches challenges with courage and enthusiasm.

And that is exactly what hiring managers and recruiters want to see in a hiring process. Companies hire people to solve problems.

After all, in calm seas and fine weather, everyone looks like an excellent ship captain.

[#storytelling](#) [#application](#) [#communication](#)

Please find further articles on career topics on my homepage
<https://karrierecoaching.ch/en/articles/>

