

# Every starfish story matters

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Where would we be without other people's ideas and perspectives? Without being able to see through another person's eyes and re-see ourselves through their stories? You're wearing Lululemon! Is it the best place to get running gear? And why (!! ) are you are moving to China? Our lives are totally infused with the perspectives and patterns of others — families, friends, colleagues, and advisors. With people we value, every comment offered is a potential waypoint nudging our thinking and refreshing the way we see the world.

But, as dispensers of words, we're often unaware of the influence they have on the receiver. Significant chains of events can stem from a passing conversation — or sometimes even from things we don't remember we said. Pro-Vice Chancellor Māori at the University of Waikato, Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith tells a wonderful story about the importance of kind words, as she recalls a student who unexpectedly came to visit her after an absence of nearly twenty years. It seems that the professor's words of encouragement and vision to the then struggling student so long ago had sustained this young woman through an epic journey of academic and personal success. When the student returned to thank her, Professor Tuhiwai Smith thought back to her own wish to improve "the life chances, opportunities, and frameworks for Māori". She was surprised to find herself achieving this with a few wise words whose particular weave had lasted through time; inspiring and protecting a learner.

Listening to stories from the heart such as this can be magic — stories speak to a very smart place in us where we tend to remember what we heard. Sometimes, as a result, we change the way we operate — not because someone told us to — but, because we 'saw' and discovered for ourselves something shiny and valuable in there, and we decided to have it too. In this purposeful listening, we give ourselves the space and the key to unlock our own

door to empathy, intuition, and new possibilities for understanding. This is powerful learning, and very different from being in the “They’re-telling-me-what-to-do” space.

Sometimes in our workshops and conferences, despite best intentions, we end up in default, ‘telling’ a lot. We have an idea-fest. We might happily go away with a list of future actions, but, have we personally experienced change? Are we now set down on a slightly different set of coordinates?

Recently, a group of teachers attended a business conference. Successful business owners were talking about our next generation of entrepreneurs: “we need to foster innovation”... “creativity and thinking outside the square is important”... “we need people with soft skills”, and “fifty percent of today’s jobs could be redundant within our students’ lifetimes”, they said.

And then Dan Radcliffe told a story... Dan spent five years at Otago University, eventually graduating with a Bachelor of Commerce and Master of Business. Next came a job at a major company in Auckland. This corporate job lasted just three days before Dan realised that an office job wasn’t for him, and he quit. Moving back to his parents’ farm in Taranaki, he thought about where his most important and valuable learning experiences had been. Deciding that he learned best out of his comfort zone, Dan decided to do some volunteer teaching in Africa. Eventually arriving back in New Zealand, Dan’s experience in Africa led to him starting the very successful International Volunteer HQ, a volunteer travel company operating out of New Plymouth.

While that is where Dan left his story, this is what the [NZ Herald](#) had to say about Dan and his company in October 2014:

International Volunteer HQ founder and chief executive Daniel Radcliffe was last night named Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year at an event held at the Langham Hotel in Auckland.

In the space of just seven years Radcliffe has sent more than 35,000 volunteers overseas to 26 different countries through IVHQ, now one of the world's leading volunteer travel companies, and marketed almost entirely through social media.

Awards judge chairman Greg Cross said that Radcliffe was "almost a prototype" of what he hoped New Zealand's next generation of entrepreneurs would be like. "Dan epitomises the next generation of New Zealand entrepreneurs.

Do you recall an important story? Did the experience change your perspective on something?

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1 [The Starfish Story](#), Author unknown. From [The Star Thrower](#), by Loren Eiseley



## Liz Stevenson

[Liz Stevenson](#) supports Kāhui Ako/Communities of Learning as an Expert Partner. Previously co-leading the Learning with Digital Technologies project, Liz has also developed an online coaching room for sportspeople with AUT and, at the University of Waikato, designed an online mentoring programme for secondary school art students and professional artists. Recently, as a result of her ongoing research into Learning Circles, Liz developed the peer learning process, Story Hui – a method now being used by [teachers](#) to describe learners' achievement in play-based or project-based learning, and by students to talk about their learning strengths and capabilities.